

The Stills of Granville: From Corn Whiskey to Peach Brandy, With a Little Cherry Bounce on the Side

Author's Note

This story began when the editors of this quarterly were sitting one late spring afternoon sipping some wonderfully delicious Canadian blended whiskey that cannot be found in Ohio. The question arose—weren't there several distilleries in early Granville? And where were they, who ran them,

what did they produce, and who consumed the results of this process? Next, how did Granville become a "dry" village for such a long time?

The attempt to resolve these queries produced this article. The editors trust that this article will be both enjoyable and informative reading for an early fall afternoon.

THE STILLS OF GRANVILLE:

FROM CORN WHISKEY TO PEACH BRANDY, WITH A LITTLE CHERRY BOUNCE ON THE SIDE!

The two hundred-year history of Granville exhibits a love/hate relationship with alcoholic beverages: their distillation, their marketing, their consumption, and their export. The early settlers put away much alcohol—so much that the contemporary reader is almost bewildered when first confronting the amount consumed. Pioneer folks drank hard liquor at work sites, often with meals, during the mustering of the militia, at the raising of new houses and barns, especially at social events, around the pot-bellied stove of the general store, and even, if some sources are correct, at early religious camp meetings!

In his lively *Ohio and Its People*, historian George Knepper, describing alcohol use in Licking County, puts the matter this way:

Alcohol lubricated work in frontier Ohio. The distillery was usually among the first buildings erected in a new settlement. While converting bulky grain into whiskey enabled farmers to move their product to market, and while much whiskey served as a kind of currency, the fact remained that much was consumed locally.

Knepper notes that in 1820, Licking County boasted it had thirty-eight operating stills, producing mostly corn and rye whiskey. This amounted to some 97,000 gallons of whiskey annually. Of this amount, less than 30,000 gallons were exported. Hence nearly 70,000 gallons remained for local trade—and Knepper writes, "plenty of drinking whiskey was left to keep the county's 12,000 inhabitants well supplied."² Several of these thirty-eight stills functioned within Granville Township. And Granville fit the pattern described by Knepper. An early business established in Granville and opened in November 1805 was a rough-cut tavern operated by Timothy Rose. With this tavern, located in his cabin on the village square, Rose may have been Granville's first businessman. He served whiskey at twenty-five cents a quart. In 1809, Rose constructed a second tavern building. This two-story frame building, on the southwest corner of Broadway and Pearl Street, was, Granville historian William Utter suggests,

"the most imposing building in the village." Rose's tavern served the citizens and visitors to Granville for several years as a convivial meeting place. The fare of spirits included hard cider, whiskey, gin, peach brandy, a beverage called "flip,"



Two views of a small distillery.

and a local specialty referred to as "cherry bounce." Rose himself was a leading village citizen and served as a deacon of the Congregational Church. In fact, the celebration following the ordination of Timothy Harris as the new pastor of the Congregational Church was held in Rose's tavern. Obviously there was no stigma attached to the use of alcohol by the village elders during the formative stages of Granville. But within twenty-five years, this sentiment would change radically.

Frontier settlements always experienced a lack of hard currency, and this shortage led to the widespread practice of barter. Whiskey, of course, was a consumable item that could be exchanged for various goods and services. Horace King wryly notes that "the craftsmen who installed the pews in the 1816 Congregational church were paid in whiskey...."⁴

As a backlash to this omnipresent use of hard liquor, in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, fervent preachers of the gospel began ranting incessantly about the need to practice temperance. Of course, at this time, "temperance" meant "abstinence" from hard liquor and not the cultivation of the practice of moderate drinking. Within twenty-five years of the founding of Granville, alcoholic beverage production and consumption had fallen dramatically. Early temperance societies had a remarkable success by mid-century. In the late nineteenth century, the village of Granville by ordinance became "dry," a state of affairs that lasted for nearly a century, well into the twentieth century.

