

History of the Cocktail.



THE PALO ALTO HOTEL AT BLADENSBURG IN 1846, WHERE THE COCKTAIL WAS BORN.

From an old print in the possession of the Ohio Historical Society.

INTELLECTUAL BARTENDER RECALLS DUEL THAT WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR ITS INVENTION.

[Baltimore Sun.]

THE cocktail," said an intellectual Baltimore street bartender the other day, "is a distinctively American invention. True enough the name originated in England and was there applied to mixtures as early as the time of Dr. Johnson; but the true cocktail, as every patriotic American knows it to-day, was invented in the State of Maryland on April 17, 1846.

I am well aware that, in maintaining this thesis, I am laying myself open to bitter attacks from so-called experts. The principal text books of alcoholia tell other stories, and the fact that these stories differ widely in no wise dampens the enthusiasm of each author for his own.

"The great alcoholic statistician and genealogist, Prof. Dr. Ferdinand Braun, of Halle, insists that the cocktail was invented in the Middle Ages by Wolfram von Spiegeleisen, the minnesinger, who is best known to fame as the discoverer of yodling.

Braun devotes a whole chapter in his mammoth work "Die Alkoholismus," to the demonstration of his theory, and quotes 100 forgotten books and manuscripts, but his argument for all that is ridiculous.

"As a matter of fact, whisky and gin were entirely unknown to the human race until toward the middle of the seventeenth century, and a cocktail without whisky or gin, as everyone knows, would not be a cocktail at all.

"On Braun's own showing the drink that Spiegeleisen invented was a sort of cheap brandy punch, made of Bordeaux brandy, nutmeg and sugar. One might conceivably call this drink a flip, but it was is no sense a cocktail.

Maloney, the Irish whisky historian, is well aware of the distinction, but in one part of his book on "The History of Drinking in Great Britain" he falls into a similar error. That is to say, he seems to confuse the cocktail with a drink which was the forerunner of what is now known as the stone fence.

"The Smithsonian Institution, in a somewhat elaborate report upon early drinking customs in the United States, says that the cocktail was invented in London in 1834 and introduced into this country, by way of New York, the year after. The University of Chicago, in a later work upon the same subject, repeats this error.

"That it is an error is shown by the diary of Herman Smith, published by the Falstaff Society in 1884. Smith was employed as head bartender at various New York hotels during the period 1832-1840, and later became superintendent of the wine cellars at Delmonico's. He kept an elaborate diary from 1832 to 1838, in which he noted down innumerable facts and happenings of interest to students of alcoholia.

"He recorded, for example, the drinks called for by his most distinguished clients—Daniel Webster, General Scott, John Tyler and the elder Astor among them. We learn from this quaint old chronicle, written in Smith's bad English (for he was a Bavarian) that Webster's favorite tipple was what we now call the whisky sling—that is to say, a mixture of whisky, sugar, nutmeg and water. Webster, according to Smith (or Schmidt) insisted that there be no more than 10 per cent of water, and refused to take a chaser of water afterward.

"Well, the thing I started to say is this: That Smith, despite the minuteness of his chronicle, makes no mention whatever of the cocktail. This to me is proof positive that the cocktail was unknown in New York in the thirties; for had it been introduced in 1835, as the Smithsonian and Chicago scientists say, it is obvious that Smith would have heard of it and mentioned it.

"So much for the university pundits. The researches of Sir Edward McComb, the Scotch distiller, are deserving of more respect, but he, too, I am convinced, makes many errors.

"Sir Edward's treatise upon the cocktail (it was privately printed in a limited de luxe edition, and I have, I believe, the only copy in America) deals at great length with the origin of the name. He says that it was first applied to a drink in the middle of the eighteenth century.

"The first drink to bear it was a diabolic sort of concoction of beer and brandy made up of concoction by the officers of the Second Regiment of Royal Sussex Fusiliers, in the British Army. The men of this regiment, because they wore plumes resembling rooster feathers in their caps, were commonly called 'the cocktalls' by the men of other regiments. The new drink, when it began to attain fame, took the name.

