"Spirituous Liquors": Brewing and Distilling in 19th-Century Charlottetown

By Edward MacDonald and Carolyn MacQuaid

In 1876, English sporting gentleman John J. Rowan passed judgement on the local ale in the new Canadian province of Prince Edward Island. "The beer is the best in America," he wrote, but, "that is not saying very much for it." Perhaps, he reflected, "beer drinking is a matter of education, and it is possible that if Canadians drank more beer and less tea they would be the better for it."[1]

At least some Islanders were already taking Rowan's prescription to heart. By the mid-1870s, Islanders had been manufacturing "spirituous liquors"[2] on Prince Edward Island for sixty-five years. According to the census of 1861, there were no less than twenty breweries and/or distilleries in the little island colony. Of these, the largest and oldest were located in the hard-drinking capital of Charlottetown. Yet, a quarter-century after Rowan's taste test, the industry was no more. The rise and fall of brewing and distilling in Charlottetown offers a classic case study of small-scale local manufacturing in 19th-century Canada, and of the paradoxical nature of Prince Edward Island society, which both loved and loathed the spirits that nourished it.

Hard Drinkers

In a recent lecture, historian Boyde Beck reckoned four necessities that pioneer Islanders must purchase: tea, sugar, tobacco, and rum.[3] Extant store ledgers from the colonial period amply support Beck's assertion.[4] Nineteenth-century Islanders had a powerful thirst, and liquor suited both their taste and their imagined needs. Indeed, it was stowed deep in the cultural baggage of the United Kingdom immigrants who dominated the colonial period on Prince Edward Island. Quite apart from the dubious quality of much "fresh" water, Europeans' taste for intoxicants -- and the altered states

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[1]John J. Rowan, "The Emigrant and Sportsman in Canada" (London, 1876), p. 188.

[2]As legislation and statistical records invariably referred to beer and distilled liquors.

[3]Boyde Beck, "Pioneer Life on PEI," public lecture in Island Lecture Series, 2003. He might have added molasses to his list.

[4]See, for example, Dorothy M. Morris, "Tales from a Ledger: Scots on the North Side," *The Island Magazine*, 30(Fall/Winter 1991).

that they produced -- had deep social and cultural roots. Liquor was an accompaniment to almost everything: celebration, lamentation, ritual, play, work, even birth. "The first drink a child got when born had rum in it," septuagenarian John B. Schurman of Bedeque would recall in 1876.[5] To drink, then, was an intensely social act. "I could not meet a friend but there must be a treat," wrote Schurman, "and if a neighbour came to see you, he would not think he was kindly treated unless treated out of a decanter."

According to popular wisdom, alcohol was a restorative, fortifying bodies worn down by long hours of hard labour in harsh conditions. At the same time, it dulled the physical and psychic pain of pioneer existence on Prince Edward Island. "When I was very young," recalled Charlottetown merchant Richard Heartz of the 1820s, "I used to see my father and my eldest brother going off to work every day:

> They were masons and bricklayers and always had a lot of work. They had to have their morning drink before breakfast. Then at 10 o'clock they would throw down their tools and go to the nearest tavern, of which there were many, to have their mid-morning tot. Before dinner they had their noon allowance. At 3 o'clock came the mid-afternoon decoction; before tea, another draw, one right after tea, followed by two or three nightcaps."[6]

At election time liquor became a necessary lubricant. "Rum was free on these occasions," remembered Henry Mellick, who was raised near Elmira in the mid-19th century. "Without plenty of rum a candidate's chances for success were very poor, however good he or his party or platform might be. Each candidate supplied the rum for his supporters. It was kept at a booth, where they could drink all they desired; and some of them had large desires."[7]

Little wonder, then, that Bishop Angus MacEachern could sigh in 1831, "Our people are

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[5]John B. Schurman, Bedeque, was answering an historical survey circulated in 1876 to the elders in various Island communities. See PARO 2702/311 (as transcribed by Christine Gorman for the Island Register, http://www.islandregister.com/1876, 30 September 2005).

[6]Quoted in Frank Richard Heartz and Ruth Heartz MacKenzie, "The Baron," *The Island Magazine*, 48(Fall/Winter 2000): 21-22.

[7][Henry Mellick], *Timothy's Boyhood* [?????]. For supporting evidence, see Edward MacDonald, ed., "'It Assumed the Form of An Epidemic': Election Day at St. Eleanor's, 1867," *The Island Magazine*, 53(Spring/Summer 2003): 16-24.

extravagant in tea drinking, dress, grog, and horse racing."[8] Or that Walter Johnstone, Protestant Bible salesman and travel writer, would rail in 1822, "[Islanders] are remarkably fond of riding, rolling about, frolicking and drinking rum."[9]

How extravagant? How fond? Numbers varied from year to year, but in 1848, for example, Islanders consumed 2.3 gallons of hard liquor per person.[10] Thirty-three years later, in 1871, the figure was still 1.3 gallons.[11] Clearly, Islanders were a hard-drinking lot.

Most of what they drank was imported, and their revenue-starved government happily taxed Islanders' thirst. Beginning in1780, successively higher duties on imports of "distilled spirituous and fermented liquors" made up a substantial portion of the government's annual income.[12] Besides taxing importers to buy their liquor, the government required merchants and tavern owners to pay a license fee in order to sell it. In 1822, liquor taxes raised 43% of the Island government's total revenue, and while the proportion fluctuated, it never fell below 15% over the remainder of the colonial period.[13]

Rum, powerful and cheap, was already the drink of choice for Islanders by the turn of the 19th

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[8]Quoted in Edward MacDonald, "The Good Shepherd: Angus Bernard MacEachern and ???, *The Island Magazine*, 16(Fall/Winter 1984): ????.

