

Boston

Liquid Diet: Bully Boy's Hub Punch

Distillers Dave and Will Willis have resurrected a forgotten, pre-Prohibition favorite in New England.

By [Christopher Hughes](#) | [Chowder](#) | October 8, 2014 1:53 pm



Brothers Dave and Will Willis of Bully Boy Distillers are bringing back a pre-Prohibition Boston tradition this fall, one that (unless you're a cocktail historian) you might not be aware of. It's called Hub Punch, a stiff rum-based elixir that was originally concocted at the now-defunct Hub House Hotel in Thousand Island, New York, and later bottled and distributed by Boston-based distiller C.H. Graves & Sons.

"There was stuff written about it in the late 1800s and early 1900s and then it just disappears," Dave Willis says. "There's no record of Hub Punch after that. So, it was our best guess that it just disappeared with the onset of Prohibition."

Bully Boy was introduced to the libation less than a year ago when, by chance, Russell House Tavern bartender Fred Yarm and Pomodoro bartender Stephen Shellenberger were able to procure an empty C.H. Graves & Sons bottle. The two shared their find with the Willis brothers and it set them off on an obsessive "treasure hunt" to figure out the full history and recipe behind the forgotten drink.

“As a distillery in Boston I feel like we have a pretty good grasp on the history of spirits in the region and this one totally took me by surprise,” Dave says. “After Fred Yarm and Stephen brought it to our attention I actually went and found an empty bottle on eBay. It would have been great to get our hands on one with Hub Punch still *in it* because we could have done some analysis on it, even if it were spoiled. The good news is that back then spirits were relatively unsophisticated. It’s not like C.H. Graves & Sons goes into the historical record as this master distillery, they were really more of a bottler. So we got a good sense of what probably went into it just by looking at what it was served with.”

The high proof spirit was typically mixed with lemonade, soda water, or iced tea—a suggestion even printed on the C.H. Graves & Sons label. That hint, along with the punch’s fairly uniform composition, led to the Willis brothers final recipe. They steeped Bully Boy’s aged Boston Rum with orange peel, lemon peel, raspberries, and a secret mix of botanicals and herbs.

“I think the techniques we used were exactly the same,” Dave says. “I’m pretty sure they were steeping and I’m almost positive they were using citrus. The botanical component is our own contribution. By no means is it an attempt to replicate the original Hub Punch recipe. It’s our best crack at what it was most likely tasted like, while advancing it to make it more current.”

Bully Boy’s Hub Punch will be released at the end of October and even comes with a recipe booklet developed by Dave and Will. All of the cocktails follow a simple 1:2:2 ratio, with one part Hub Punch, two parts soda, and two parts something sweet, such as ginger ale or lemonade.

“We wanted to create a product that you could use at home without having to go buy Chartreuse and Benedictine and all these crazy expensive things,” Dave says. “We wanted people to be able to make what we call ‘kitchen cocktails,’ where you could mix it with ginger ale and it would taste fantastic. But it was just fun to work on something that’s so wholly unique. There’s nothing else out there quite like Hub Punch.”

**Get a preview of Hub Punch at a launch party at The Hawthorne on Oct. 22 at 6 p.m.; 500 A Commonwealth Ave., Boston, [eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com).*