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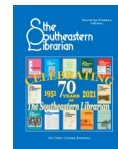
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Distilling a Collection: Creating a Distilling, Fermenting, and Brewing Special Collection at the James E. Walker Library

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ABSTRACT

This essay recounts the steps we took to launch the new Distilling, Fermenting, and Brewing Collection in our Special Collections department. It began with the routine task of weeding our general collection but quickly led to other activities which included a broader collection analysis; consideration of campus, local and state resources; consultation with development and fundraising staff; and research in the antiquarian trade. Knowing what we had and what we could acquire in the book market, surmising the potential for private and industry support, and understanding the multiple scholarly possibilities embedded in our collection, we embarked on building a resource that can attract students, faculty, outside researchers, and private supporters.

KEYWORDS

distillery, alcohol, fermentation, philately, special collections

The effort to assemble a special collection and build a collection from scratch is one of the tough chestnuts in academic librarianship. The challenges are myriad. There are often financial, space, and staffing constraints. Working with these challenges, librarians aim to establish a collection that can sustain various scholarly approaches and remain relevant and attractive to researchers at the local, regional, or even national level. They must also be realistic about their institution's long-term ability to fund the effort, as well as the supremely practical matter of availability of appropriate materials that "fit" a well-defined realm of collection. Recently, the James E. Walker Library at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) negotiated these and other challenges, ultimately establishing a special collection of materials that, we believe, will remain permanently useful in teaching and scholarship. Our new collection is tentatively titled the *Distilling, Fermenting, and Brewing Collection*. In what follows, we recount the process by which this collection came about, and we offer it as an example of how other college and university libraries might approach launching a new collection.

The library at MTSU was established with the university's founding in 1911. Over the decades, librarians sought to increase holdings by acquiring large stocks of used books and by accepting gift collections from retiring faculty and members of the local community. Consequently, despite its twentieth-century origin, the library is home to many books published in the nineteenth century.

The library's Special Collections department is relatively new. Founded in 1999, the department has modest collections focusing on early Tennessee imprints and Eudora Welty, an extensive collection of pop-up and moveable books, and the Margaret Lindsley Warden Collection for Equine Studies, which features practically all aspects of the horse and horsemanship. Our emphasis is on preserving the physical artifact and printed word.

Our new collection began with a large-scale weeding project of the general collection as part of our transition from Dewey Decimal Classification to the Library of Congress Classification system. Our subject liaisons reviewed materials in their areas of specialty for either withdrawal, repair, or retention/reclassification. Areas such as business, medicine, or computer science were straight forward. Older books were usually outdated and irrelevant. These moved from the shelves, through the withdrawal process, and out the door. In other areas, such as economics, we discovered materials that were older and not relevant to keep in the general stacks, but had potential to become their own special collection.

Our collection includes early editions of seminal works by macroeconomists Irving Fisher, Joseph Schumpeter, and John Maynard Keynes. John Maynard Keynes' *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* (1936) provided the first economic theory that could explain the Great Depression. Essentially, Keynes argued that it was demand (not supply) that drove production, and it was the decrease in the aggregate demand for goods and services in the economy that caused unemployment. The study of Macroeconomics and the Great Depression are co-temporary to Prohibition and its related social issues such as moonshine, temperance, prisons and crime, and poverty as they occurred in middle Tennessee during the 1930s.

After some discussion, we set aside the materials that focused on the birth of macroeconomics and turned our focus on Tennessee. We had numerous books published in the late nineteenth and into the early twentieth century that addressed Tennessee's economic and social conditions. We removed these books from the shelves for evaluation. After searching the library catalog for Tennessee books, reports, and the library's Institutional Repository for publications about middle Tennessee's history, we compiled a preliminary list of Tennessee publications. Examples include *Edward Ward Carmack in the Fight for Prohibition in Tennessee* by Lucille Neville and *History of Tennessee: Its People and its Institutions from the Earliest Times to the Year 1903* by William Robertson Garrett and Albert Virgil Goodpasture. In wondering if these volumes might form a foundation for developing a special collection, we brainstormed and began discussing specific kinds of economic activities and commercial markets in Tennessee. Among the most obvious was the production of Tennessee Whiskey.

