

THE HOPE DISTILLERY COMPANY

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Louisville, Kentucky

On January 15, 1814, James D'Wolf, Jr., of Bristol in Rhode Island, bought a farm adjoining the Town of Louisville in Kentucky. It contained one hundred six acres and cost \$10,600. Sellers were Robert Todd (RS), Fortunatus Cosby and Mary Ann his wife, and William Lytle and Eliza N. his wife, the last two being residents of Cincinnati. This purchase was the beginning of one of the most ambitious, and one of the least successful, undertakings in the industrial history of Kentucky. For it led to the founding of The Hope Distillery Company. At a time when other Kentucky distilleries were small hand-operated plants, producing from one to four barrels a day, The Hope Distillery was planned and built to utilize steam power machinery to produce twenty-five barrels of whisky a day.

The tract of land was a rectangle with a roughly triangular section extending from its northeast corner, the whole having a sphinx-like silhouette. In terms of today's streets, the land lay approximately between Jefferson and Crop streets and ran from Fifteenth Street to Twentieth Street. The triangular extension was bounded by Fifteenth Street, Portland Avenue, and Pirtle Street. D'Wolf agreed as a condition of the sale "that the ditch or canal already cut and opened for draining the large pond within the premises should not be obstructed but be always kept open," and he reserved the right to keep the ditch in repair.¹ D'Wolf also owned town lots Nos. 50 and 51, which lay at the end and on opposite sides of Main Street. Each lot was one hundred five feet wide by two hundred ten feet deep. These lots joined his farm. They cost a total of \$120.

No sooner had D'Wolf acquired this land than he leased it to one Chester B. Powell for a period of five years. Powell agreed to pay \$630 a year rent. He was to enclose the farm with "a good strong and sufficient worm rail fence" and he was to clean up the place. He was allowed \$120 for cleaning up and \$122 for building the fence. He might cut wood from the tract, but he must grow no hemp or flax. D'Wolf agreed to lend Powell a total of \$3,359 on security of Mr. David R. Poignand. In return Powell was to build a brick barn forty feet long by thirty feet wide by fourteen feet high for \$964.36; a brick dwelling house on Lot No. 50 thirty-four feet long by twenty feet wide by nineteen feet high for \$1,394.64; also a frame cowhouse and a

smokehouse and privy of brick.² All of these improvements must have been made. For on June 15, 1816, Simeon S. Goodwin of Boston in Massachusetts, attorney-in-fact for James D'Wolf, Jr., released Chester B. Powell and David R. Poignand from their lease of D'Wolf's land, they having carried out Powell's agreement with D'Wolf.³

This Simeon S. Goodwin was hired as Agent and Superintendent of The Hope Distillery as of January 1, 1816. The Company had been formed in the East late in the previous year. The agreement which started it was signed on December 20, 1815, by and between James D'Wolf of Bristol, Rhode Island, and Ruggles Whiting of Boston, Massachusetts. Terms of the agreement were that the distillery should be built on D'Wolf's land at Louisville, Kentucky; capital was to be twelve shares at \$5,000 each; D'Wolf bought five shares for himself, three shares for Ruggles Whiting, and one share for Simeon S. Goodwin, they giving their notes to repay him; incorporation was to be sought from the Kentucky Legislature; Whiting was to act as Purchasing Agent and Superintendent of Construction; Goodwin was appointed Agent at a salary of \$400 per year plus one-twelfth of the profits; and stockholders were to meet in Boston.⁴ An Act of Incorporation was duly obtained. It was approved January 27, 1817. Incorporators were James D'Wolf, Ruggles Whiting, Tilley Whitcomb, Thomas Whiting, Martin Blake, Simeon S. Goodwin, Ebenezer Breed, and John Breed. They were authorized to issue twenty shares of stock at \$5,000 per share. The corporation was "allowed to manufacture spirits from grain and other goods . . ." All banking powers were prohibited. The charter was to continue until the first day of January 1837.⁵