[9]Quoted in Mark C. Davis, "'I"ll Drink to That': The Rise and Fall of Prohibition in the Maritime Provinces, 1900-1930" (Ph.D dissertation, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, 1990): 32.

[10]Davis, p. 49, gives a figure of 3.6 gallons per capita for 1829, but his source for this is unknown. Blue Book statistics from that year suggest the actual proportion was close to 1.8 gallons per capita. But since liquor customarily was imported at maximum proof to minimize the duty (payable by volume, not strength), then cut for the retail trade to maximize profit, and since domestic beer production was not even recorded, Davis' figure for 1828 may not be so far-fetched.

[11]Davis, pp. 49. Compare such figures to 1961, when the per capita consumption was .81 gallons.

[12]A summary of the duties appears in each volume of the colony's Blue Books, extant yearly from 1821 onward. See PARO, CO 231.

[13]A generalization drawn from a systematic sampling of Blue Books statistics.

century, and it tended to dominate liquor imports.[14] Beer, being weaker, was traditionally considered healthier than hard liquor, but it spoiled quickly, and so, did not travel well. In its short shelf life, colonial entrepreneurs saw a business opportunity. Why not quench Islanders' thirst for ale with a domestic product?

Home Brew

The fortunes of Prince Edward Island's first brewery have been chronicled elsewhere.[15] It was founded in 1810 at Bird Island Creek (now Wright's Creek), in East Royalty, by George Wright and his wife, Phoebe Cambridge, in association with her brothers Artemas and Lemuel. The brewery struggled in the beginning with raw materials and methods (both the imported hops and the imported brewer were disappointments), but it survived and may even have begun to prosper before the whole complex, now involving a distillery, succumbed to fire in 1827 with damages estimated at over £1,500.

Whether Bird Island was brewing beer at the time it burned is unclear, since George Wright had by then embarked on a new venture. In 1824, he formed a partnership with his brewmaster Thomas Pethick to carry on a brewery in a renovated brick building located on the west side of Weymouth Street between Euston and Fitzroy Streets.[16] The brewery had been operating for several months by the time "John Barleycorn" (probably Pethick or Wright) described it in a letter to the editor in the *Prince Edward Island Register* on 16 May 1826. "A very prominent object" on what was then the northeastern approach to the town, the new brewery measured 92 by 32 feet at its widest. The main storey included a brewhouse as well as a malt kiln with tiled floor and "arched brickwork," all

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[14]"Geneva," that is, gin, fermented from grain but flavoured with juniper berries, was a distant second.

[15]H. T. Holman, "The Island's First Brewery," *The Island Magazine*, 25(Spring/Summer 1989): 10-14.

[16]Land Office Records, Liber 36, Folio 349. Although somewhat altered, the building still stands at 201 Weymouth Street, just south of Ken's Korner. According to John Brooks, interviewed in 1876, Pethick was Wright's brewer before establishing his own brewery. See PARO 2702/301.

atop a foundation of Island sandstone. The second-floor granary had "the convenience of a door at the gable end, through which the Grain, as it is taken in, is hoisted by means of a tackle fall." Downstairs in the storage cellar ("capable of containing ordinarily 120 Puncheons") a door opened out onto a gentle incline convenient for rolling barrels in and out. Beneath the cellar's planked floor there was a drain "to receive all wet, and the Brewer can, when he pleases, flood the whole of it, and as easily let off the water with all its collections of filth and dirt accumulated in it, thus not only removing all offensive substances, but keeping the air of the cellar sweet and pure." Throughout, the equipment was "on the most approved plan, all complete and manufactured of the best materials."

In the wake of the fire at Bird Island Creek, Pethick looked to expand the scope of his operation."The prospect appears very encouraging," read an 1829 appeal for a business partner who could "command" £300, "as the duty on all imported spirits is high and none on the home distilled."[17] By 1830, Pethick had become sole owner of the Weymouth Street business, which now included a distillery.[18] For the next 40 years, Pethick's Brewery was a fixture on the Charlottetown business scene, and its proprietor became one of Charlottetown's most respected and active citizens. In 1855, he would be elected one of the founding councillors of the newly incorporated City of Charlottetown.[19]

Pethick's success soon coaxed competition. The census of 1833 counted seven liquor manufacturies in the colony, five of them in Queen's County, and in 1841, there were 10. We know the names of only a few. In 1833, for example, "R. Thompson & Co." advertised a distillery in Charlottetown, and in 1838 James H. Down was operating a brewery and distillery at his road house,

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[17]*PEI Register*, 4 August 1829. The advertiser is not specifically identified, but it appears certain it was Pethick. Land records suggest one of the investors attracted was Halifax merchant and shipowner Samuel Cunard. See Land Records, Liber 36, Folio 359, 361, 363.

[18]See Land Office records, PARO liber 36, folio 363.

[19]As recorded in entries from the Master Name Index, Public Archives and Records Office. He was a member of the local Mechanics' Institute, Charlottetown's Royal Agricultural Society, and the local militia, as well as being a justice of the peace.