Whiskey production has long been an important economic and social component in Tennessee. Currently, the state is home to 60 wineries, 30 distilleries, and 52 breweries, with many of these located an hour or less from our campus. Capturing and preserving information in this area would add to the research potential for local and regional economic and social historians. Additionally, in 2017 MTSU launched a niche academic program in Fermentation Science. Offering both undergraduate and graduate degrees, the program is unique in the state, and one of only two in the southeast region to focus on fermentation.

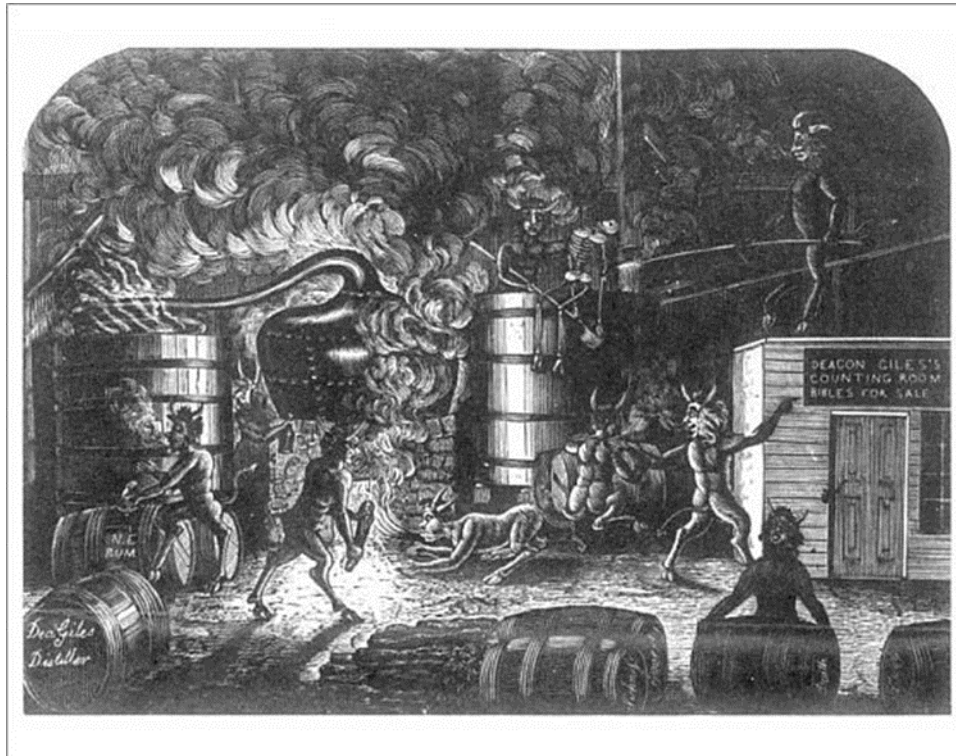
After deciding to move forward, we pondered altering our focus for the potential collection. We determined that a strict concentration on Tennessee Whiskey was overly confining and, consequently, broadened the idea to encompass distilling, fermenting, and brewing. This would support research and interest in the new Fermentation Science program. At the same time, we began appreciating the array of sociocultural and historical subjects that fell within our broader notions about the collection—among other subjects, the temperance movement, Prohibition, moonshining, and smuggling. Thus, we felt the diversity of the collection could support research and teaching across multiple disciplines, and this diversity would also give us leeway to develop a host of interesting and visually engaging exhibits.

The broader focus would also allow us to assemble clusters of similar books or books that throw light on a similar subject--"sub-collections" or "micro-collections"--within the larger collection. An early group of acquisitions included pamphlets, a broadside, and a book centered on the Massachusetts temperance leader and abolitionist Reverend George Barrell Cheever. In 1835, in an article in a Salem newspaper, Cheever published a satirical attack on "Deacon Amos Giles," a pseudonym for John Stone, a prominent Salem citizen, Unitarian minister, and owner of a prospering distillery. The article recounts a Sunday when the Deacon's distillery workers quarrel and walk off their jobs. Giles, represented as a greedy man seeking to make money on the Sabbath, hires "a gang of singular-looking fellows"--that is, demons from Hell--whose "dress was wild and uncouth" (Mackay, 1973, p. 234). Stone sued Cheever for libel and won, and as part of his punishment Cheever was publicly whipped (Mackay, 1973).