Alcohol Abuse as a National Problem

Certain indicators suggest that the use of alcoholic spirits in the newly established federation of states was reaching an all time high for consumption in the first third of the nineteenth century. Various states of insobriety among both the pioneer folks and the gentry in the urban areas were, as one observer wrote, "too obvious not to be noticed." The first three presidents of the new republic expressed concern on the alcohol issue. George Washington, who himself had distilled liquor on

his Virginia lands, remarked worriedly that distilled spirits were "the ruin of half the workmen in this country." John Adams, who was said to have consumed a tankard of hard cider with his morning breakfast, asked rhetorically: "...is it not mortifying... that we Americans should exceed all other...people in the world in this degrading, beastly vice of intemperance?"

Thomas Jefferson, whom historians consider to be the inventor of the presidential cocktail party, was afraid that the abuse of cheap whiskey was "spreading through the mass of our citizens."⁵ Certainly these founding fathers and presidential leaders were socially adept

and reasonable men who were not suspect for advocating hellfire and brimstone temperance haranguing.

Another venue for serious alcohol consumption was the extended journey. In traveling by stagecoach across the bumpy and hardscrabble frontier roadways, the stage would stop at taverns along the route for a brief rest and a nip of what the tavern keeper was serving for the day. On one seventeen-hour trip in Virginia—which traversed some sixty-six miles—the stage stopped at wayside taverns ten times. One foreign observer noted that “the American stage coach stops every five miles to water the horses and *brandy the gentlemen!*” With the advent of the steamboat, the stagecoach was replaced to some degree, but not the aspiration to consume spirituous drink. The floating barroom was the most popular and crowded space on the steamboats that plied the major rivers of the United States.

Writing about the early stills of Jefferson County in eastern Ohio, William C. Howells noted:

No difference if grain was scarce or dear, or times hard, or the people poor, they would make and drink whiskey. And the number of little distilleries was wonderful. Within two miles of where we lived there were three of them. They were small concerns, but they produced enough. They were commonly fitted up with a twenty-five or forty-gallon still and a half a dozen tubs. They might, perhaps, have produced a barrel a day, if pushed to their capacity. The distillers would exchange a gallon of whiskey for a bushel of corn or rye, and when the whiskey-jug was empty, a boy would be sent on a bag of grain, perched on an old horse, to the still-house to make the exchange and renew the supply. People were not particular about the age of their liquor, and it was often drunk on the day it was made.

The Stills of Granville

Granville village and township kept pace with the rest of the young country in the area of distilling and consuming ardent spirits. In the record files of Professor William T. Utter, one finds a typed copy of a contract dated October 21, 1811, indicating what was needed to begin the distillery process in early Granville:

Article of an Agreement made the 21st of October in the Year 1811 between Job Case, Timothy Rose and Grove Case of the party of the first part and Ebenezer Berkley of the second part.

Witnesseth:

That the party of the first part agreeth to furnish to the party of the second part seven hundred bushel of chopped grain (or more if convenient) delivered to their still in Granville (Ohio)—one third of said grain to be Rye and the remainder Corn—said grain to be merchantable; the party of the second part is to have the use of said distillery to distill said grain.

That the party of the second part is to deliver to the party of the first part six quarts of merchantable whiskey

for each bushel of grain as above stipulated—said whiskey to be furnished as fast as said grain is distilled.

The above agreement is to go into operation from the above date and limited to one *year*.

It is understood that the party of the first part is to furnish fuel at the distillery—the party of the second part to leave the distillery in as good repair as received, necessary wear excepted.

Witness our hands to the above

Attest: O.C. Dickenson

Ebenezer Berkley

Timothy Rose

One bushel of grain was worth about twenty-five cents. This same bushel could be transformed rather easily into two and one-half to three gallons of hard liquor, which was worth about two dollars and fifty cents. As Horace King notes: “It is not surprising that the more enterprising settlers would make whiskey.”

A note in the Utter collection recording either a letter or a conversation and dated February 2, 1912 informs the reader that the Granville distilleries were vibrant operations:

Distilleries: In 1827, there were six in this vicinity. One at the Cold Spring (on West Broadway). In 1811, Rose, Winchell, Case (2), Jacob Goodrich (north of town), three on Centerville Street (the present Newark-Granville Road). Lorin Hayes distilled peach brandy on his farm on East Centerville Street. Distillery on lower Loudon Street—Jaspar Munson. Another on the Allyn farm on Columbus Road opposite the college site (original site of Denison University). Also one on the Bean farm directly west of this.

