

for May 27, 2007

Queen Victoria's Birthday



Celebrating Victoria Day 2007

Although born under the flag of King William IV in 1832, Gooderham & Worts was a quintessentially Victorian business. In fact, the company started distilling in 1837, the year that Victoria ascended the throne. Although there is no known link between the events, many a Toast to the Queen was undoubtedly made with the finest of Gooderham & Worts whisky.

During the Victorian period (1837-1901), Gooderham & Worts grew from serving an essentially local market with a single, wooden still to serving the world with an elaborate and ultra-modern column-still set-up. By the 1870s, G&W was not only the largest distillery in the British Empire, but the largest in the world. By the end of Victoria's reign in 1901, G&W was less dominant, but still a major force in the world of distilling.

The proprietors of G&W were "Victorian" to their core. Queen Victoria, in chromolithographic form, presided over their offices. And a colourful 1886 diploma, awarded with a commemorative medal for participation in the great Colonial and Indian Exhibition held in London, was proudly displayed upon return from that signature event. The spectacular opening was attended by W. G. Gooderham, eldest son of company president, George Gooderham.

On May 24, 1886, the *Globe* captured the spirit of those times with a report on the opening of the Exhibition ... that just happened to be published on the Queen's 67th Birthday:

The opening day of this Exhibition, as all the world knows, was characterized by the impressive, peaceful pomp and pageantry of a Royal progress. Bereft of this the spectacle still remains one of the most remarkable the world has ever seen, and the Briton or the Colonial who could pass through the long galleries unmoved by strong emotions of patriotism and pardonable pride must indeed be callous to ennobling influences.

Torontonians no doubt celebrated Victoria's Birthday somewhat more modestly by going to the Island, picnicking in Queen's Park, or participating in a regatta on the Bay ... much as they had done since 1845 when the Queen's Birthday on May 24th was first declared a holiday in Canada. After Victoria's death in 1901, the Canadian Parliament formally established "Victoria Day" as a legal holiday, naming the first Monday preceding May 24th as the date.

This year, the statutory holiday fell on May 21st, but the Queen's *real* birthday still fell on May 24th. To honour G & W's Victorian heritage, the Queen's Union Jack is flying atop the Cannery for the full week of celebrations, including the long week-end and the Doors Open festival on May 26-27.



Classically draped "colonies" pay tribute to enthroned "Britannia" at the Colonial & Indian Exhibition held in London, 1886

Please send your comments or questions to Manager of Heritage Services, Sally Gibson, sg@thedistillerydistrict.com.