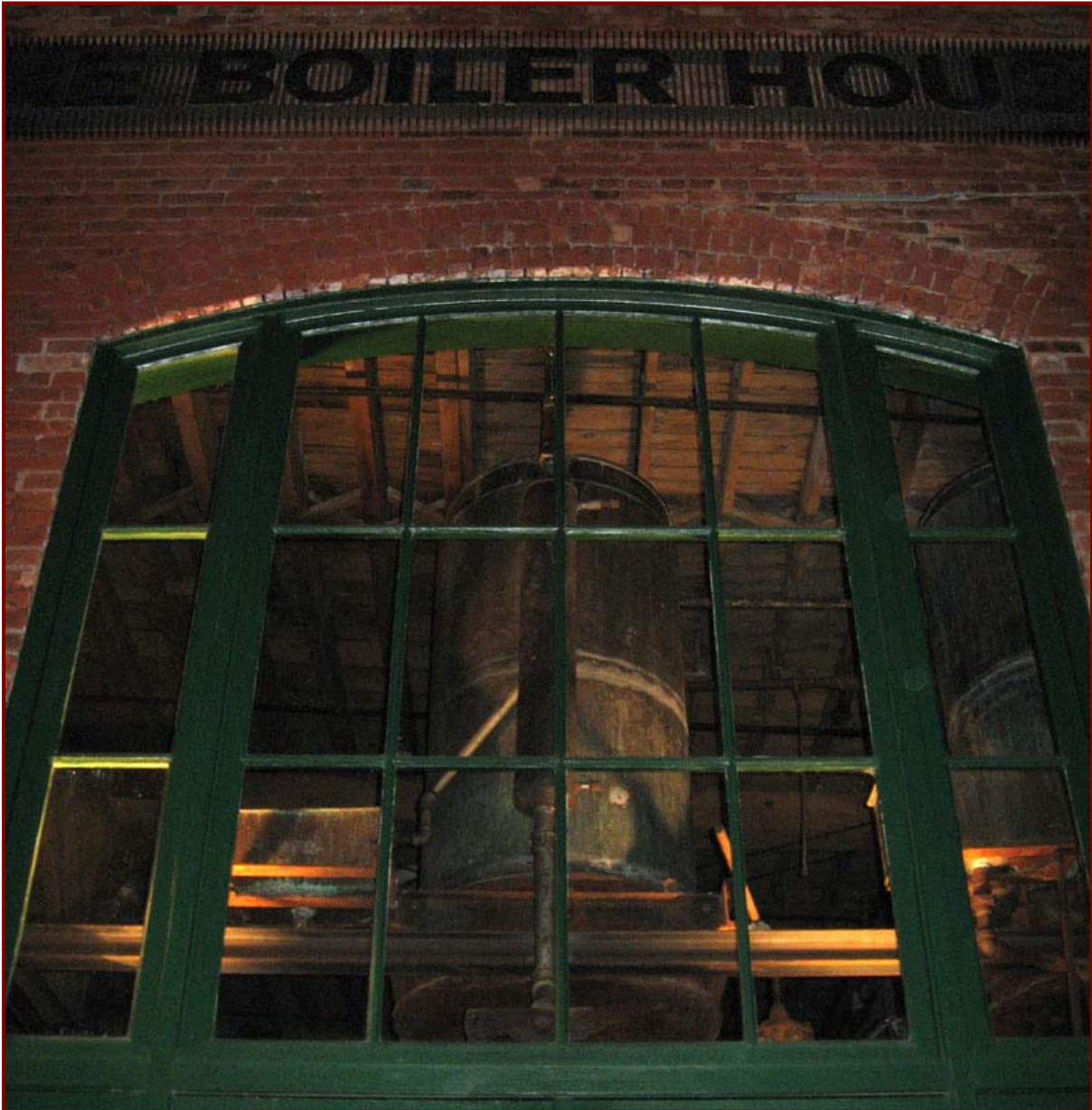


Heritage Artifacts: Polar Water Still

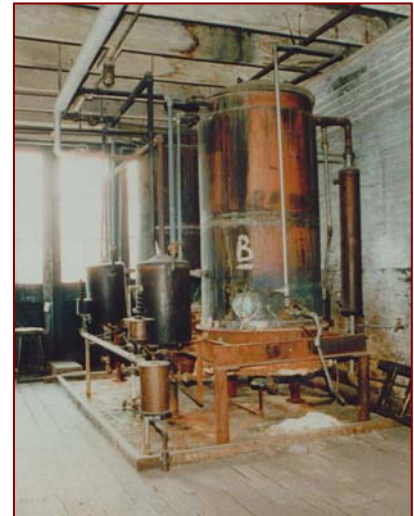


Water Still (artifact 53-4-1/2) in its new home

*F*rom about 1900 to the late 1920s, the water still now on display in Building 46 distilled ordinary water on the top floor of Building 53 at the southeast corner of Trinity Street and Tank House Lane. The task was to demineralize and purify local water (from well, lake, or City pipes) so that it could be blended with alcohol at various points in the beverage-producing process. Gooderham & Worts' column stills created almost pure alcohol, between 96 and 97 proof ... far too strong to be drunk with pleasure. Experience revealed that the alcohol should be stored in either barrels or tanks at 64 proof, and imbibed at 40 proof after a few years' aging.