Ruggles Whiting came to Louisville to build the distillery. Since steam power was used throughout the plant, the boiler room must have been among the first buildings to go up. Then there was a mill building, in which grain could be raised from the delivery wagons to an upper level, to drop by gravity into the mills. James Codd was the miller. Small grains, rye and malt, were ground in the usual manner. Corn, however, was received on the cob and was ground the same way, cob and all—a departure from the customary distillery practice of using only the kernels. A separate building housed the malting operation, where a portion of the grain was allowed to sprout in order to develop its diastatic powers for converting grain-starch into grain-sugar. Probably twelve to fifteen per cent of the grain underwent this process. Maltsters were Thomas Calder, at \$25 a month, and James Crow, at \$2.00 a day. (One wonders if this were the Dr. James Crow who became famous for his fine whisky produced

in Woodford County after 1825.) The ground grain, or meal, was elevated to the second story of the mash building, where it was mixed with water heated by steam. This slurry then dropped into a mash tub, called a "kieve," and here it was stirred by huge power-driven rakes while it cooled somewhat and the malted grain was added. Thanks to power-driven machinery, this mashing process, which in the ordinary way would require the day-long work of thirty men, could be completed in an hour by one man.

Now came a step in the procedure unknown to Kentucky distillers then and now, in which the liquid portion of the mash was separated from the solid grain husks before fermenting. The sweet, sticky liquid was drawn from the "kieve" through a system of pumps and pipes into extensive coolers situated in the second story of another house. This cooler was the largest vessel of its kind in America, having a capacity of eight thousand gallons. When the liquid "saccharum" had cooled sufficiently, it was let down into large fermenting vessels. Here yeast was added and fermentation took place. Andrew Dunlap was in charge of this part of the process. Upon completion of the fermentation period, the "beer" was dropped into an underground reservoir, known today as a beer well, and from there it was pumped as needed to the stills.

The stills were in a separate building. They were, of course, made of copper and they weighed more than ten tons. They were bought in England, shipped to Louisville in pieces, and erected on the spot. They cost \$5,763.10 plus the "cost to reduce to Baltimore money" \$461.05 plus the transportation costs. They were erected by George Williams and Joseph Swager for \$1,719.98. This construction cost did not include the foundations and furnaces. The singling still was flat and made on an entirely new principle. It contained fifteen hundred gallons. The doubler was deeper and held seven hundred fifty gallons. The singling still could be brought to a boil in twenty minutes, while the doubler required an hour to run off a charge. Distillers were Thomas Cormick and James Carroll, the latter "on condition of success at 1500\$ per year."

Since whisky must be placed in some kind of container, the cooperage operation was an important part of the plant. Coopers were Shadrack Bickford, Charles and Michael Bloomfield, Edmond Welsh, and Isaac Herrin. The cooperage was extensive, because in 1820, on a court order to satisfy a judgment, some \$3,000 worth of heads and staves were sold at the plant. Whisky was not aged by the distiller in those days, so there were no warehouses. But a very necessary part of the operation was disposing of the waste from the distillery. Evan Williams had encountered this problem back in the eighteenth cen-

ture, and it remains today a problem for distillers who do not have modern by-products plants. The plan of The Hope Distillery was to feed the waste to hogs raised on D'Wolf's farm. Patrick Maxey was hired to run the farm. He also boarded some of the workers and he agreed to take his pay in whisky.⁶

The distillery buildings were located on some sixteen or seventeen acres⁷ situated just east of what is now Fifteenth Street and lying between Lytle Street on the north and Rowan Street on the south.⁸ This land is now occupied by the plant of The Devoe and Reynolds Company and by the freight station and yards of the Monon Railroad. Following the failure of The Hope Distillery Company, the buildings stood almost idle for a number of years. They finally burned.⁹

Dr. M'Murtrie's statement that "the works generally being calculated to produce twelve hundred gallons per day . . . the residuum of the whole operation furnishing an excellent food sufficient for five thousand hogs . . ." gives a basis for determining the size of the plant. It must be pointed out that when this was written the distillery had not yet been put into operation, so the figures were theoretical and highly optimistic. They indicate, however, that some six hundred bushels of grain could be processed each day. It is doubtful if this production was ever reached. On March 26, 1822, Simeon S. Goodwin stated in court that "owing to dissensions in the Corporation, want of funds and bad subordinate agents employed by the Corporation, neglect and mismanagement of the Corporation that the works were not put in operation . . . except so far as to make some imperfect experiments and that if the works had been put in operation as contemplated they would have make large profits annually."¹⁰ This is probably as near the truth as any of the charges and countercharges hurled by the lawyers and litigants.

