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A toast for the town: ABC store celebrates 75 years

The ABC store in Clifton Forge is the only one in Virginia to be in the same spot since its founding in 1934 after Prohibition.

By [Courtney Cutright](#)

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CLIFTON FORGE -- A fifth of Bacardi rum sold for \$3.90 in 1934 when the Virginia Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control formed on the heels of the end of Prohibition.

Today the same bottle sells for \$15.90 -- that's a price increase of more than 300 percent over the past 75 years.

Indeed, much has changed in the Alleghany Highlands community of Clifton Forge over the decades.

But one Main Street staple remains: the Virginia ABC store.

The town's liquor store is the only one in Virginia to remain in its original location at 531 Main St. since the state ABC was formed.

"This store is a symbol," said Frank Hall, Virginia ABC commissioner and a former state legislator.

Hall and several other ABC dignitaries were on hand Wednesday for an open house to celebrate the store's history and ABC's 75th anniversary.

The Clifton Forge store was the 23rd in the state to open after Prohibition was repealed.

An article in The Covington Virginian on June 23, 1934, reported a crowd gathered to witness the delivery of the store's inventory, which arrived in three truckloads from Richmond.

"Probably no such large lot of liquor has ever passed at one time over the Midland Trail," according to the article. The Midland Trail, or U.S. 60, was the area's main route before Interstate 64 was built.

Town Councilman Jimmie Houff, 71, said when he visited the store in the 1940s, clerks collected patrons' purchases from behind a counter. He recalled thumbing through the worn pages of the catalog on the store's front counter.

"You didn't go for variety because you couldn't see anything," he said. "Back then all you could do was stretch your neck because you couldn't go behind the counter.

"If you didn't look at magazines, you might not know what Jack Daniel's was."

Self-service did not become a way of doing business until 1969. The following year, the department began to hire female clerks.

The first Virginia ABC store opened in Richmond, said Chief Operating Officer Curtis Coleburn.

"It has been moved a couple of times, but it is still in existence," he said.

Virginia ABC operates more than 330 stores across the state, employing 2,685 workers and selling \$641 million

worth of spirits last year.

What is the best selling item in the Clifton Forge store, which sold 6,639 gallons of liquor last year?

"It is a tossup between bourbon and vodka," sales associate Linda Snyder said.

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