

Harry C. Hatch (1884-1946)



Harry C. Hatch, 1938

Harry C. Hatch was a self-made millionaire and one of the giants of the liquor business during and after prohibition in Canada and the United States.

Born in Prince Edward County, where he helped his father run a hotel, Hatch launched his career by buying a Whitby liquor store in 1911 for \$2500 and selling it two years later for \$14,000. In 1913 he moved to Toronto and bought another liquor store with his brother. In 1916, prohibition came to Toronto, threatening financial disaster. But two days later, Hatch had departed for Montreal and started a mail order business to serve his Toronto customers, who were still allowed to consume alcohol in the privacy of their own homes. This business thrived and laid the foundation for future ventures.

In 1921, he became associated with the Corby Distillery near Belleville on Lake Ontario. Before long, he had built-up an “export business” that raised Corby’s output from 500 gallons a month to 50,000 by serving the American market. Again, his fortune grew. When the Gooderham family became interested in getting out of the shady distillery business, Hatch was ready.

In 1923, he and associates purchased Gooderham & Worts – during prohibition – for 1.5 million dollars. At the same time, he convinced the Canadian government to let him start exporting whisky before it had been aged the two years required by law. (In Ontario, it was not illegal to manufacture and export whisky.) Then just as Ontario prohibition was ending, Hatch et al purchased Hiram Walker in Walkerville (Windsor) for substantially more - \$14,000,000. The Walkerville plant was strategically located across the river from Detroit. While supplying this market, Hatch explained that “the Volstead Act [US federal prohibition legislation] does not prevent us from exporting at all. It prevents somebody from over there from importing. There’s a difference.”

In 1927, Hatch merged the two great distilleries into Hiram Walker-Gooderham and Worts and expanded the Toronto distillery by building the largest rack house on the site – seven storeys with a capacity of about 40,000 barrels – and a large, case goods warehouse. In 1928, he established a branch office in Montreal. The Quebec office facilitated serving not only eastern Canada, but also customers along the eastern seaboard of an America still under prohibition. When U.S. prohibition ended in 1934, Hatch immediately opened the largest distillery in the world at Peoria, Illinois and expanded across the continent.

Hatch became president and chairman of the board of Hiram Walker-Gooderham & Worts, Ltd; vice-president of Canada Malting Company; a director of T. G. Bright Wine Co., Canada Steamship Lines, and Canadian Industrial Alcohol Co. Ltd. In addition to these business interests, Hatch was a baseball fan (the 1938 portrait comes from a poster created to celebrate the championship Gooderham & Worts team), and became the dominant owner and breeder of race horses in Canada during the 1930s and '40s. Five of his horses won the King’s Plate.

When Harry C. Hatch died on May 8, 1946, notices of his death appeared in the news section, the business section, and the sports section of local newspapers.

Sources: Primarily obituaries such as: “Sportsman, Industrialist, Harry Hatch Dies at 63,” *The Globe and Mail*, May 9, 1946; and “Horse Owner, Industrialist Harry C. Hatch Dies at 63,” *Toronto Star*, May 8, 1946. See also Stephen A. Otto, [Inventory of Archival Sources](#) (1994), Craig Heron, *Booze: A Distilled History* (2003), and C. W. Hunt, [Whisky and Ice](#) (2003).