Another Utter note contains references to five Granville stills, which expand the descriptions of several of the stills noted above:

Lorin Hayes Distillery near eastern limits of township on farm of Deacon Hayes. Made peach brandy. Jacob Goodrich 1811 or early 1812. One half mile north of town. The one where the explosion took place. A distillery run by Captain Joseph Fassett One mile east of town. A distillery run by Major Case. One half mile east of town. The first distillery to be established. The proprietors were Judge Rose, Deacon Winchel, and Major Case. This still was located over the hill west of town (at the Cold Spring).

Since an adequate supply of cold water was necessary for the distilling process, this explains the reference to the “Cold Spring” on West Broadway north of Sugar Loaf. Although there are references to nine distilleries in Granville village and township during the first quarter or so of the nineteenth century, Utter remarks that it is doubtful if more than six ever functioned at the same time. The explosion at the Jacob Goodrich still is noted in several historical texts.

Instead of using metal tubing, Goodrich, in order to economize, used a wooden tub with a metal bottom for the still pot, and he further substituted hollow elder reeds in place of the normal copper tubing. According to several records, the first few drops came through the reeds with a strong elder flavor, and then the entire still exploded. The cause, though unexplained, is often said to be the lack of copper tubing.

Another reference note in the Utter collection is from W. Stanberry and refers to the area around Newark in 1818. This graphic description indicates the breadth of the use of alcohol by seemingly hard-working pioneer folks.

Another item of considerable profit was the retailing of whiskey. Whiskey was the popular beverage of the day, and was consumed without stint or limit. Distilleries abounded in every direction around the country. The drinking of whiskey seemed to be regarded as one of those inalienable rights which Mr. Jefferson neglected to mention in the Declaration of Independence. It was a common occurrence, on public days, to see even staunch farmers lying around perfectly loose and quite respectably intoxicated. Whiskey being plenty and cheap, there existed no motive for adulterating it, and it was perfectly pure. We heard of no such a thing in those times as delirium tremens. It required some ten or fifteen years for a man to kill himself by drinking whiskey and even then a great many claimed the honor of dying of consumption.

One H. L. R. writes in a letter dated July 1, 1901 about an early juvenile escapade with the spirits of Granville. Utter's notes indicate the content of this letter of a young person's coming of age imbibing Granville corn liquor:

His grandfather, Samuel Mower, owned a farm half a mile west of town with two large barns. Had a distillery in a township west of Granville. Whiskey to the amount of ten or fifteen barrels was stored in the bar for aging. When H. was ten or twelve, he and an uncle used straws and got drunk.

In his narrative on the history of Granville, Horace King writes that "in 1828, Granville Township stills produced 18,000 gallons of whiskey with a value of \$18,000, a vast sum in those days." Professor King goes on to suggest, with figures that correlate with other published reports, that "local consumption was about 10,000 gallons so whiskey production was not an economic success." King further

notes that this "meant that the township drinkers were putting away collectively the astounding quantity of 110 quarts per day." However one determines the amount of whiskey, nonetheless a huge quantity of what Pastor Little called "ardent spirits" was consumed by a rather small band of mighty drinkers. Commenting on the widespread use of liquor in early Ohio, Utter notes that "millions of bushels of corn and rye passed through the primitive distilleries and the product, all too often, passed down the throats of the men who were the

Liquor Everywhere in Early Granville

Contemporary readers, while mostly not immune to the use of alcohol, nonetheless are mildly stunned when reading the figures denoting the huge amount of hard liquor consumed by the early pioneers. One might wonder what caused this overwhelming use of "ardent spirits" by the early nineteenth century Ohio pioneers.

Several reasons can be offered in the manner of an explanation of this phenomenon of heavy drinking.

The first explanation rests on the large amount of grain—especially corn—which was grown on the frontier farmlands. The biggest problem concerned what to do with this grain. Shipping was immensely difficult in the first third of the century. It was not until

the opening of the Ohio-Erie Canal in the 1830s that Granville farmers found a suitable mode for exporting their grain. Before that time, shipment of grain was nearly impossible. What does one do with all of this grain? Make whiskey, of course! Hence the elementary law of supply and demand rendered it advantageous to turn large amounts of grain into whiskey. The same

economic condition held for the huge amount of apples on Ohio farms. The making of fortified cider—usually about forty proof—efficiently used the large quantity of apples.

