

The History of Laird & Company

William Laird, a County Fyfe Scotsman, settled in Monmouth County, New Jersey in 1698. At this time he began the production of AppleJack for his own use, as well as, his friends and neighbors. While in Scotland, it is believed that William Laird was involved in the production of Scotch. Thus upon his arrival to the New World, he employed his expertise by using the most abundant natural resource in the area, apples.

In 1717 the Colts Neck Inn, Colts Neck, New Jersey, was built by a Laird ancestor as a stopping place for stage coaches and dispatch riders traveling from Freehold to Amboy, New Jersey. Our first physical records referring to the commercial distillation and sale of AppleJack were entered in Robert Laird's account book of operations in 1780. Although, the distribution and sale of AppleJack undoubtedly occurred approximately 100 years prior to this date.

Apple Jack - Apple Brandy was a standard item on the Colts Neck Inn's menu. From family records, it appears to have been one of the Inn's best sellers. Frequent mention is made of the travelers taking AppleJack along with them. Robert Laird's account book of 1780 indicates a price of four shillings, six pence per gallon of "cider spirits" (AppleJack). This represented about a half day's wages.

Robert Laird was a Revolutionary War Soldier under the command of George Washington. When the troops were in the Monmouth County area, the Laird family supplied them with AppleJack. Historical records indicate that George Washington wrote to the Laird family some time prior to 1760 asking for their recipe for the production of AppleJack. The Laird family supplied the requested information and entries appear in George Washington's diary in the 1760's regarding the production of "cyder".

Samuel Laird, the third son of Robert Laird, became the proprietor of the Colts Neck Inn in 1812. The AppleJack distillery flourished at this site until 1849. During this year, a fire burned the distillery to the ground. Shortly after that, the second Robert Laird, son of Samuel, moved the distillery down the road to Scobeyville. This present site of Laird & Company was founded in 1851 for the commercial production of AppleJack on an expanded scale. Robert Laird's records show frequent shipments to various points in the United States, particularly to Denver and Los Angeles. Friends had moved, but they still wanted to enjoy AppleJack.

In the late 1820's an Evangelist known as Johnny Appleseed taught religion in the Ohio River settlements. While he preached, he handed apple seeds to his congregation and saw to it that the seeds were planted. Years later, when the

trees bore fruit, he taught his followers how to make AppleJack. This was the beginning of AppleJack's continued popularity along the Ohio River valley.

Abraham Lincoln served Apple Brandy in his Springfield, Illinois tavern. His published list of rates, dated 1833, shows Apple Brandy at 12¢ a half pint. This would appear to be a low price, but Lincoln's same list shows that lodging per night was 12.5¢, and breakfast, dinner or supper was 25¢.

Laird & Company continued to operate at the Scobeyville site under the direction of Joseph T. Laird, Jr., (Samuel's grandson) until Prohibition was declared. During Prohibition, the company survived through the production and sale of various apple products, such as sweet cider and apple sauce.

In September 1933, Laird & Company was granted a federal license under the Prohibition Act to distill Apple Brandy for medicinal purposes. This made it possible for John E. Laird and his brother Joseph T. Laird, III to produce legal inventories of AppleJack. Thus, AppleJack became available to the public immediately after the repeal of Prohibition. At this time modern stills were built and modern equipment such as cider presses, warehouses, laboratories and bottling facilities were installed.

Since repeal, Laird & Company has been in continual operation except for the Second World War. During this period, the Scobeyville plant was converted to the drying and dehydration of apple pomace for pectin and other products to aid in the war effort.

During Prohibition a large number of illegal distilleries operated along the east coast for the production of "bootleg AppleJack". At this time, it was believed that bootleg AppleJack was probably the safest spirit beverage to consume, since it was made from apples with no adulterants added.

After repeal, most of the AppleJack distilleries became legal. Unfortunately the flavor and quality of their product did not meet Laird & Company's high standards. Thus, Laird & Company, then headed by John E. Laird, Jr., pursued a campaign to buy up these distilleries to protect the quality and flavor of this unique beverage. Since that time, Laird & Company has produced something in excess of 95 percent of all AppleJack - Apple Brandy sold in this country.

The year 1951 marked the millionth case of Laird's AppleJack to be packed since repeal of the eighteenth amendment. It was an occasion for a celebration with each employee receiving one silver dollar for each year of service.

In a resolution passed by the New Jersey State Senate in March 1964, special tribute was paid to AppleJack Brandy. "The members of the Senate of the State of New Jersey salute the AppleJack Brandy producers as the oldest native distilled spirit beverage industry in the United States". Today, the Laird's distillery in Scobeyville, New Jersey is recognized as the oldest operating distillery in the country.

The present bottling facility of Laird & Company was built in 1965. There have been three additions to this original building since. The warehouse bordering on Laird Road and the production offices were constructed in 1975. An addition to the processing department was built in 1979. In 1980, another warehouse was added on, totaling 155,000 square feet of space.

Today, Laird & Company produces close to 1.5 million cases of distilled spirits annually. Due to our continuous efforts to upgrade our bottling facilities with more sophisticated machinery and equipment, we actually have the present capability of producing three million per year.

Approximately 35% of the annual production is contract bottling. Various companies ship product in bulk to Laird's advanced processing facility. Here, Laird & Company provides the services of blender, bottler and shipper. Since 1968, Laird & Co. has served such clients as Hiram Walker, W.A. Taylor, "21" Brands, Maidstone Wine & Spirits, Joseph E. Seagrams & Sons, Wellington Importers, Shaw Ross Importers, Inc., Sidney Frank Importing Co., Sazerac, Park Benzinger & Co., Blair Imports, Wine Merchants, Ltd., Premier Wine Merchants, Specialty Spirits and J. Armando Bermudez & Company.

Today Laird & Company is not just "Laird's AppleJack". Along with its flagship brand it produces quality Vodka, Gin, Canadian, Scotch, Bourbon Blends, French Brandy, Tequila, Rum and Cordials. It also imports a wide variety of fine wines and spirits.

Since 1698 when William Laird settled in Monmouth County, the Laird family has been associated with the production of AppleJack, and over the years has diversified with other types of distilled spirits. Larrie W. Laird, eighth generation of the Laird family, currently heads the family run firm. John E. Laird, III and Lisa Laird, both of the ninth generation, hold the positions of Executive Vice President and Vice President, respectively.

The above information was provided by Laird & Co. in February, 1997.