The Accounts of The Hope Distillery Company, as of January 1, 1819, show that the original stock of \$60,000 had been increased by three assessments to \$96,000. The amount "expended in buildings, utensils, horses, waggons &c as far as the accounts are settled up to this date" was \$87,420.63. Total expenditures, including sums paid to the proprietors, were \$109,135.11. (An audit of the books one year later showed that the firm was \$17,000 in debt.) Among the employees were: Joseph G. Blake, clerk; Carver Mercer, brickmaker; and William E. Burrell, doctor.

By this time D'Wolf was becoming dissatisfied with the management of the business. In October, 1819, he sent John Howe, of Bristol, to Kentucky to investigate. Howe arrived in Louisville late in December or early in January. He reported that he found evidence of mismanagement and collusion on the part of Whiting and Goodwin. Be-

cause of D'Wolf's anxiety, Howe tried to close the business, either by selling D'Wolf's interest, or by buying out the other stockholders, or by renting the works to someone else. Whiting and Goodwin, however, claimed to have proxies for a majority of the stock¹¹ and they refused to consider any of D'Wolf's proposals.

But apparently Howe alarmed Goodwin and Whiting. For the latter left Louisville soon after Howe's arrival. And Goodwin filed suit against the other stockholders on February 5, 1820.¹² He asked \$15,000 for his services. The suit came to trial in 1822 and a jury awarded Goodwin \$5,000. All the stockholders shifted their liability to D'Wolf, who was now a United States Senator. D'Wolf expressed considerable disgust with Kentucky courts, but he gathered together his evidence and sent it to his attorney, James W. Denny, by "the Hon. H. Clay." Denny started a series of legal maneuvers which finally resulted in the Court of Appeals' dismissing the suit on a technicality. So Goodwin promptly sued again, this being Suit No. 1270 of the Jefferson Chancery Court. Notice of the suit was published for two consecutive months "in the *Morning Post and Commercial Advertiser*, an authorized newspaper of the commonwealth, published in Louisville." D'Wolf replied "that during his [Goodwin's] agency, he shamefully mismanaged the business of the said Company, and was a most unfaithful and unworthy representative of its interests: That by his neglect and abuse of the trust confided to him the Complainant greatly injured the said Company, and was frequently directed by this defendant to desist from any further exercise of his functions as Agent, but still continued to squander the funds and involve the Corporation in debt, and was finally dismissed by this defendant, as President of the Corporation, by advertisement in a public newspaper printed in Louisville in the State of Kentucky . . ." Again Mr. Denny exercised his legal talents and, very largely by perseverance, he obtained a second dismissal from the Court of Appeals in November of 1829, with costs to D'Wolf.

But even with this suit in the courts, D'Wolf retained some faith in Goodwin—possibly because the latter was heavily in debt to him. He allowed Goodwin to continue as Agent, but he did revoke his power-of-attorney. On July 3, 1820, he employed Charles M. Thruston as attorney for the Corporation.¹³ In fact, Goodwin remained as Agent until December 3, 1821, when he was replaced by Isaac Thorn. When Goodwin refused to turn over his books and papers, Thorn hired a band of armed men led by one Hugh Hawes to seize them. This they did on the night of February 2, 1822, breaking into Goodwin's office and taking not only Company records, but also Goodwin's private papers.¹⁴ Hugh Hawes later became Secretary of the Corpo-

ration.¹⁵ Evidently Goodwin stayed with the Company, because in 1823 he made a deposition in Thruston's suit and signed it "Clerk." And by 1824 he was again appearing as "Agent." But Goodwin did not prosper, for in 1826 he was described as "notoriously insolvent."