Relief from bland food. Corn was the principal staple for most frontier farms and settlements. Various cornstuffs comprised the daily fare for the frontier table, not only once but for all three meals. Fortified spirits made this bland corn menu more palatable for the early settlers.

Whiskey for medicinal purposes. Whiskey indeed offered a sedative effect temporarily numbing the pains experienced so much of the time by so many pioneer persons. Hence, given this large amount of pain, it is not inconceivable that whiskey

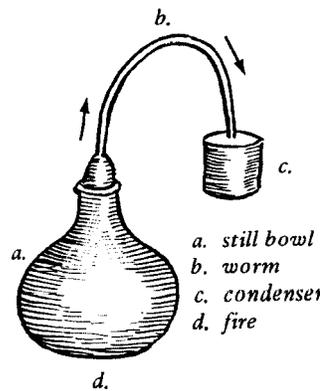


Figure 1. Still

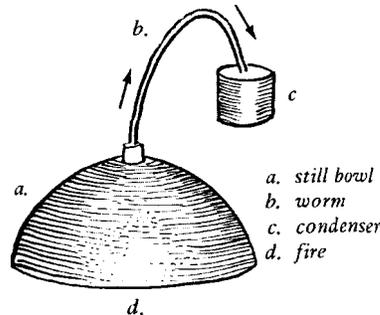


Figure 2. Flat Still

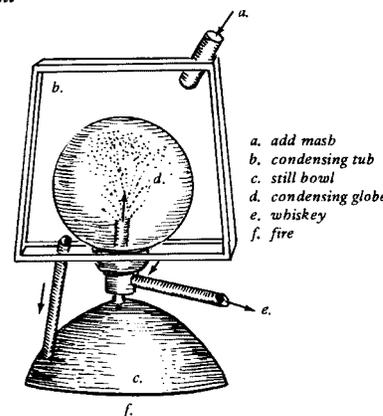


Figure 3. Perpetual Still

became a palliative rendering the experience of pain less severe. One must remember that the practice of medicine of the time was primitive at best and possibly nearly worthless at the worst. Pioneer folk were in pain almost continually. Whiskey assisted these hearty folks to get through the day.

Water fit for human consumption often difficult to find.

Even well educated persons coming, especially to the mid-west and uppersouthlands, quickly fell into the habit of alcohol consumption. Europeans moreover were accustomed to having wine on the table. With no decent homegrown wine yet to appear and the water so terribly polluted in many places, whiskey was used as a replacement for both water and wine.

Later temperance advocates often cited a "perverse soul" and "the lack of religious character" as the principal causes for consuming alcoholic beverages. Certainly this kind of claim is nothing but zealous fanaticism. Little study has been undertaken on the exact causes leading to what the middle nineteenth century reformers called intemperance. Whatever the causes, Jacob Little emerged on the Granville scene full bore and radically altered the landscape for the use of what he called "ardent sprits."

Jacob Little and the First Temperance Crusade

In February 1827, a new Congregational minister arrived in town—a person destined to become, for all practical purposes, a temperance gunslinger. This was the influential and spirited Jacob Little, the person of the cloth whose New Year's day sermons were a chronological rendition of the "sins" of the citizens of Granville. One charming note found in the Utter collection is from a William R. to Henry Bushnell, noting that Captain Joseph Fassett had a small distillery, which was one of those "so handsomely noticed one year in Rev. Little's New Year's Sermon. Little organized a temperance society, which several historians believe was the first such organization west of the Allegheny Mountains. Utter writes that in 1829, nearly five hundred Granville men had signed the pledge of total abstinence. This campaign resulted, to be sure, in a corresponding drop in alcohol consumption. In April 1831, the Congregational Church required for membership, in addition to affirming a belief in standard Christian tenets, that incoming

parishioners adopt temperance as a condition for full participation in the religious community.