"In his book Sir Edward admits freely that there is nothing in common between the cocktail of to-day and the horrible mess swallowed by the officers of the Second Fusiliers. He seems to hold that the modern cocktail was invented in 1836 by George Brooks, proprietor of the famous Brooks's Club, in London. Again his authorities do not appear, and again I doubt that he is true.

"As a matter of fact, Brooks was not a bartender at all, but a fishmonger, and his club was noted less for its wet goods than for its gambling tables, though its wine cellar at one time was very extensive.

"Sir Edward says that when Brooks perfected the new drink he was at a loss for a name for it, and that 'cocktail' was suggested by Colonel William de Forrest, of the British Army, who had served in the Second Fusiliers years before and recalled the old brandy-and-beer cocktails. Colonel De Forrest, he says, was a celebrated bon vivant of the period, and spent much of his time at Brooks's Club.

"Chiefly as a matter of idle curiosity, I recently communicated with the British War Office regarding this Colonel De Forrest. What was my surprise to learn that he was killed on July 18, 1831, in Monmouthshire, while riding to hounds with the Fanlow Hunt, of which he was master of foxhounds.

"This, you will note, convicts Sir Edward of a serious error, for he says that De Forrest named the cocktail in 1836, whereas the records show that De Forrest died in 1831. In the face of such an egregious blunder we may well view with suspicion all the rest of Sir Edward's argument.

"Meanwhile you are probably recalling my statement that the modern cocktail was invented in 1846, and wondering how I will prove it. Attacking the subject in the scientific manner, we find that it breaks up into definite questions, to-wit:

"1. When was the cocktail invented?

"2. By whom?

"3. Where?

"4. Who were present?

"5. Who drank the first cocktail?

"6. Who gave it its name?

"My answers to these questions are as follows, viz.:

"1. On the 17th of April, 1846, at 8:15 a. m.

"2. By John Welby Henderson, a native of North Carolina.

"3. At the old Palo Alto Hotel, at Bladensburg, Md.

"4. Colonel Deamead Maglone, U. S. A.;

Hon. George William Mattingly, member of Congress from Georgia, and Messrs. J. Upton Benson, Frederick G. Allison and John A. Hopkins, besides the aforesaid Henderson.

"5. John A. Hopkins, of Fairfax, Va.

"6. I don't know.

"The story is an interesting one, and as it has come to me, bit by bit, out of the dim limbo of the past, it has enthralled me like some mediæval romance.

"Bladensburg, in those days, was a place of spirited combats and heavy drinking. The old dueling grounds were still in use, and almost daily a party of gentlemen—members of Congress, diplomats or high officials—would come to settle some affair of honor. There were hotels which catered almost exclusively to such parties—the old Palo Alto, the George Washington and others still standing.

"On the evening of Tuesday, April 16, 1846, a party of 12 gentlemen left the old John Adams House, in Washington, and galloped northward along the deserted streets. A late fall of snow had covered the ground with its white mantle, and the sound of their horses' hoofbeats were scarcely heard. It was cold and windy and they were muffled to the ears.

"The party rode in two groups, one of which contained seven and the other five. In the first group were the Baron Henri de Vrie et Challone, an attache of the French Legation; his fellow-diplomat, Chevalier Luigi Lugno, representative of the King of the Two Sicilies; Messrs. Jones, Lorrimore and Burton, members of the lower house of Congress, and Drs. John Malone and Guilford Galloway, of the Army Medical Corps.

"In the second group were Mr. Hopkins, Colonel Maglone and Messrs. Mattingly, Benson and Allison.

"As you have, no doubt, suspected ere this it was a dueling party. Baron Challone and Mr. Hopkins were the principals and Chevalier Lugno and Colonel Maglone were their seconds. The cause of the difference I have never learned, but it was a gentleman's fight and it was to be conducted in a gentlemanly manner.

"Shortly after 9 o'clock the 12 men reached the Palo Alto Hotel and there enjoyed an excellent supper. At 10 o'clock, after courteous good-nights, they retired to their chambers. At daylight next morning they were awake and ready for the journey to the dueling ground, a few hundred yards away.