Devonport Lodge, on the eastern side of the Malpeque Road (now University Avenue).[20] Such enterprises were apparently transient, but Pethick gained at least one serious rival in the 1830s. His name was George Coles, and he would cut a wide swath across Island history.

Coles was a self-made and largely self-educated man. Born in Charlottetown Royalty in 1810, he opened a store in Charlottetown in 1834. The following year he founded a brewery and distillery. He prospered and over the next decade, gradually expanded his business interests, although the principal enterprise remained his brewing and distilling operation, which occupied a double lot on the north side of Kent Street, near Prince. By mid-century, historian Ian Ross Robertson estimates, Coles employed between 20 and 30 men, and had a capital outlay of between £7,000 and £8,000.[21] At that point, he was easily the largest distiller on Prince Edward Island, producing four times as much liquor as his nearest rival, Pethick.[22]

Coles' political career -- founder of the Island Liberal Party, architect of Responsible Government, author of the Free Education Act, Father of Confederation -- would make him the best known of Charlottetown's alcohol manufacturers, but he paid for his political celebrity with jibes and insults. In 1846, political rival Joseph Pope, whose own son would dabble in distilling, accused Coles of killing a young man with his whiskey (a charge Coles angrily refuted).[23] A few years later, that great humbug, B. W. A. Sleigh turned up his nose at Coles' profession. "It will hardly be believed in England," he sneered in *Pine Forests and Hacmatack Clearings* (1853), "that the highest Member in the Executive Council keeps a grog-shop; and that any admirer or partisan of the liberal

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[20]For Thompson's business, see *Royal Gazette*, 5 March 1833. For the Devonport Brewery and Distillery, see the *Royal Gazette*, 16 October 1838. The latter business seems to have been located adjacent to the current Canadian Broadcasting Corporation studios. A cluster of elderly hardwood trees marks the general location.

[21]*Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol. ??, *s.v.* "Coles, George," by Ian Ross Robertson, pp. 182-88. See, too, assorted newspaper ads for Coles' business.

[22]See *Journal of the House of Assembly*, 1853, Appendix C. Alas, this is the only year for which statistics are available for individual distillers. Coles produced 1,719 gallons to Pethick's 451 gallons.

[23]*Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol. ??, *s.v.* "Coles, George," by Ian Ross Robertson, pp. 182-88.

Government, or any other thirsty traveller, can enter and purchase from the hands of the Honourable Gentleman a noggin of gin; while his eyes will be equally gratified, if of a republican turn, by seeing the aged father of so exalted a son, wheeling an empty cask from the premises."[24] In business as in politics, George Coles wasn't afraid to get his hands dirty.

Those That Like It. . .

By mid-century, pioneer Prince Edward Island was nearing political, social, and economic maturity. Free trade with the United States, responsible government, a shipbuilding boom, and the glimmer of land reform all inflated a bubble of colonial self-confidence. As settlement spread and the population burgeoned, small-scale manufacturing flourished as well, protected by the colony's relative isolation and its small market, which combined to discourage Mainland competition. Within this context, like a ship in a bottle, the Island's alcohol industry found a precarious niche.

According to the census of 1848, there were 13 brewing and distilling establishments in the colony. Seven years later there were 17, and in 1861, 20, four of them in Charlottetown. Besides established operations such as Pethick's and Coles', there were new, often short-lived ventures, about which we know little more than names. Around 1850, W. H. Badge opened a distillery on what is now University Avenue, scarcely a block from Coles' business.[25] He was still in business in 1852, when John Glydon's Charlottetown distillery turned out 319 gallons of liquor in its only recorded year of operation.[26] Sometime between then and 1854, David A. Barry opened a steam-powered distillery at Dalrymple's Mills, three miles from Charlottetown. There, by his own account, he manufactured "the best article of SPIRITS ever offered for sale on the Island, and at much lower prices than any imported."[27]

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[24]B. W. A. Sleigh, *Pine Forests and Hacmatack Clearings* (1853).

[25]See Charlottetown *Examiner*, 16 May 1864, p. 3.By the time he died in 1864, he was listing himself as an accountant. See *Hutchinson's Directory*, 1864.

[26]*Journal of House of Assembly*, 1853, Appendix C.

[27]Charlottetown *Examiner*, 8 January 1855. See, also, entries in the License Ledgers for 1852 and 1853.

The distilling industry peaked in the early 1860s, thanks to opportunists such as the wonderfully named Pierce Gaul, an established merchant who added a distillery to his store at the lower end of Queen Street during 1862-63 before transplanting his several enterprises to the rising village of Montague Bridge. Just as Gaul was leaving, merchant and civic politician Donald McIsaac started up a distillery on his premises on Sydney Street, near Pownal Street.[28] He renewed his distilling license through 1865, but then seems to have abandoned the experiment. In 1867, Douglas M. Harrington, the immigrant son of a Anglican parson, married George Coles' daughter, Louisa. Two years later, D. M. Harrington & Co.'s Spring Park Steam Brewery and Distillery was advertising its wares by the cask or the bottle. Unfortunately, the ad is the only evidence of the company's existence.[29]

Harrington's establishment is one of several brewing/distilling firms listed in Spring Park, and it is difficult now to say whether they represent several operations or merely successive owners. In 1852 and '53, a distilling license was issued to Archibald White of Spring Park.[30] A year later, licensee James McNally gave Spring Park as his address, then, in 1857, ownership seems to have passed to John Connolly. His version of the "Spring Park Brewery and Distillery" lasted until the late 1870s.[31]

Of all the mid-century establishments the most ambitious and durable proved to be the Brighton Brewery. It was founded in 1848 by Robert Henri Frederick Smith in the Charlottetown

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[28]See *Hutchinson's Directory*, 1864.

