

Friday Loyalist Night

For the May 2015 Conference in Victoria, B.C., our Friday Loyalist Night attendees will have the experience of a totally Loyalist meal including some drinks from the 1700's.

Early settlers from Europe had learned not to drink the local water lest they become extremely ill. No-one knew where cholera came from. It had yet to be discovered that water polluted with various pathogens caused many diseases but Europeans knew that it was safer to drink beer, rum, wine, cider, i.e., any form of alcohol. They brought those sensibilities with them to the New World.

By 1790, the average yearly consumption of a young man was 5 gallons of hard liquor, 34 gallons of beer and one gallon of wine. Children as young as 1 year old were often fed rum or brandy in the belief that the alcohol contained nutrients and minerals necessary for their health.

Our Loyalist ancestors, early on, made their own beer and used the barm or froth from the beer brewing as a leavener in bread as there was no commercial yeast available. Apple growers made hard cider (apple cider allowed to separate into water and sweeter heavy cider by freezing outside and then removing the water). Rum from Jamaica, Madeira wine, bitters, molasses and brandy were often blended into unusually named drinks. For instance, crisp apple cider with a shot of rum was called a Stone Fence. Quite a delicious drink on a hot day as I and the conference committee members can attest.

Because our ancestors were of a frugal nature, even beer that had gone sour was heated, mixed with molasses and crumbles of stale rye or corn bread to mask its off flavours. This was commonly served in homes and taverns as home-made beer tends to go sour when it isn't properly stored. It had its origins in England where it might be called a Whistle Jacket. In the 1780's our ancestors called it a Whistle Belly Vengeance.

In a tavern you might drink your rum or other liquors out of a "Gill" (pronounced djill) the tin equivalent of the modern shotglass but holding 4 ounces of alcohol. The one shown below is a modern hand made copy of an original Gill.



It was common to start the day off before breakfast with a pint of bitters. Any bark, herb, or berry, steeped in alcohol for a few weeks and bottled was called bitters. Any break from work usually led to partaking of another drink. Lunch meant more alcohol. Dinner and after-dinner all included drinking whether at home or in the local tavern as the tavern was the centre of social life.

After the revolution the amount of drinking really took off and reached its zenith about 1825, leading to the founding of many temperance societies in both Canada and the States and eventually the prohibition era in the U.S. in the 1930's.

Visit the Victoria Branch website to keep up-to-date on the planning for 2015.
<http://www.uelac.org/uelvictoria/UELAC-Conference-2015-Victoria-BC.htm>

Conference 2015 Planning Committee