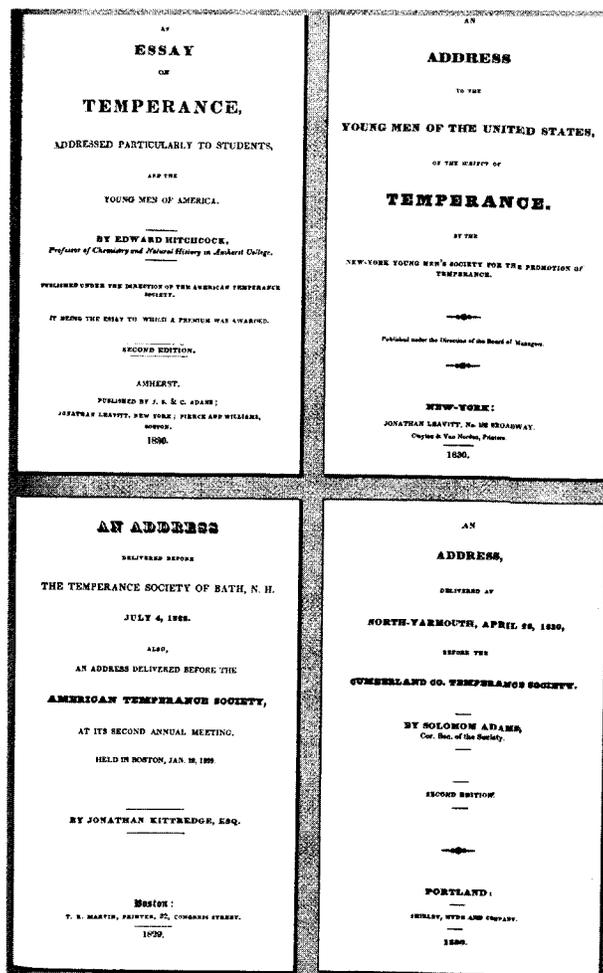
In a memorial volume describing Granville, Dr. A. S. Carman writes in some detail about Jacob Little's account of alcohol use in Granville early in the nineteenth century; Carman also notes the results of Little's temperance crusade:

The following comparative statistics were given by Rev. Jacob Little, who himself signed the pledge in 1828: "No. of inhabitants in the township, 1600; No. over fourteen years old, 980; No. in temperance societies, 500; No. of families in the township, 300; No of families using ardent spirits, 150; in 1827, township consumed, spirits: 10,000 gallons; in 1829, township consumed, spirits: 2800 gallons—which is a saving of 7200 gallons.

Doctor Little proceeds to figure that this diminution, reckoning at 35 cents a gallon, amounted to \$2,520, and would be sufficient to pay taxes and cost of schools and charities in the whole township; which goes to show that other things were cheap as well as whiskey. The good Doctor further specifies that in 1829, fourteen buildings had been raised without ardent spirits, and that sixty hard drinkers had been brought into the two temperance societies of Granville, leaving but eight

common drunkards in the township as against twenty-eight in 1827. In a letter to Rev. Geo. C. Sedwick, dated April 12, 1830, W. S. Richards, Secretary of the Granville Reformed Temperance Society, states that the society enrolls about one hundred members, not less than thirty-five of whom had been more or less habitually intemperate. About five or six of this number had lapsed repeatedly, and one more it was feared would prove incurable; but the society on the whole was greatly encouraged as it had every reason to be.

An interesting temperance story concerns Elias Gilman, a leader of the first Granville migration party who also served as a magistrate at the first election. By 1818, Gilman was pretty thoroughly "into the sauce." Jacob Little remarked disapprovingly that Gilman "did not draw a sober breath in twelve years." Poor Elias lost almost all of his



Granville possessions Nonetheless, determined to rid himself of demon rum, Elias signed the temperance pledge in the early 1830's. Few if any Granville residents thought Elias could stay sober for any length of time. Yet until he died nearly a quarter of a century later, Elias stayed true to his word and drank nary a touch of hard cider or any other distilled beverage. He lived to be 92! Jacob Little preached Gilman's funeral eulogy, in part as following:

His living till ninety-two, and dying without disease of old age, is no argument for intemperance. He lived so long in spite of twelve years of intemperance. A year of such intemperance as his, uses up at least two extra years of constitution. Had it not been for that vice, his physical powers were sufficient to sustain life twenty-four years longer³, or till he would have been 116 years of age!

Utter notes that "One hoped that Little had a twinkle in his eye when he wrote that!"

