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Alexandria Community Media

Alexandria celebrates Virginia Cider Week

A longtime favorite for those who crossed the Atlantic Ocean 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 operated throughout Virginia's history. The 2012 designation of Virginia Cider Week highlighted not only hard cider's renaissance as a drink of choice but also a long tradition of cider-making. The Alexandria Cider Festival Saturday continues that historical tradition.



PHOTO/HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA

Musicians perform at the 2024 Alexandria Cider Fest.

Locally made apple cider was inexpensive, popular and enjoyed by all ages and economic levels. Fermented or "hard" cider was consumed as a beverage and distilled into apple brandy or applejack.

Although not an Alexandrian, John Adams was a renowned cider fan and advocate. In a letter sent the year before his marriage to Abigail Adams, he wrote, "Give me Bacon, and Cyder, and Books and Girl and Friend, and I will frisk it."

After his term as President, more than 40 years later, he wrote to a physician friend that he had met a Virginia doctor who told him:

"Those who drank cyder, for their ordinary Beveredge were the most healthy and longest livers, that those who drank Wine or ardent Spirits… were not so healthy and ended their days earlier."

Advertisements in newspapers, such as the Alexandria Gazette, show the prevalence of cider consumption in previous centuries. For example, on Dec. 5, 1863, during the middle of the Civil War, R.H. Gemeny posted an ad, announcing 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.

In this century, after decades of being overlooked in favor of other fermented drinks, cider returned in popularity 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 with 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 [chaptalization, adding sugar to the juice]. Any fermented apple juice above 10% alcohol must be labeled 'apple wine.' According to current law, cider cannot have more than 7% alcohol when chaptalized."

The annual Alexandria Cider Festival will be held Saturday. Advance-priced tickets can be purchased online at alexandriava.gov/shop for $55.00 or at the door for $65.00 per person.

For the nation's 250th anniversary, the VA250 Mobile Museum Experience will be open on Queen Street during the event. 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's history.

Cideries featured include Albemarle Ciderworks, Blue Bee Cider, Bold Rock Hard Cider, Ciders from Mars, Henway Hard Cider, Lost Boy Cider, Potter's Craft Cider, Sage Bird Ciderworks and more. Stay up to date on the festival at apps.alexandriava.gov/Calendar/.

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