[29]Before showing up with the Spring Park Steam Brewery and Distillery, Harrington held a store license in Mt. Stewart in 1861 and 1864, according to the License Books, PARO, RG 7, Sub-series 1, File 2, License Ledgers, 1846-1861. There is no record of a distilling license in his name. It's possible he was operating John Connolly's plant (see below) or even taking over from his ailing father-in-law, whose own distilling license was not renewed in 1869 or '70.

[30]Later census reports suggest he became a blacksmith and machinist.

[31]*Hutchinson's Directory*,1864, p. 198, lists one James Caslow as his partner. It is possible, too, that Harrington and Company may have operated Connolly's plant.

Common on what became York Lane ("Brewery Lane," to locals).[32] After a decade of brewing, Smith seems to have encountered financial problems, for in June 1862 his household furniture was sold at auction.[33] Evidence suggests the business may then have lapsed until October1868, when Smith sold it for £2,600 to two young local businessmen, Charles A. Hyndman and Thomas Morris.[34] Charles' brother, F. W. Hyndman, was a silent partner in the enterprise.[35]

The two had good credentials. Morris' enterprising father, merchant John "Brick" Morris, had built the first brick building in Charlottetown. The Hyndman family would soon make their name in the insurance business, but most recently, Charles Hyndman had been superintendent of the City's Anglo-American Telegraph Company. He now became manager of the brewery, living literally next door to the plant in a comfortable house on Brighton Road.[36]

Hyndman and Morris gave Smith's enterprise a new lease on life. With its tall red water tower, the Brighton Brewery became another local landmark. So was their beer. "Better than can be imported," boasted their ad in the summer of 1877. "Just the drink for this weather."[37]

Half-Pint to Puncheon

Large or small, old or new, Island products and producers shared certain characteristics with their Mainland contemporaries. As in the rest of Canada, Island brewers tended to be either Roman

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[32]"Island-made Beer, Ale Flowed Freely in the 1800s," Charlottetown *Evening Patriot*, 15 February 1986, p. 3. The source here is Walter Hyndman.

[33]*Ross's Weekly*, 29 May 1862, p. 3.

[34]There is no distilling license recorded in Smith's name after 1862, but it is unclear whether or not a license was required if someone only brewed beer rather than distilling hard liquor. Mortgage dated 21 October 1868, PARO 3119/14. The nature of this transaction is a little murky, and extant license ledgers have no entries for Hyndman or Morris between 1868 and 1871.

[35]Telephone interview with Fred Hyndman, Charlottetown, 13 October 2005.

[36]See his obituary in the Charlottetown *Daily Patriot*, 28 August 1906, p. 8, as well as various directories.

[37]Charlottetown *Examiner*, 23 July 1877, p. 2.

Catholic or Anglicans, two denominations that historically tolerated moderate alcohol consumption, and were often immigrants from Ireland or England. Preferred locations for breweries and distilleries were on the outskirts of town, close to the clientele, but apart from the inevitable pollution of a town without sewage or sanitation facilities.[38]

Product selection tracked price, preference, and practicality. When it came to beer, local preference was shaped by cultural heredity. Like other colonists from the British Isles, Islanders preferred the heavy, slightly bitter taste of ale (and its near cousin, porter, a dark ale made with browned or charred malt) to the lighter, paler lager that gradually swamped the American market after mid-century. How much of it they drank is much harder to gauge. While colonial statistics tracked domestic production of hard liquors after 1847, only beer imports are recorded in the extant records.

When it comes to local distilling, we know how much but not what. In 1847, the first year for which statistics survive, 2,317 gallons of spirits were manufactured on Prince Edward Island. As the only real urban concentration, Charlottetown dominated distilling through the 1850s, generally accounting for 75%-85% of domestic production. It maintained its supremacy through the early 1860s as liquor manufacturing enjoyed the briefest of golden ages. Between 1859 and 1860, the amount of spirits distilled on Prince Edward Island nearly doubled, to 11,805 gallons. Production held steady through1863, the peak year, when Island distillers turned out 15,603 gallons of hard liquor to supplement the 56,000 gallons imported. Charlottetown's share in this was 11,553 gallons, 74% of the domestic total. But in 1864, the distilling industry sagged to half the 1863 production, even as liquor imports boomed, and while the numbers then held more or less steady for the rest of the decade, the rise of Summerside undercut Charlottetown's importance as the distilling capital of Prince Edward Island.[39]

What were Islanders distilling? In the beginning, at least, it seems to have been whiskey, which, like beer, was a negligible import until very late in the colonial period, and so, had little

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[38]The Canadian norms are drawn from Albert Tucker, "The Heady Brew," *Horizon Canada*, Vol. 8: 2168-73.

[39]See *Journal of the House of Assembly*, 1847-1873. Domestic production figures are generally buried within appendices containing the auditors' classification of public accounts, in tables listing duties collected.

competition.[40] But after 1854, official records chart increasing amounts of "spirits manufactured from molasses," presumably rum. In the 1860s, in fact, rum production frequently outstripped "spirits distilled from grain" as local distillers catered to local tastes.

