

Bully Boy Distillers and the History of Hub Punch

Craft distillery turns back the clock with a classic New England spirit.

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[Bully Boy Distillers](#), Boston's first craft distillery, was founded in 2010 by brothers Dave and Will Willis. The siblings grew up on a fourth-generation family farm in Sherborn, Massachusetts, where they often made cider as children. "As we got older our interest switched to hard cider, and eventually distilled spirits," says Dave. "The farm has always been the soul of our family, but its tough to make farming work in Massachusetts." Bully Boy Distillers has been a way for the pair to carry on their family's legacy of local agriculture while paying homage to New England's rich craft distilling history.

The name "Bully Boy" comes from their grandfather's favorite farm work horse. "His college roommate was actually Teddy Roosevelt and he always used the phrase "Bully", meaning superb or wonderful, so our family honored Teddy by naming the horse after this phrase," says Will.



The pair grew up as hobbyists. They started by innocently making cider, then as teenagers they began to look for more excitement. “It was around this time that we discovered a secret room in the farmhouse basement that had all these Prohibition-era bottles,” says Dave. “We decided it was time to up the ante, and start distilling our hard cider into applejack.” Eventually after being hobbyists for many years there was some favorable legislation passed in Massachusetts that made setting up a distillery more feasible. They decided the time was right to take a leap of faith and pursue their passion. “Today, we craft every Bully Boy spirit in small batches in our 750 gallon copper pot still, and bottle and label the spirits by hand at our Boston distillery.”

On top of the other spirits the duo produce, they have recently decided to delve into the history of New England spirits with the addition of Hub Punch. Historically, Hub Punch was a bottled rum elixir that was incredibly popular in [Boston](#) in the decades leading up to Prohibition. “We discovered that the drink was originally concocted at the now-defunct Hub House Hotel in Thousand Island, NY, which was infamous for their debaucherous parties,” says Will. At some point in the late 1800s, Boston-based distiller C.H. Graves brought Hub Punch to Boston and began bottling and distributing their recipe.

According to vintage advertisements, Hub Punch was consumed in a variety of ways and settings: at bars, at parties, in military encampments and it was even used for medicinal purposes. “We found ads and things written about Hub Punch from the late 1800s and 1900s, and then it just disappears,” says Dave. It’s likely that Hub Punch disappeared with Prohibition.



Bully Boy’s version of Hub Punch

To create the recipe, they consulted every historical account of the beverage they could find in an effort to create a recipe that most closely resembled the original. It took weeks of testing out different ingredients and testing the different batches in a variety of cocktails,” says Dave. “Our version of Hub Punch is fruit-forward since it’s infused with raspberries, lemon peel and orange peel, but balanced with the tea-like undertones of the botanicals.” The base of Hub Punch is Bully Boy’s aged Boston Rum. “We’re pretty confident that the original Hub Punch was steeped with fruit, but the botanicals were our own addition to Hub Punch.” They make no claim that they have created the exact Hub Punch recipe, but rather their own take on a drink that delighted Bostonians for decades.

Bully Boy also produces five other spirits: White Rum, [White Whiskey](#) and Vodka, which are all un-aged, as well as American Straight [Whiskey](#) and Boston Rum. Both are aged a little bit over three years.