



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

The return of cider

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In this century, after decades of being overlooked in favor of other fermented drinks, cider is making a comeback in the United States. To highlight its renaissance, and to draw attention to Virginia's long history with the drink, the Virginia General Assembly established Virginia Cider Week on September 5, 2012. The joint resolution designated the full week before Thanksgiving as Virginia Cider Week not only in 2012, but in each succeeding year. Virginia Cider Week has expanded this year from Nov. 11 to Nov. 20. The bill recognizes cider's role in early Virginia, its favor in the eyes of Thomas Jefferson, its decline due to industrialization and prohibition and its rebirth in this century.

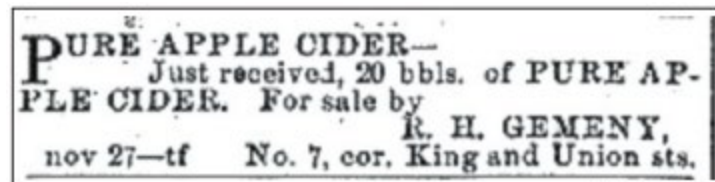
A long-time favorite of those who crossed the Atlantic from England to Virginia and their descendants, hard cider was perceived in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as the fermented drink of the lower classes. Despite that reputation, cideries have continued to operate in the Commonwealth throughout its history. The 2012 designation of Virginia Cider Week highlights not only hard cider's renaissance as a drink of choice, but the long and continued tradition of cider-making in our state.

Similarly, the region of Normandy, which includes Alexandria's sister city of Caen, France, also has a historic cider tradition. Normandy, the region of which Caen is the capital, includes the only "Route du Cidre", a 40-kilometer loop marked by signs with an apple. Cider producers in Normandy often also produce calvados, an apple brandy that is cider distilled for two years in oak casks.

Alexandrians from previous centuries consumed cider regularly, as evidenced by advertisements in newspapers, such as the *Alexandria Gazette*. For example, on December 5, 1863, during the middle of the Civil War, R.H. Gemeny took out an ad saying that he had just received 20 barrels of pure apple cider. Others, such as George H. Robinson, advertised a crab apple cider that probably combined methods and materials from the New and Old Worlds.

What caused cider's decline? According to experts, the Industrial Revolution and changing tastes influenced by a growing immigrant population that preferred beer to cider was the first blow to cider production and consumption. Prohibition also dealt a fatal blow to many orchards and cideries in the 20th century.

According to Virginia Cider Week: "Virginia hard apple cider can be up to 10% alcohol by volume, without chaptalization, or adding sugar to the juice. Any fermented apple juice above 10% alcohol must be labeled 'apple wine.' According to current law, a cider cannot have more than 7% alcohol when chaptalized according to current law."



Advertisement in the December 5, 1863 Alexandria Gazette.



Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

This year's Alexandria Cider Festival will be held on Nov. 19. Advance-priced tickets can be purchased online at alexandriava.gov/shop for \$55.00 or at the door for \$65.00 per person. Tickets include cider tastings, a souvenir glass, live music and a little history, too.

“Out of the Attic” is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as “Marking Time” and explored Alexandria’s history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into “Out of the Attic” and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.

These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by staff of the Office of Historic Alexandria and invited guests.