That domestic rum relied on imported molasses must have narrowed the profit margins considerably for Island distillers, since both the raw materials and the product were subject to duties. On the other hand, grain, the basic ingredient for both whiskey and gin, was easily -- and cheaply -- procured, and after each harvest season local newspapers habitually ran ads very much like the following, which first appeared in the *Royal Gazette* in December 1841:

> At Pethick's Brewery & Distillery the highest price will be paid in Cash on delivery for any quantity of BARLEY, OATS AND RYE. On hand a Large Stock of Ales, XXX, XX and X, also, SPIRITS, WHISKEY, GIN and RUM all of which will be sold very *Low*, for cash or produce.[41]

How low? For two shillings, in the 1840s, you could slake your thirst with two gallons of George Coles' treble X draft. Seven shillings would buy you a dozen bottles of ale or a gallon of double-proof whiskey. A gallon of rum cost five.[42] By the 1860s, the price of beer had foamed to five shillings per gallon at Pethick's Brewery, depending on the quantity and strength of the ale, while whiskey fetched nine shillings a gallon.[43] A generation later, according to Hyndman family tradition, Brighton Ale went for five cents a bucket.

The rates recorded in Pethick's ledgers are, presumably, wholesale prices, since customers could always buy their drink at the factory door. More likely, they either drank their fill at a local tavern – there were no less than forty in Charlottetown or its Royalty in 1852 – or purchased their

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[40]In a public lecture on temperance in 185, Rev. J. R. Narraway stated that 6,290 gallons of whiskey had been produced the previous year on Prince Edward Island. See J. R. Narraway, *The Liquor Traffic: Ought It Be Protected or Prohibited by Law* (Charlottetown, 1854), p. 4, provides the statistic for whiskey production.

[41]*Royal Gazette*, 1 February 1842.

[42]*Royal Gazette*, 1 February 1842.

[43]Ledgers from Pethick's Brewery, 1850-63, PARO, HF 3466 XHF.72.118, item 3-4; unidentified ledger, 1864-67, PARO, HF 3466 XHF.72.118, item 1.

supply at a merchant's store, where liquor was freely available in any quantity from a gill (a quarter-pint) to a puncheon. All that a store owner required to retail alcohol was a license, and at mid-century one could be had for £3. Predictably, then, most of Charlottetown's brewers and distillers also operated stores and/or taverns. In the early years, customers generally brought their own containers to merchants' stores for filling, but a certain level of product packaging gradually developed. Although Brighton Ale may well have sold by the bucket to cricketers in Victoria Park, ads from the 1870s suggest the brewery's ale and porter were generally sold bottled, in pints and quarts.[44]

Until mid-century, most Canadian breweries were small operations, turning 200 to 2,000 gallons a year. While statistics aren't readily available, Island breweries and distilleries were likely no different. Of Charlottetown's five distillers in 1853, for example, only George Coles produced more than 500 gallons of liquor.[45] Science and geography helped dictate scale. Beer could scarcely be preserved long enough to transport before the era of pasteurization, especially from a colony that spent each winter packed in ice, and Island distillers had neither low costs nor premium quality to offset their distance from larger markets. Blue Book statistics reveal that alcohol exports were virtually non-existent in the colonial period.[46] In other words, the health of Charlottetown's brewing and distilling industry depended mainly on how much Islanders drank.

Empty Glasses

In the early 20th century it was convenient to blame Confederation for the decline of the Maritime economy. More recently, historians have pointed to the consolidating tendencies of central Canadian industry. Both interpretations are seductive if simplistic when applied to the Island's brewing and distilling industry. Confederation did remove tariff protection for local manufacturers against competition from elsewhere in Canada, and the introduction of pasteurization eventually made it more

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[44]See, for example, Charlottetown *Daily Examiner*, 4 June 1877 and 23 July 1877. The same ad also offers ale and porter by the hogshead (holding 54 imperial gallons) and quarter cask.

[45]*Journal of the House of Assembly*, 1853, Appendix C.

[46]In 1867, for example, Prince Edward Island exported 700 gallons of ale and porter, 18 gallons of gin, and 402 gallons of whiskey.

feasible for distant competitors to ship beer to the Island. But most hard liquor had always been imported, and while beer imports did increase after the mid-1860s, there is little evidence of a flood of Mainland ale drowning Island brewers.[47] The truth is that the Island's brewing and distilling industry was in decline even before Prince Edward Island became Canada's seventh province in 1873.

As it can in a small industry, personal misfortune played a part. In 1869, Thomas Pethick, now 72, turned over many of his properties to his daughter, Eliza Dalrymple, and her husband, merchant, shipbuilder, and sometime premier, J. C. Pope. Within a year, Pethick was dead, and while Pope held a distillery license from 1869 until at least 1873, he was only dabbling; brewing had been Pethick's life. Brewing and distilling had largely defined George Coles' business career as well, and he, too, was out of the industry by 1871. Beginning around 1866, his mental health had unraveled, and after sojourns in mental hospital, he ended up a prisoner of his family, locked in the bedroom of his own house.[48] One of Coles' symptoms was a conviction that he was destined for financial ruin. Ironically, his affairs were in such a bad state by 1871 that his trustees were forced to sell off his holdings to meet his family's expenses. The centrepiece of the auction on 1 June was "the well known Coles' Brewery, together with its contents and outbuildings."[49] It was a tragic end to one of Charlottetown's greatest success stories.

