

Uisegebauch, Uisegebaugh, Nancy Uisegebaugh

A bit of a tongue twister. The Scottish song's more familiar refrain is: "Whiskey, whiskey, Nancy whiskey..." *Uisegebauch*, pronounced WEEZ-ga-bochh, is Gaelic from which the word "whiskey" is derived and means "water of life." Maybe that is why Colvin Run Mill seemed "happy" grinding 1,500 pounds of wheat for Mount Defiance Cidery & Distillery of Middleburg, Virginia as Dan reported in the January-March newsletter. It probably had been a century or longer since the mill had ground wheat, corn, or rye to make mash for whiskey.

Early Days

When the mill first began to operate around 1811 grinding grain for a still most likely was common. As Dan explained, rather than letting excess wheat rot, farmers could make beer, which, without refrigeration didn't last long, or whiskey, with a forever shelf life. Bulky bushels of grain could be converted into gallons of spirits, yielding a much lower volume but much higher value product. One horse could carry four bushels of grain valued at \$4 or one 60-gallon barrel of whiskey valued at \$24. It is no surprise that Philip Carper, the first owner of the mill, applied for a license to sell ardent spirits in 1822. Solids left over from the distillation process made "succulent feed" for animals. Not to worry. All traces of alcohol had dissipated so cows didn't go loopy and produce Bailey's Irish Cream!



The first to make distilled spirits in the New World was Wilhelm Hendriksen, a Dutchman, on Staten Island. In 1640 he created a beverage made of rye and corn. The blend was unique. Barley was preferred for whiskey in the Old World, but it didn't grow well in America's warmer climate. Rye, less used in Europe, thrived and became the grain of choice for whiskey. Mixing rye with corn, a native crop of the New World, yielded a distinctive product. As more Scots, Irish, and Scots Irish streamed into America, so did the production of distilled spirits. Local production of "the water of life" was given a boost after the American Revolution when

rum prices increased and Madera and champagne supplies became uncertain.

Although George Washington enjoyed adult beverages, he was not known to partake of whiskey but did relish making money. His Scottish manager at Mount Vernon, James Anderson, convinced him to plant rye and make whiskey. The initial endeavor was so successful that Washington commissioned five stills that produced 11,000 gallons of whiskey in 1798.

Small, personal stills dotted the landscape and standards of production did not exist. A style of whiskey was indicated by where it was produced: Pennsylvania or Monongahela whiskey; Maryland whiskey; and a newcomer, Kentucky or Western whiskey also known as Bourbon. The latter used predominately corn rather than rye because it was native to the area and easy to grow. The designation "bourbon" was associated with Kentucky because one of its largest counties was named Bourbon in gratitude to Louis XVI of France for his assistance in the American Revolution. The first commercial distillery was built in Louisville – also named in honor of

Louis XVI – by Evan Williams in 1783. Even though the city is in Jefferson County, Williams' whiskey was called bourbon since it was made in Kentucky.

The difference is in the barrel

One common characteristic of all whiskeys was that they were crystal clear (think moonshine). The reddish color of the spirit would not emerge until the mid-1800's. How did that happen?



Oak barrels were used to ship whiskey as well as many other items in bulk. Making a barrel requires the wooden staves to be slowly heated so they could be bent and then fastened at the top and bottom by a metal band that pushed the staves close together, rendering the barrel watertight – or whiskey tight. Mother nature took over: these “toasted” staves imparted flavor and the reddish color to the otherwise clear distillate. How does this happen?

Naturally seasoned white oak wood, that means leaving it out in the elements – rain, snow, sun, and wind – for six to twenty-four months, reduces the natural tannin in the wood and begins to break down compounds that are absorbed into the distillate in the barrel.

What are those compounds and what do they do? Hemicellulose and lignin are soluble in ethanol – the liquid that emerges from the still – and add flavors. Hemicellulose has sugars that caramelize when heated yielding notes of nuts, caramel, licorice, and butter. A 53-gallon oak barrel can release up to two pounds of sugar over five years of aging. Lignin adds spice, floral, vanilla, chocolate, and grassy flavors. The wood's tannin imparts color and spicy, coconut flavors.

To access these flavors the oak must be heated, either toasted, charred or both. Toasting, as mentioned, is the traditional way to make wooden staves bend to shape the barrel. Toasted barrels produce a lighter colored spirit with a sharper flavor.

Charring is a quick process, with burns ranging from 15 seconds (Char #1) to 60 seconds (Char #4). Charring further breaks down the wood allowing the ethanol to access more of the wood's compounds yielding more intense flavors. The charcoal layer resulting from charring serves as a filter removing undesirable flavors and chemicals. A heavier char, however, reduces the amount of tannin, providing less color.



Some examples might help. Woodford Reserve, a family favorite, uses barrels of naturally seasoned oak – nine months – that are toasted for ten minutes then charred for 25 seconds. Wilderness Trail whiskey uses oak naturally seasoned for 18 to 24 months for barrels that are subjected to a 53-minute toast and a #4 char.

Whiskey and Bourbon Whiskey

Common folks were aghast at the red color and insisted that their whiskey be clear. But time and tastes change. Eventually the “red liquor,” which became known as bourbon, was preferred. The first bourbon was probably made by Dr. James Crow, a Scotsman living in Kentucky. With a scientific bent, he developed recipes predominantly using corn and a sour mash starter (think sour dough bread) and aged the spirit in charred oak casks. His consistently tasty whiskeys, Old Crow and Old Pepper, were popular during the Civil War.

Bourbon whiskey is a legally defined subcategory of whiskey that pretty much follows Dr. Crow’s method. It must be a whiskey produced in the U.S. from a fermented mash of not less than 51 percent corn and stored in charred new oak containers. Bourbon must be aged for two years and have no added flavorings.

Notice that the geographic location is no longer determinative of its name. Bourbon can be made in Texas or California. A whiskey made in Bourbon County, Kentucky may not be called bourbon unless it meets the legal specifications for bourbon.

Geographic designations still play a role. For example, Kentucky Straight Whiskey is whiskey made in the state of Kentucky but can be a blend of whiskeys from different distillers and made from 51% of a grain – corn, rye, wheat, etc., and aged in oak barrels for at least four years.



Some bourbons have a single predominate grain in addition to the 51% required corn. Buffalo Trace is a “high rye,” bourbon – peppery taste – while Maker’s Mark is a “high wheat” bourbon, a bit softer on the palate. George Washington’s recipe of 60% rye, 35% corn, and 5% malted barley is a rye whiskey, akin to Hendriksen’s original formula.

The wheat ground at Colvin Run Mill has been converted to mash at the Mt. Defiance Distillery, blended with water and distilled. If it is resting – or aging if you will – in new charred American white oak barrels, which will impart caramel and vanilla flavors, and is part of the 25 percent white wheat in the mash that also contains 70 percent corn and five percent malted barley, it will emerge in two to three years as Old Voldstand’s straight bourbon whiskey. That’s right, bourbon whiskey made in Middleburg, Virginia.

While waiting for the results of the “happy” mill grinding, you might try practice saying “Uisegebauch, Uisegebauch, Nancy – O,” so it trips lightly off the tongue when you enter the Mt. Defiance tasting room. It is sure to give them a smile, but you will still have to pay for the tasting.