The Corporation was dissolved sometime prior to August, 1826. Ruggles Whiting was back in Louisville during this year. And a short time later it was reported that the distillery buildings had been "rifled" of most of their utensils and equipment. Whiting died soon after his return to Boston.¹⁶

D'Wolf now became involved in a number of law suits, both in the State courts and in Federal Court.¹⁷ He showed great persistence in fighting these suits. In one instance, a judgment was rendered against him in 1819 and his lawyer kept the case in court until 1842. But he successfully defended his title to the land which he had originally purchased. He leased it at low rentals for farming purposes. In 1828 he leased it to Patrick Maxey, who planned to manufacture soap and candles and to run a "Brewery of Malt Liquors."¹⁸ Finally on September 22, 1829, James D'Wolf, Jr., and Julia Lynch his wife, then of New York City, sold all of the land and the two lots to James D'Wolf III of Bristol, Rhode Island, for \$10,000. They stated that the land was free of all encumbrances.¹⁹ James D'Wolf, Jr., died in December of 1837, aged seventy-three years.²⁰ But he had the satisfaction of knowing before he died that his Kentucky investment would at last be successful. For James D'Wolf III, his son, had developed the land into a subdivision known as DeWolf's Western Addition. By the fall of 1835 he was selling small lots at prices ranging between five and six hundred dollars each. Through the years over five hundred of these lots were sold by the D'Wolf heirs.²¹ Thus James D'Wolf's losses were recovered by his descendants with interest and profit.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Jefferson County Deed Book Q, 129-131. On October 4, 1820, Barbara F. Todd, wife of Robert Todd (RS), being now of age, agreed to the sale. See Deed Book S, 171-172. The approximate location of the land was determined by plotting the surveyor's points and comparing them with J. Flint's "Map of the Falls of the Ohio," 1824, E. D. Hobbs' "City of Louisville and Its Enlargements," 1832, and E. J. Coleman's "New Map of Greater Louisville and Environs," 1943. Flint's map of 1824 shows that the only made streets in the neighborhood were Main Street, Twelfth Street, and the public road from Louisville to Shippingport and Portland. Main Street extended only two hundred ten feet west of Twelfth Street, and Portland Avenue then ran all the way to Main Street, which it intersected just east of Twelfth Street.

² Jefferson County Deed Book 10, 353-356.

³ Jefferson County Deed Book K, 141.

⁴ Jefferson Circuit Court, Chancery Branch, March Term, 1824, Suit No. 1270. Copy of the original agreement is filed here.

⁶ *Acts . . . of the Twenty-Fifth General Assembly for the Commonwealth of Kentucky* . . . Gerard and Dendall, Printers, Frankfort, Kentucky, pp. 154-157.

⁷ M'Murtrie, Dr. H., *Sketches of Louisville*, Louisville, Kentucky, 1819, pp. 127-137, describes the distillery. Names, costs, etc., in this passage were taken from the accounts of the company filed with Suit No. 1270, above.

⁸ Suit No. 1270, above.

⁹ Hobbs, E. D., map of 1832, above.

¹⁰ Casseday, Benjamin, *The History of Louisville, from Its Earliest Settlement till the Year 1852*, Hull & Brother, Louisville, Kentucky, 1852, p. 143.

¹¹ Suit No. 1270, above.

¹² It is interesting to note that all the stockholders claimed voting rights in the Corporation, but they shifted their liability to D'Wolf whenever the Company was sued.

¹³ A transcript of this suit and all the papers relating to it is filed with Suit No. 1270, above.

¹⁴ Jefferson Circuit Court, Chancery Branch, December Term, 1823, Suit No. 1852. After doing considerable work, Thruston had to sue D'Wolf for his salary. He asked \$400 and was granted—and collected!—\$800 because the currency of the Kentucky banks was worth only fifty cents on the dollar at the time.

¹⁵ Suit No. 1270, above.

¹⁶ Jefferson Circuit Court, Chancery Branch, October Term, 1823, Suit No. 2366.

¹⁷ Jefferson Circuit Court, Chancery Branch, August Term, 1826, Suit No. 2745.