That Charlottetown had lost two of its most prominent brewers didn't have to mean the end of their breweries. Yet, neither long out-lived their founders. Indeed, the 20 brewing and distilling enterprises of 1861 had been cut nearly in half, to 11, by the time of the 1871 census. For the root cause of the industry's decline wasn't Confederation nor taxes nor personal misfortune, but organized

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[47]Admittedly, there was an increase in the quantity of imported ale in the years just before Confederation, largely from the United Kingdom and, to a lesser extent, from Canada. In 1867, for example, 9,546 gallons were imported, 5,604 gallons of it from the United Kingdom. In 1872, the comparable figure was 7,524 gallons.

[48]Quoted in H. T. Holman, "'Deserted by God and Man': The Tragedy of George Coles," *The Island Magazine*, 29(Spring/Summer 1991): 20.

[49]Charlottetown *Examiner*, 14 April 1871. After 1868, license ledgers have no record of any license issued under Coles' name.

opposition on Prince Edward Island to drinking itself.

The Temperance Tide

After describing the hard drinking habits of his father and brother in the days of his youth, Richard Heartz concluded, "They were making seven shillings a day and spending considerably more than half of it for grog. They made their money working like horses and spent it like asses."[50] That memory made a teetotaler of Heartz. He wasn't alone. Branded as a moral failing and blamed for a host of social evils, heavy drinking encountered a rising tide of temperance agitation across the North America as the 19th century progressed. The first temperance society on Prince Edward Island formed in Bedeque in 1827.[51] Since "temperance" initially meant moderation in drinking, it wasn't some sort of bad joke that Thomas Pethick was a member in good standing of the local temperance society in the 1840s. But soon after the Sons of Temperance established their first Island branch in Charlottetown in 1848, they began pressing for the "annihilation of the Liquor Traffic,"[52] and that would have put people such as Pethick out of business.

Starting in 1850, temperance crusaders showered the House of Assembly with petitions demanding prohibition.[53] In a public address published in 1854 at the "unanimous request"of those in attendance, teetotaler J. R. Narraway, had little sympathy for the Island's distillers, the farmers they bought from, or the government that depended so much on liquor taxes. Compensate the distilleries if you must, Brother Narraway conceded, but, really, their closure would only entail the loss of "a few

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[50]Frank Richard Heartz and Ruth Heartz MacKenzie, "The Baron," *The Island Magazine*, 48(Fall/Winter 2000): 21-22.

[51]The best source on the regional temperance movement remains Mark C. Davis, "'I"ll Drink to That': The Rise and Fall of Prohibition in the Maritime Provinces, 1900-1930" (Ph.d dissertation, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, 1990).

[52]For the coming of the Sons of Temperance, see Davis, p. 40, and John Anderson, "Sons of Temperance," in D. A. MacKinnon and A. B. Warburton, eds., *Past and Present of Prince Edward Island* (1906). The quote is from a petition to House of Assembly; see *Journal of the House of Assembly*, 1853, p. 51.

[53]See, for example, *Journal of the House of Assembly*, 1850, 1852-57, 1861-65, 1868-69. The quote is from the 1853 petition.

hundred pounds of capital" when all was said and done. A small price to pay when "the traffic in intoxicating drinks is the poisonous root of the gigantic evil of drunkenness."[54]

The author of *The Island Rose: A Collection of Original Poems on Temperance and Other Subjects* (1869) was equally blunt: "it is the duty of everyone to do all they can to arrest the progress of this monster vice that is spreading devastation and death throughout the land." Poetry was an unlikely weapon, but "The Reclaimed Drunkard's Address" did its jog-trotting best:

My friend, said he, a cup of tea
Will do more good than rum;
We'll have it strong, so come along
The noisy tavern shun.

Although the House of Assembly resisted, finding prohibition "inexpedient," liable to cause "an excessive loss of revenue," and "a serious infringement of the private and inalienable rights of individuals and society at large," it slowly bent under prohibitionist pressure.[55] During the 1850s and '60s, Island governments tinkered with taxes on liquor imports and manufacture, quintupled the cost of a distilling license, and gave local school districts the power to refuse retail licenses to stores and taverns.

Nothing seemed to work. Certainly, nothing satisfied the temperance activists. And there was ample evidence that the "monster vice" was hard at work in the Island capital. With 729 convictions for drunkenness in 1877 alone, it was hard to deny Charlottetown had a problem. The anti-liquor lobby was clearly in the ascendant, and it received its first legislative stick in 1878 when Parliament passed the Dominion Temperance Act. The "Scott Act," as it was popularly known, provided for "local option": voters in individual counties and municipalities could petition for a plebiscite on the issue of prohibition in their communities. The results were binding for a minimum of three years. Within two years, all three Island counties were officially dry. Charlottetown became the real

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[54]Narraway, pp. 2, 23-26.

[55]The arguments quoted were made in a resolution moved by a special committee of the House in 1855 in response to several petitions favouring prohibition. The Committee also suggested there was no evidence that a majority of Islanders were in favour and that prohibition had proven unworkable in the American states where it had been adopted. See *Journal of the House of Assembly*, 1855, pp. 111-12.

battleground for "wet" and "dry" forces. After adopting the Scott Act in April 1879, the City narrowly survived two plebiscite challenges (in 1884 and 1887) before going wet again in1891.[56] The drys triumphed in1894, but Charlottetown was wet once more from 1897 until the turn of the century.

