

HBCA Information Sheet: Liquor Sales

The Hudson's Bay Company has been involved in the trade and sale of liquor for centuries. The first record that we have found of liquor being shipped to North America was a parcel of French brandy sent in 1692; there is a record of Scotch whisky being shipped as early as 1701 and rum in 1775.

By the mid 1890s, HBC had established a wholesale business in Winnipeg, Vancouver, and Victoria that sold many different brand name luxury products, including liquor, tea and coffee, cigarettes and tobacco, and confectionery. These products were sold in HBC stores and fur trade posts, but also to hotels, restaurants, and other retailers who carried the stock in outlets and small town general stores across the country. Liquor operations were controlled by the Winnipeg wholesale branch from 1915 until 1935, when the Wine and Spirit Division was formed. Hudson's Bay Co., Inc. was a U.S. wholesale subsidiary that sold liquor and other products to the American market from 1925 until 1976.

HBC also bottled and sold liquor under its own label, and at one point had a full line of spirits - scotch, rye, brandy, rum, and gin. HBC brands have included:

Scotch – Best Procurable, F.O.B. (Fine Old Blend), Royal Charter, 1670
Rye – Very Old, Special
Brandy – Three Star, Special, 50 Years Old, Royal Charter, 1670
Rum – Jamaica, Demerara, Ye Old Hudson's Bay
Gin – Triple Distilled

In 1987 Hudson's Bay Distillers was sold to Seagram's and as a result HBC spirits became unavailable in Canada. However, Hudson's Bay Company Blended Scotch Whiskey continues to be sold in the U.S. thanks to special licensing arrangements with Sidney Frank Importing.

The following are some sources of images of HBC liquor bottles:

- Photos:
 - Wholesale, HBC Wine & Spirit Operations, 1899, 1965, 1967 (HBCA 1987/363-W-110/1-10)
 - Wholesale, HBC - Wine & Spirits Advertisements, 1930-1970 (HBCA 1987/363-W/111/1-111)
- *The Beaver Magazine*:
Advertisements for brands of HBC Whisky and other spirits ran regularly between 1935 and 1988. An index for *The Beaver Magazine* is available online at http://resource.canadashistory.ca/beaver/index/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.FAdsp_home.
- Wine and Spirit Division advertising materials, 1935-1956 (HB2007/101)
- *HBC Fall and Winter Catalogue*, 1910-1911 (FC 3207.2 A8, p. 217)

- *Spirits of Tradition*, by the Hudson's Bay Company, published by the Wine and Spirits Department, Beaver House, Great Trinity Lane, London, 8 pp. (HBCA E.255/17).