The incident promoted Cheever to national attention as a leading figure in the temperance movement and led to numerous publications and reprintings of the original satire and accounts of Cheever's trial. These publications remained popular long after the original episode. Our holdings include an 1865 broadside with an engraving of Deacon Giles' distillery worked by "demons" as well as Cheever's effort to appeal his sentence, *A Defence [sic] in Abatement of Judgment for an Alleged Libel* (Cheever, 1836). In addition, we acquired two pamphlets: *The True History of Deacon Giles' Distillery* (1844) and *The Dream, or a True History of Deacon Giles's Distillery* (1859).

Figure 1

Contemporary Engraving (ca. 1840s?) of “Demons” at Work in “Deacon Giles” Distillery



Once we had a better idea of the potential nature and variety of our collection, we looked more closely at books in our main collection and also got a feel for possible acquisitions in the antiquarian book trade.

We tried two methods to locate possible acquisitions for our fledgling collection. The first method was to analyze Excel reports pulled from our ILS based on Dewey classification. This was neither an efficient nor accurate method. Relying on the Dewey classification was simply too broad and, moreover, locating potential items in the spreadsheets relied on filtering with keywords. We tried again. This time we searched our catalog using keywords and then LC subjects when we found a potential item. Keyword searches were broad but yielded promising result sets. To narrow the results, we removed online resources and materials not located in our main library by using the catalog facets. We ran searches on Prohibition; Temperance; Alcohol Beverage Industry; Whiskey/Whisky; Moonshine; Wine; Beer. These searches yielded a mix of titles with publication dates from the 1800s to materials published as recently as 2019. Some of the titles we uncovered and transferred into the new special collection were:

- *Anti-Saloon League Conference Proceedings.* (1913, 1931)
- *Anti-Saloon League Yearbook.* (1909-1931)
- *Oxford Companion to Wine.* (2015)
- *Oxford Companion to Beer.* (2012)
- *Dictionary of American Temperance Biography.* (1984)
- *Standard Encyclopedia of the Alcohol Problem.* (1925)

Although we could make a case for many more titles than we pulled, we decided to leave numerous titles in the stacks to be readily available for researchers. We wanted to add only the truly unique.

Meanwhile, we searched the consolidated online rare book sites for books on distilling, brewing, and wine making; we also looked for antiquarian booksellers with a specialization in these areas. This

was fruitful: we found hundreds of editions, ranging from the 1500s to the present, that fit the parameters of our collection, and we compiled a list of several dozen representative volumes. Fortunately, we were able to allocate some funds for acquiring materials. A sample of our acquisitions include:

- *A Friendly Admonition to the Drinkers of Gin, Brandy, and other Distilled Spiritous Liquors*, a pamphlet printed and published at London in 1800, and written by the clergyman and scientist Stephen Hales to represent “the Necessity of restraining a Vice so Destructive of the INDUSTRY, MORALS, HEALTH, and LIVES of the PEOPLE.”
- *A Great Convention of Drunkards*, a lengthy satirical poem that savages drunkenness by the Reverend Charles Giles, printed and published at Buffalo in 1854.
- *The Art of Blending and Compounding Liquors and Wine* by Joseph Fleischman and published at New York City in 1885. It contains numerous mixed drink recipes as well as advice for purchasing liquors and wines.
- *The Drunkard’s Looking-Glass*, printed and published at Baltimore in 1843. A temperance work written by Mason Locke Weems--“Parson Weems,” famous for his factually questionable *Life of General George Washington*—and published posthumously by his widow.
- *Every Man his own Brewer, A Practical Treatise, Explaining the Art and Mystery of Brewing Porter, Ale, Twopenny, and Table-Beer*, the 1798 sixth edition of a popular and often published work by Samuel Child.
- Business ledger of J.M. Newsom dating to 1869. An account book kept by Newsom, who was apparently a Tennessee farmer and distiller, recording expenditures on and income from whiskey production and other goods.

With end-of-year funds, we acquired our first major acquisition, a first edition of one of the earliest American distilling manuals, an 1809 copy of *The Practical Distiller: Or an Introduction to Making Whiskey, Gin, Brandy, Spirits, &c, of Better Quality, and in Larger Quantities, than Produced by the Present Mode of Distilling, from the Produce of the United States* by Samuel McHarry and published by John Wyeth. A reprint of this work can be found in *Early American Imprints, Series II*, imprint number 17955. This seminal work provides directions for making spirits using rye, corn, buck-wheat, apples, peaches, potatoes, pumpkins and turnips. It also includes sections on purifying, clearing, and coloring whiskey. Most importantly, McHarry includes instruction on charring the aging barrels by burning straw to “sweeten” the wood, as well as using maple charcoal filtering to give an “aged flavor” to the product. These techniques look to be precursors to the barrel charring practiced by the best whiskey makers today and the charcoal filtering that is an essential to Tennessee Whiskey.