Last Call

In the rest of Canada, the brewing industry went through a period of consolidation in the last quarter of the 19th century which produced fewer but much larger firms. On Prince Edward Island, breweries and distilleries simply disappeared, as drinking became, first unfashionable, then illegal. In 1871, Charlottetown actually had five of the colony's eleven liquor-making establishments. At the end of 1879, after Charlottetown went dry but before Queen's County followed suit, one of the capital's cornerstone operations, the Spring Park Brewery went on the market. Apparently, there were no buyers because the following October the real estate and machinery were auctioned off.[57]

Spring Park's fate reflected the general trend. By 1881, the number of Island breweries and distilleries had fallen from ten to four, all of them in Charlottetown or its Royalty. A decade later, there was only one, the Brighton Brewery. Other "beer manufacturers," such as Job Bevan and George Simmonds, had switched over to "cordials" and soft drinks.[58]

Exactly how Hyndman and Morris survived the (officially) dry '80s isn't recorded, although the cracks in the Scott Act provide one clue. While it banned the barter or sale of "any spirituous or other intoxicating liquors"(except for sacramental, medicinal, or industrial use), the Act didn't actually prohibit their manufacture. Moreover, a licensed brewer or distiller could sell in bulk "to such persons as he has good reason to believe" would carry the alcohol outside the district where the Scott

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[56]Davis, p. 134. Ruth Elizabeth Spence, *Prohibition in Canada* (Toronto: Ontario Branch of Dominion Alliance, 1919), cites the actual plebiscite results. The "drys" prevailed by 60 votes in 1884 (775-715) and by just 20 in 1887 (689-669). Spence attributes the 1891 "dry" victory to a cynical gerrymandering of the voters' list by "wet" forces.

[57]See Charlottetown *Patriot*, 11 December 1879; and *Patriot*, 14 October 1880.

[58]*McAlpine's Maritime Provinces Directory, 1870-71*, lists Simmonds at the head of Prince Street, with Bevan located on Euston. *Teare's Directory and Hand Book of Prince Edward Island, 1880-81* puts Bevan in Charlottetown Royalty. *McAlpine's Charlottetown City Directory, 1887-88* contains a North River Road address for Simmonds.

Act was in force. Merchants and traders could retail liquor on the same terms, providing liquor manufacturers with a welcome layer of legal insulation between them and illicit use of their products.[59] A shortage of enforcement agents, jurisdictional squabbles between federal and provincial governments, and a very large "wet" minority in Charlottetown turned such legal loopholes into embarrassing breaches in the temperance bastion.

That temperance advocates had always targeted "hard" liquor also played into brewers' hands. By 1889, the Brighton Brewery was advertising "Pale, Amber and Light Beers," a weak echo of the powerful double and treble X ales marketed by mid-century Charlottetown breweries. Still, as far as the Scott Act was concerned, beer was beer. Or not. Temperance supporters were outraged when a PEI Supreme Court justice ruled that "hop beer" was not an intoxicant after all, but merely an "exhilarating" beverage and so, not prohibited from sale by law! The immediate result was "a deluge of beer-drinking in Charlottetown."[60] Only a series of more sober Supreme Court decisions reversed the flow of ale, and by then, another wet interlude was at hand.

According to the census of 1891, Brighton Brewery's land, buildings, and equipment were valued at $10,000, about the same as its purchase price back in 1868. The firm had ten employees, all male, and produced about $25,000 worth of product per year, paying out about $4,500 into the local economy. That was all that remained of the Island's brewing and distilling industry.

Decades of temperance crusading had taken their toll. In 1874, Islanders had downed 1.04 gallons of beer per capita; 20 years later, consumption had slumped to .286 gallons.[61] Although Islanders might be imbibing less, their drinking was geographically more concentrated. As the Scott Act dried out rural Prince Edward Island, tipplers gravitated to Charlottetown. In 1894, the capital had 92 legal drinking establishments, one for every 124 citizens. That year, City prohibitionists won another Scott Act plebiscite and local drinking again went underground.

In May 1895, the huddle of abandoned buildings that had once been the Spring Park Brewery,

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[59]"An Act Respecting the Traffic in Intoxicating Liquors," 41 Vic., cap. 16.

[60]As recounted in Spence, p. 128, who quotes B. D. Higgs, editor of the *Morning Guardian* and a staunch prohibitionist.

[61]The latter figure is from 1893. See Davis, pp. 134-35.

including 10,000 brick, went up for sale.[62] That December, Charlottetown was abuzz with word of a more promising transaction. The Brighton Brewery had been sold to an English syndicate, reportedly headed by Lord Aylesford, which had recently bought up four Halifax breweries.[63] The Oland family, whose Army and Navy Brewery was part of the buyout, occupied prominent positions in the new consortium, and it was J. C. Oland and an English director, Londoner Arthur Tangye, who came to Prince Edward Island to close the deal for the Brighton Brewery.[64] "It is understood," gossiped the *Daily Examiner*, "that the price paid was in the vicinity of $14,000 but this doesn't include the stock."[65]

It has been supposed that Halifax Breweries Ltd. purchased the Brighton Brewery in order to close it, yet there is some evidence that the brewery continued during the next wet period in Charlottetown, which began in 1897. In 1900, Halifax Breweries was advertising a headquarters in Halifax with a branch office in Charlottetown,[66] and according to Oland family tradition, one of the Oland sons was sent over to learn the brewing trade by running the Charlottetown operation.[67] Of course, it may be that the Island branch merely sold beer brewed in Halifax. Whatever the case, 1900 was the year that Prince Edward Island became the first Canadian province to successfully introduce prohibition legislation. By the time the act came into force in 1901, the Brighton Brewery had closed

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[62]Charlottetown *Daily Examiner*, 15 May 1895.