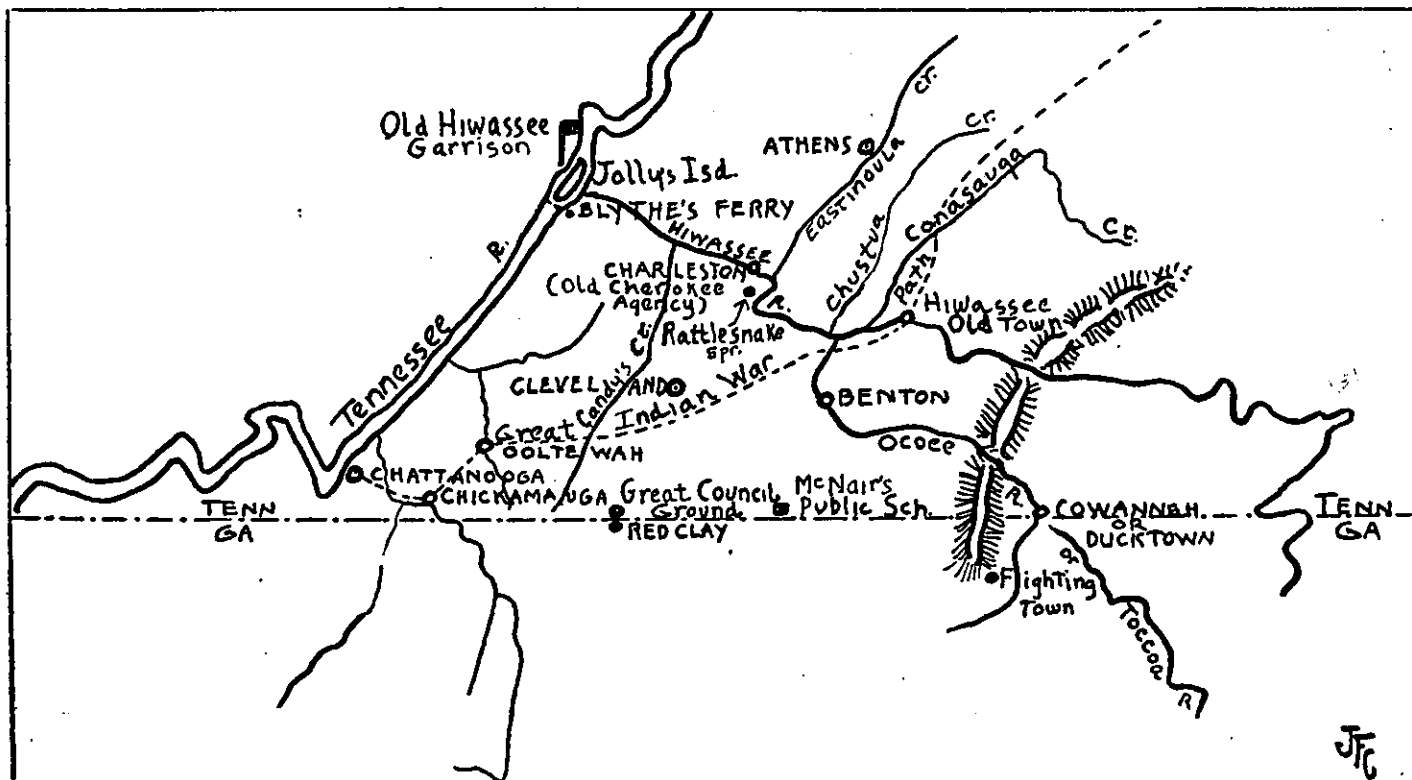
¹⁸ Suits Nos. 2366 and 2745, above, refer to other suits which do not appear in the index.

¹⁹ Jefferson County Deed Book AA, 348-349.

²⁰ Jefferson County Deed Book CC, 335-338.

²¹ *Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1949*, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1950, p. 1081.

²² Jefferson County Deed Books RR, SS, TT, and forward, especially No. 63, p. 600 ff.



SKETCH OF PORTION OF OLD MAP OF CHEROKEE INDIAN TERRITORY, ABOUT 1884. (Not to scale)
 (James F. Corn, 12-15-52)