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Virginia Cider Week: a modern, historic tradition

Alexandria celebrates Virginia Cider Week from Nov. 15 to Nov. 24. 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 also the long and continued tradition of cider-making in our state. Similarly, the French region of Normandy – which includes Alexandria's sister city of Caen – also has a historic cider tradition.

Although not an Alexandrian, John Adams was a renowned fan and advocate of cider. From a letter sent the year before his marriage to Abigail, Adams declared, "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."

Adams wasn't the only presidential admirer of cider. An opposition newspaper claimed about William Henry Harrison:

"Give him a barrel of hard (alcoholic) cider and settle a pension of two thousand a year on him, and take my word for it, he will sit the remainder of his days in his log cabin."

The attack backfired, as Harrison cultivated an everyman persona to contrast with Martin Van Buren's supposed aristocratic airs and won the election of 1840.

In this century, after decades of being overlooked in favor of other fermented drinks, cider came back into fashion in the United States. To highlight the drink's re-

naissance, and to draw attention to Virginia's long history with hard cider, 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.

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.

Normandy, France, 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 on Nov. 23. Advance tickets can

be purchased online for \$50 or at the door for \$65 per person. 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. The festival offers guest samples from Blue Bee Cider, Albemarle Ciderworks, Ciders from Mars, Lost Boy, Henway Hard Cider Company and Potter's Craft Cider.

The Alexandria-Caen Sister Cities Committee is pouring two French ciders – Honorie Cidre from Normandy and Le Brun Cidre de Bretagne, from Brittany. The Alexandria-Caen Sister Cities Committee is pouring different flavors of a Swedish cider called Rekorderlig. For more information on the festival, see: alexandriava.gov/historic-alexandria/alexandria-cider-festival.

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