Figure 2
The Practical Distiller.

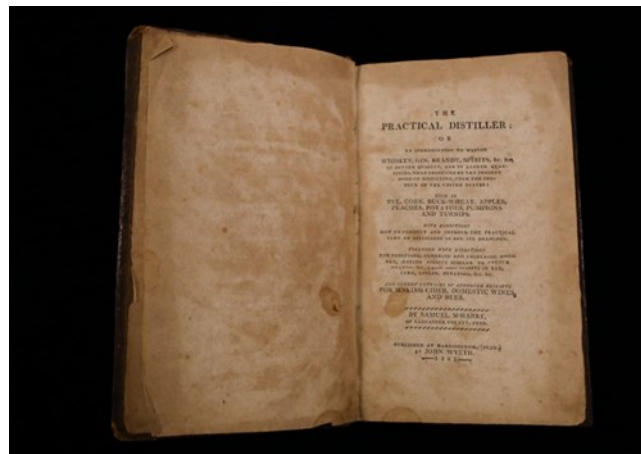


Photo courtesy of the
James E. Walker Library by
Maggie Stahle MTSU '22.

In determining to make our collection unique and truly reflect the subject, we delved into philately and decided to collect Tennessee revenue stamps. Working with Eric Jackson, a well-known revenue stamp dealer, we purchased liquor, wine, and beer revenue stamps, both pre- and post-Prohibition. We purchased a variety of stamps: used, specimen, and perfins. As a cost-saving measure, we purchased single stamps and not in blocks or plates. Additionally, we acquired some basic philately tools such as stamp books and tongs, as well as a few reference books, such as the Scott *Specialized Catalogue of United States Stamps & Covers* (2021), the United States volume of the *Scott Standard Postage Stamp Catalogue*, and *Field Guide to Revenue Stamped Paper: U.S. Southern States*.

Figure 3

Examples of Revenue Stamps.



Photo courtesy of the James E. Walker Library by Maggie Stahle MTSU '22.

Although we wanted to add alcohol-related postage stamps, the United States prohibits any positive depiction of alcohol on its postage stamps. What we uncovered were postage commemoratives for Prohibition, pinot noir grapes, and Frances E. Willard, the noted temperance crusader. We purchased not only individual stamps, but commemorative first-day covers relying on the services of the Mystic Stamp Company. Revenue and postage stamps tend to be reasonably priced (although there are rare and high-priced stamps); we recommend purchasing from established and reputable stamp dealers and companies. The American Philatelic Society has a dealer database on their website and is helpful for locating possible vendors. In addition to making our collection more comprehensive and complete, stamps and covers provide an interesting and unique visual for in-house exhibits and digital displays.

Figure 4

Commemorative Cover, First-day of Issue, 1998 Prohibition Postal Stamp.



Photo courtesy of the James E. Walker Library by Maggie Stahle MTSU '22.

A chance encounter with a local distillery marketing representative became our first connection to a production facility. Greenbrier Distillery in Nashville has agreed to work with us and to provide information and materials about their history, advertising, and perhaps bottle labels. We are excited that Greenbrier is our first connection and hope that we can expand and partner with them for additional opportunities, as well as other local distilleries, breweries, and wineries. We also plan to reach out to our Fermentation Science faculty and students and encourage their support and use of the collection. Additionally, we plan to seek partnerships with MTSU's Center for Historic Preservation and the history department. As we move into a post-COVID environment, the MTSU campus is re-opening and, with the increase of faculty and students on campus, we hope to see usage of the collection increase.

We will continue to grow our collection through continued analysis of materials located in our general stacks, purchasing materials on the open market, and establishing connections with other local distilleries, vineyards, and breweries to obtain advertising materials, labels, and histories. Additionally, we hope that this collection will pique the interest of our development office and lead to opportunities and partnerships in that realm. We are in the initial planning stages of a collection that would focus on the automobile industry within middle Tennessee, especially, Nissan and Saturn. The automobile industry is a vital economic activity in the area, with two Nissan plants, one of which is located in the former Saturn plant.

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