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The return of cider

Alexandria celebrates Virginia Cider Week November 11 through 20. 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 – also has a historic cider tradition.

Alexandrians from previous centuries consumed cider regularly, as evidenced by advertisements in newspapers, such as the Alexandria Gazette.

For example, on Dec. 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 dealt a fatal blow to many orchards and cideries in the 20th century.

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 Sept. 5, 2012. Joint Resolution 105 designated the full week before Thanksgiving as Virginia Cider Week not just in 2012, but in each succeeding year.

The bill recognized 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. According to Virginia Cider Week:

“Virginia hard apple cider can be up to 10% alcohol by volume, without chapitalizing (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 chapitalized.”

Alexandria's sister city, Caen, France, also has a vibrant cider tradition. Normandy, the region of which Caen is the cap-

ital, 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.

This year's Alexandria Cider Festival will be held November 18. Advance tickets can be purchased online at alexandriava.gov/shop for \$55 or at the door for \$65. Tickets include cider tastings, a souvenir glass, live music and a little history. While enjoying a selection of Virginia ciders, learn more about the growing Virginia cider industry and its connection to Alexandria history. The Alexandria Cider Festival includes offerings from Albemarle Cider Works, Bryant's Cider, Castle Hill, Ciders from Mars, Henway Hard Cider, Lost Boy Cider, Potter's Craft Cider and Sage Bird Ciderworks. A Rocklands food truck will be at the event.

Out of the Attic is provided by the Office of Historic Alexandria.