[63]For the Island side of the story, see *Daily Patriot*, 18 December 1895, p. 3; and "Brewery Sold," *Daily Examiner*, 19 December 1895, p. 3. See, too, Allen Winn Sneath, *Brewed in Canada: The Untold Story of Canada's 350-Year Old Brewing Industry* (Toronto: Dundurn Group, 2001).

[64]The other Halifax breweries were Hayward's Crystal Spring Brewery, O'Mullin's Foyle Brewery, and Lindberg's Bavarian Lager.

[65]"Brewery Sold," *Daily Examiner*, 19 December 1895, p. 3.

[66]*McAlpine's Prince Edward Island Directory*, 1900. Under pressure from temperance forces, the Liberal government had introduced a punitive license fee of $400 per annum in 1899.

[67]Telephone interview with Fred Hyndman, Charlottetown, 13 October 2005. Hyndman was told the story by Philip Oland, a modern-day descendant.

its doors.[68] To keep them closed, a series of amendments in 1902 de-legalized the wholesale trade in liquor and set the minimum alcohol content for an intoxicating beverage at 3%.[69]

Having effectively killed Charlottetown's liquor industry, Prohibition soon tarnished its memory as well. Stripped of its Victorian context, the fact that merchant Owen Connolly had begun his 19th-century fortune by selling liquor became the skeleton in the closet of his 20th-century philanthropy. And when Charles A. Hyndman died in Edmonton in November 1906, his admiring obituary discreetly failed to mention that the man who once "carried on business here" had made his living out of brewing beer.[70] An occupation once seen as reflective of Islanders' industrial enterprise was now considered an embarrassment. Drinking became Charlottetown's dirty little secret, and though it would stagger on until 1948, Island Prohibition would always have liquor on its breath. Even after Prohibition's repeal, it would take decades for the Island to recover from the hangover. Only in the 1980s would the sober business of manufacturing spirits once again become a respectable undertaking in Charlottetown. The ghosts of Thomas Pethick and George Coles would drink to that.

Sources

This article is adapted from a talk that I gave as part of the annual Island Lecture Series in 2003. Much of the research for that was compiled by my co-author Carolyn Roberts. Primary sources include the License Ledgers for stores, taverns, and distillers (PARO, RG 7, Series 1, Sub-series 1), assorted mid-century brewery ledgers (PARO, HF 3466 XHF.72.118, items1-4), the Journals of the House of Assembly, census returns, Blue Book statistics, and, of course, the Public Archives' Master Name Index. The Atlantic Canada Newspaper Survey, the funds for which, sadly, gave out before the work was complete, helped us locate relevant newspaper ads. These have been supplemented by reference to the various Island business directories. To sift through Island newspapers for relevant

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[68]Sneath, however, contradicts the census. According to *Brewed in Canada*, p. 73, George Oland was sent to the Island in 1901 to revive the sagging fortunes of the syndicate's Charlottetown brewery, which he supposedly did.

[69]Spence, p. 328.

[70]Charlottetown *Daily Patriot*, 28 August 1906, p. 8.

articles on a century's worth of brewing and distilling would be a self-defeating proposition, but generous colleagues have kindly shared material they've gleaned over the years. My thanks to the king of pithy quotes, Boyde Beck, for sharing his files, and, especially, to Catherine Hennessey, the *doyenne* of Charlottetown history, for sharing hers (and to Faye Pound for the research tip).

The most directly relevant secondary source has been H. T. Holman, "The Island's First Brewery," *The Island Magazine*, 25(Spring/Summer 1989), but we've also mined Irene Rogers' classic compendium, *Charlottetown: The Life in Its Buildings* (Charlottetown: Prince Edward Island Heritage Foundation, 1983). Walter Hyndman's family history is cited in Jim Cody, "Island-Made Beer, Ale Flowed Freely in 1800s," Charlottetown *Evening Patriot*, 15 February 1986, p. 3. Aggie-Rose Reddin generously shared self-published material on two of her distiller ancestors, Pierce Gaul and Donald McIsaac. Ian Ross Robertson's masterful profile of George Coles in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography* is now available on-line. And, of course, one cannot now write Island history without reference to *The Island Magazine* itself. Besides Harry Holman's piece, this study draws on at least a half-dozen other *Island Magazine* articles.

For a broader context on Canadian brewing, I've employed Allen Winn Sneath, *Brewed in Canada: The Untold Story of Canada's 350-Year Old Brewing Industry* (Toronto: Dundurn Group, 2001); and Albert Tucker, "The Heady Brew," *Horizon Canada*, Vol. 8: 2168-73. The best source on the history of Prohibition in the Maritimes remains Mark C. Davis, "'I"ll Drink to That': The Rise and Fall of Prohibition in the Maritime Provinces, 1900-1930" (Ph.D dissertation, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, 1990), but odd and valuable details are preserved in Ruth Elizabeth Spence, *Prohibition in Canada* (Toronto: Ontario Branch of Dominion Alliance, 1919). John J. Rowan's comments on Island beer can be found in his chapter on Prince Edward Island in *The Emigrant and Sportsman in Canada* (London, 1876).