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CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

# DEMON RUM

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As we celebrate the festive holidays, we often encounter spirits of a liquid nature. We know, sadly, the ill effects of too much and the necessity of watching out for ones who are tipsy. However, did you know that the highest consumption of hard liquor occurred in this country during the 1830s?

David Sturges Copeland, in his book on Clarendon, described it. He wrote that the Sturges Distillery "with one in Holley and seven others in adjoining towns, gave the people whisky as common as cider at the present day" (1888). Stores sold it and even gave a drink to customers to encourage trade. Jugs and wooden bottles were taken to the distillery and "boys and girls on horseback might be seen homeward bound with the precious fluid."

All hands at raising bees, husking and harvesting, were rewarded with a drink. Fancy bitters were ready in the pantry or over the fireplace for guests. At dances, boys had slings and girls sweet cordials and even the local minister enjoyed hot punch or toddy.

Copeland wrote that "thinking people began to see the sorry effect," such as: "loafing around taverns, watching at the groceries for a free nip, bloated, half-awake faces, disregard of personal appearance, unfitness for labor, lack of confidence in ability to do the work of life." Men spent too much, even at 3 cents a glass at the taverns, and "before long their red noses gave them the name of toppers and sots." Such as

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these could be seen, "hanging around the village or country bar-room, ever ready to take a drink when called and often when not asked, with breaths that would have strangled an infant in the cradle if a breeze from their mouths had blown over the darlings."

A few years before 1836, one lady in Clarendon, in a drunken sleep, had fallen into her fireplace and the husband, also "loaded with the fluid," nearly lost his life pulling his wife out of the flames. As she expired she was heard to say she "wished she was under a whiskey barrel at the spout."

As the result of all of this, some people began to think something ought to be done. So, about 1847, T.G. McAllister offered space for a hall to accommodate the first temperance society in Clarendon. The "Sons of Temperance" was formed. Also, above McAllister's shop the "Daughters of Temperance" met every two weeks. Temperance societies rose and fell in the following years, until in 1883 the Women's Christian Temperance Union was organized in Clarendon by Mrs. J.H. Ruggles of Holley, and the first president was Harriet Gibson.

Sentiment against "Demon Rum" grew about this time all across the country. This eventually

resulted in the ratification of the 18th Amendment on Jan. 16, 1919, resulting in prohibition. This was repealed Dec. 5, 1933, with the 21st Amendment.

Our photo, circa 1909, in Clarendon shows the hotel to the left, the store at the end of the street and McAllister's shop in the distance across the street from the hotel. The "tell it like it was" account by Copeland reflects on all these places.