

A Guide to the A. Smith Bowman Distillery Collection, 1931-1981

The A. Smith Bowman Distillery Collection, 1931-1981
1931-1981

A Collection in The Fairfax County Public Library MSS 02-08

Title Statement

A Guide to the A. Smith Bowman Distillery Collection, 1931-1981

Subtitle: A. Smith Bowman Distillery Collection

Collection: MSS 02-08

Publication Statement

Date: © 2023 Fairfax County Public Library. All rights reserved.

Profile Description

Creation: Machine-readable finding aid created by Ross Landis, October 1, 2023

Language Usage: Description is in English

Descriptive Summary

Record Group Number

MSS 02-08

Language

English

Abstract

The A. Smith Bowman Distillery Collection consists of 1.0 linear feet and spans the years 1931-1981 and consists of a brochure, promotional pamphlet, magazine advertisement, framed whiskey labels, tobacco package, and five liquor bottles of "Virginia Gentleman" and "Fairfax County" whiskey.

Creator

Virginia Room staff

Extent

1.0 linear feet

Repository

Fairfax County Public Library

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

None

Use Restrictions

Consult repository for information

Acquisition Information

Collection assembled by the Virginia Room over a period of years

Processing Information

Chris Barbuschak, May 2018

EAD generated by Ross Landis, 2023

Preferred Citation

A. Smith Bowman Distillery Collection, MSS 02-08, Virginia Room, Fairfax County Public Library

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Separated Material

None

Related Material

None

Historical and Biographical Information

In September 1927, Kentucky-born A. Smith Bowman, Sr. (1868-1952) purchased several tracts of land which once consisted of the failed planned town of Wiehle built by Max Wiehle in the 1890s. Bowman renamed the property Sunset Hills Farm. In 1929, Bowman founded the Fairfax Hunt Club, the first hunt in Fairfax County, which met on his Sunset Hills Farm.

When prohibition was repealed in March 1934, Bowman and his sons applied for a permit to distill liquor. Granted a license, the Bowmans used former Wiehle buildings for their distillery and warehouses including the old Wiehle Town Hall. The Bowmans used corn and wheat from their Sunset Hills Farm to produce the whiskey and bourbon. The first "Virginia Gentleman" and "Fairfax County" bottled bourbon was sold to the public four years later in 1938. The Bowmans employed 250 workers to run the distillery and the farm.

In 1947 the Bowman family expanded Sunset Hills to 7,200 acres after purchasing an additional nearby 3,140 acres, making it the largest privately owned tract of land in Northern Virginia, most of which was later purchased by Robert E. Simon to build the planned community of Reston. The A. Smith Bowman Distillery expanded with new building facilities in 1966. In 1988, due to the raising living costs of employees, high taxes, traffic congestion, and space limitations, the distillery relocated to Fredericksburg, Virginia where it continues to operate today. The Bowman Distillery building, formerly the old Wiehle Town Hall, is listed on the Fairfax County Inventory of Historic Sites, National Register of Historic Places, and as of 2018 still stands at 1890 Old Reston Avenue.

Scope and Content

The A. Smith Bowman Distillery Collection consists of 1.0 linear feet and spans the years 1931-1981 and consists of a brochure, promotional pamphlet, magazine advertisement, framed whiskey labels, tobacco package, and five liquor bottles of "Virginia Gentleman" and "Fairfax County" whiskey. Subjects include Sunset Hills Farm, Virginia (present-day Reston, Virginia) and the whiskey industry in Fairfax County, Virginia.

Index Terms

A. Smith Bowman Distillery
Distilleries - Virginia - Fairfax County - History
Sunset Hills Farm (Fairfax County, Va.)
Whiskey industry - Virginia - Fairfax County

Container List

Box 1 Folder 1: Brochure, Fairfax Hunt Club House and Kennels, Sunset Hills, Virginia, 1931

Box 1 Folder 2: Tobacco package, Virginia Gentleman, Undated

Box 1 Folder 3: Magazine advertisement, Virginia Gentleman

Whiskey, c. 1975

Box 1 Folder 4: Promotional booklet, "A trip through Sunset Hills Farm, Fairfax County, Virginia : the story of "custom made" whiskey, and some fine southern recipes", Undated

Box 1 Folder 5: Framed Virginia Gentleman whiskey labels, Undated

Box 1: Glass bottle, Fairfax County Straight Bourbon Whiskey, 90 proof, 1981

Box 2: Glass bottle, Fairfax County Bourbon, 100 proof, 1 quart, 1971

Box 2: Glass bottle, Fairfax County Bourbon, 100 proof, 1 quart, 1974

Box 2: Glass bottle, Fairfax County Straight Bourbon Whiskey, 90 proof, 1981

Box 2: Glass bottle, Virginia Gentleman Straight Bourbon Whiskey, 1 liter, c. 1980s

Box 2: Plastic bottle, Virginia Gentleman Sweet Bourbon Whiskey, 80 proof, 1.75 liters, Undated