"The chronicles are obscure as to what happened on the field, but I rather judge that Baron Challone was badly wounded. At any rate, he required the services of both surgeons for more than two hours, and the ground where he fell was drenched with blood. His courtly adversary, Mr. Hopkins, rushed to his side as soon as he fell.

"Mr. Hopkins, it appears, was a man of delicate perceptions in spite of his intrepid daring, and the sight of the Baron's gushing blood made him ill. As a result, though he was not scratched himself, he staggered and seemed about to faint. His second, Colonel Maglone, and the other gentlemen rushed to his side and took him off at once to the Palo Alto.

"Once there they conducted him to the old taproom and called upon Jack Henderson, who was on watch behind the bar, to set up something stimulating at once.

"Jack, a man of resource, saw that something unusually tempting and powerful was needed. Grabbing up a champagne glass he filled it half full of good old Maryland rye, and then seizing a bottle of bitters he heaved in a few drops. As he stirred up the mixture a bottle of sirup caught his eye, and he put in a swig. Then he pushed the mixture forward—and the first Manhattan cocktail in the world was born.

"Mr. Hopkins seized the glass, poured down the liquor and at once recovered.

"Another!" he cried, enchanted.

"Jack made the second one with more care, and, seized by a happy thought, dropped a brandied cherry into it. Mr. Hopkins gulped it down and then insisted that his friends try the new drink. They were charmed, as might be expected, and when they sat down to breakfast half an hour after they were all in high, good humor.

"Colonel Maglone, who was a celebrated connoisseur of wet goods, saw at once that the moment had been an historic one, and soon after caused to be inserted in the old National Intelligencer, a newspaper of the day, an account of the new drink. He proposed that it be called the Royal Jack, in honor of Jack Henderson, its inventor, but somehow the old name of cocktail became attached to it and the cocktail it has been ever since.

"The gentlemen who were actually present when the first cocktail was compounded and swallowed were Mr. Hopkins, Colonel Maglone, Mr. Benson and Mr. Allison, with Jack Henderson behind the bar. A few years later, after the new drink had attained world-wide repute, Colonel Maglone employed a Washington artist named Timothy Pollard to make a drawing of the scene.

"This drawing was engraved upon wood and copies of the print were given to a limited number of the cognoscenti. The print is now very scarce, and the only one I know of to-day, aside from my own copy, is in the possession of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

"The cocktail spread throughout the world like some genial pestilence, and by 1850, four years after its invention, it was a favorite drink in all parts of the United States. It was known, too, in England, and Thackeray mentioned it in "The Newcomes," written in 1854. Two years before that our own Nathaniel Hawthorne had immortalized it in "The Blithedale Romance."

"Many other authors have referred to it in their works. Even Walter Pater, purist that he was, has given it a complimentary notice of a few lines. The late Lord Tennyson, it is said, left a manuscript sonnet to the cocktail, but his family deemed it inadvisable to include it in the definitive edition of his works.

"Kipling, Conan Doyle, Zangwill and other later writers have referred to it often, and Miss Marie Corelli has written a number of essays about it. It has even crept into foreign literature, and there are references to it in the works and letters of Tolstoi, Ibsen and Gabrielle D'Annunzio.

"Ibsen, as is well known, drank four cocktails a day during the last 30 years of his life, and ascribed his good health to their virtues. Tolstoi is generally supposed to be a rigid teetotaler, but a recent biographer asserts that he frequently takes a Manhattan cocktail before dinner.

"Considering the enormous number of books upon the subject of alcoholic beverages, it is strange that there are so few references to the cocktail. In the monumental French work of L'Ensoz there is not a word upon the subject, and most of the later German alcoholic archaeologists and paleontologists, when they mention the cocktail at all, merely quote Braun and let it go at that.

"In the usually issues of the Archiv fuer Alkoholismuswissenschaft since 1880 there have been but six references to the cocktail, and these have thrown no light upon its history.