The Second Granville Temperance Crusade

That we might call the second Granville Temperance Crusade began in earnest in 1874. Try as he might, Jacob Little was unsuccessful in rendering Granville into a "dry" village. What Little could not attain, the committed women undertaking this campaign did. This crusade, aligned with a statewide temperance movement that began in Hillsboro, exerted a short but intense campaign to end the sale of ardent spirits in the village. The women went door to door seeking signatures to the pledge. Hours long prayer meetings were held in front of George Bragg's saloon earnestly imploring Bragg to rescind from his "nefarious traffic" in liquor. While their influence amounted to nothing with Bragg, they were quite successful with the village council. On April 21, 1874, the council passed an ordinance that made mandatory a village policy to "restrain and prohibit ale, beer, and porter houses and places of habitual resort for tipping and intemperance."¹⁴ This ordinance did not prohibit the sale of liquor but did prohibit

drinking on the premises. Two years later, a second ordinance was approved prohibiting the sale of intoxicants within the village limits. These two ordinances eliminated any tavern business in the village. Several years later, this group of temperance women reorganized as a branch of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Horace King writes that "Granville was bone-dry for ninety-one years before beer and wine returned to the village on January 16, 1977...."¹⁵

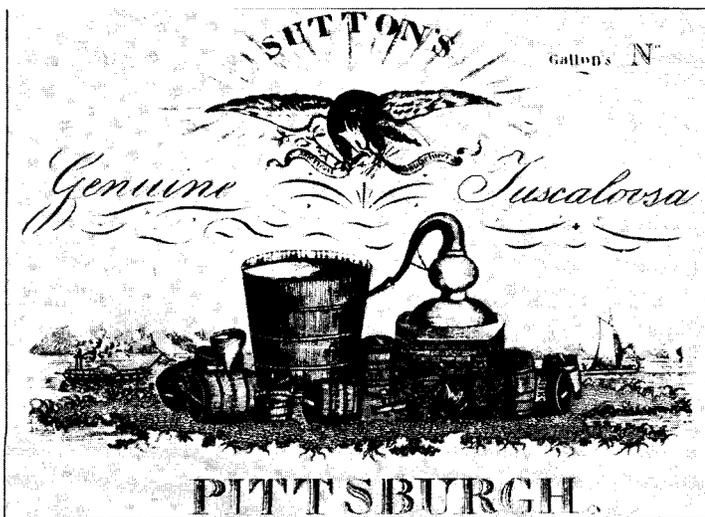
Utter notes that one effect of the village ordinances against the sale of liquor was to foster the business of the bootleggers just beyond the village limits. Two noteworthy bootleggers were Norman Gregory and his son "Bobbles." One particular bootlegging den was called "The Blue Goose," and it served its patrons in a building near the railroad station on South Main Street. In December 1886, this establishment was destroyed by fire. Arson was suspected, but nothing ever developed on this case.

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A Note on Sources

Study of the history of Granville begins always with a reading of William T Utter's *Granville: The Story of an Ohio Village* (1956) and Horace King's *Granville: Massachusetts to Ohio: A Story of the Migration and Settlement* (1989). Henry Bushnell's earlier *The History of Granville Licking County, Ohio* (1889) is the first full-length history of our village. George W. Knepper's *Ohio and its People* (1989) is a lively account of the history of the Buckeye state. An often-neglected yet useful source of historical information about Granville is Francis W. Shepardson's *Denison University: Centennial History* (1931). Shepardson, the first president of the Granville Historical Society before embarking on his successful academic career at the University of Chicago, had access to many original source materials. Theresa Overholser kindly rooted out from the files of the Granville Historical Society archives several pages of Professor Utter's notes from which he wrote his 1956 history. The author is indebted to Ms. Overholser, an adept archival sleuth, for finding this cache of invaluable materials. Utter's volume in the six volume *The History of the State of Ohio, Volume II: The Frontier State: 1803-1825* (1942) is less known by Granville residents. This volume by Utter is a useful and informative narrative of the first quarter century of Ohio's history. Finally, W. J. Rorabaugh's *The Alcoholic Republic* (1979) is a marvelous account of alcohol use in nineteenth century America.



"Advertizment for commercially distilled whiskey"