The water still worked essentially like any other still on site, using heat to separate the pure and desirable liquid from the impurities. Heritage Artifact 53-4-1/2 consisted of two tanks – one always in use while the other was cleaned or repaired. Water was pumped up to the fourth floor and fed into the top of the tank, while steam, probably from the Boiler House across Tank House Lane, was fed into the bottom to heat the water. The plant steam and the ordinary water never met or mixed.

The water was then boiled. Purified vapour rose, passed through a 14-foot vertical condenser between Building 53 and 61, which cooled it back into a liquid – demineralized or distilled water – that dripped into a large tank standing on the second floor. From there it was piped into three large copper tanks in Building 61, which distributed it, as required for blending, into alcohol storage tanks or barrels located in Buildings 61 (Corkin Gallery) and Building 62 (Artcore). Blending before and after storage was a critical component of producing palatable, not to mention excellent, G&W products.



**Water Still in original location
by Larry Turner ca. 1986**



Welding



Aligning

The old water still was disconnected in the late 1920s, when a new still was set up in the same space atop Building 53. In 1968, with the old tanks remaining in Building 53, a new system was set up at the back of Building 62, where it operated until the distillery was closed down in 1990.



Fork-lifting in a confined space

Time passed. Artifacts were moved, even removed when the future of the site was uncertain. Then new life returned to the Distillery Historic District. Heritage buildings were adaptively recycled for new uses. Recently, the 100-year old polar water still was reassembled in a prominent new location: the window of Building 46

(The Boiler House Restaurant). This intricate installation required careful planning, delicate manoeuvring, and a high level of design that respected the industrial nature of the artifacts. For the first time in its history, the polar water still can be inspected from all angles – including underneath – by legions of new admirers.

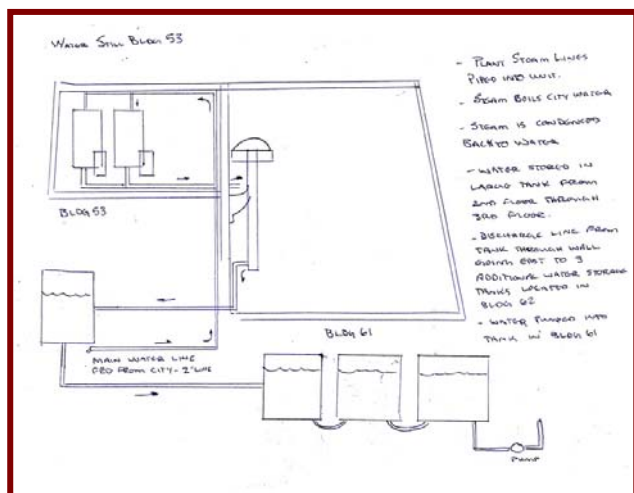


Diagram of water still in Building 53 (upper left) with links to local water (lower left) and storage tanks in Buildings 53, 61 & 62, by Jim White

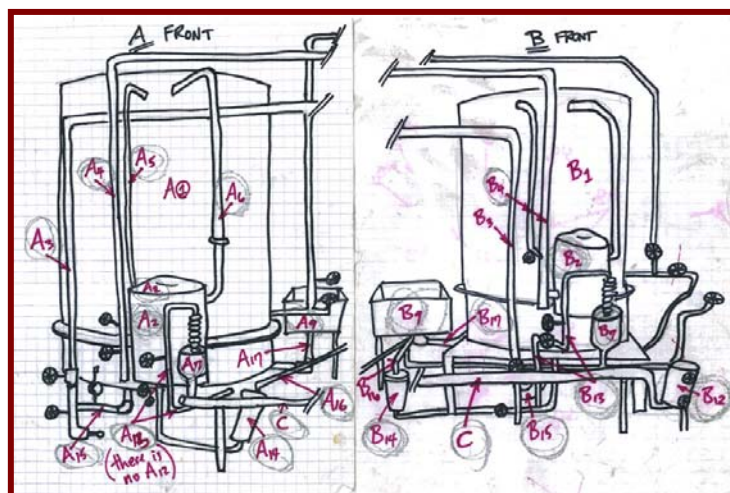


Diagram for reassembling water still in Building 46, by Sandy Ball (Woodbecker)

Thanks to Jim White for explaining the mysteries of the water still and to the Woodbecker crew for demonstrating the complex process of moving and reassembling heritage artifacts.

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

For more about the history of the Distillery District, visit www.distilleryheritage.com.