

FOREWORD

Sanity Finally Comes To Moonshine Phobia

by Gene Logsdon

Should you be so optimistic as to think you can figure out why human beings are mostly crazy, study the history of intoxicating beverages. I do not mean just the miseries that result from drunkenness which kills or maims more people and wrecks more families than war, but the kind of feckless righteousness that really believes laws and preachments can make liquor disappear. Add to that the millions of little acts of irrational contradiction that flourish between the two extremes and you will surely become as convinced as I am that we are all nuts. More than one kind of intoxication is involved in the conflict, from hoping to get plastered in a bar to hoping to get one's name plastered on the pillars of righteous sobriety. All to no avail. No matter how hard the pious opposition to distilling alcohol has labored down through the centuries, humans have just kept right on making the stuff. If brickbats contained sugar, someone would have made whiskey out of them by now.

The absurdities in the battle to suppress drinking are endless. Even after all these centuries of unsuccessful war on distilled spirits, the word "liquor", still makes some people cringe, just as the word, sex, does. It is proper enough to say that you have been to the village tavern, but not the corner bar. Hypocrisy is the name of the game.

During prohibition and still true in some social circles, it was okay to drink alcohol for medicinal purposes but not simply to make you feel better. There were and are a whole lot more eye-fluttering euphemisms for getting drunk than for staying sober, as Benjamin Franklin once observed. There are preachers who condemn drunkards out of one side of their mouths and imbibe out of the other side. Monks in search of everlasting life invented fine liqueurs which shows that we are not all crazy all the time. When I was a child, our neighbors condemned my father for drinking beer while they made and drank more potent applejack. Mom thought it was okay for Dad to have a beer or two in the evening, but oh my, not the equivalent amount of alcohol in whiskey. Getting verbally eloquent on California's most expensive wines is now a mark of advanced civilization; getting mildly high on the cheap stuff from Concord grapes in Ohio is embarrassingly boorish. When I got interested, years ago, in making ethanol to fuel my tractor, the permit gang said that was fine so long as I did not drink one drop of it myself. Tractors have more rights than humans in the gimlet eyes of the Alcohol and Tobacco, Tax and Trade Bureau, or TTB (formerly the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms). I once suggested to state authorities that they should allow corn farmers to make bourbon and sell it to wholesalers just like dairy farmers produced and sold milk. The reaction was like I had suggested turning haymows into legal brothels.

Fortunately, the desire to stop people from enjoying a good homemade drink is diminishing. Even the giant distilleries aren't as opposed to home distillation as they once were because they see how they can benefit financially from the rise in small, local distilleries just as big breweries learned to benefit from locally brewed craft beers. But the fossil remains of prohibition still linger in our legal system because drunkenness really is a problem and some rules and regulations are needed. History once more repeats itself: the last shelter of obsolescence is the law-making bureaucracy itself.

So now comes this book by Victoria Redhed Miller, *Craft Distill-*

ing: Making Liquor Legally at Home that finally, finally, finally shines some sanity on the controversy and does it with sprightly good humor that is fun to read. She presents detailed information on the ins and outs of the wacky permit situation and how to find your way through it all. Rather than just being critical, she goes on to present positive suggestions in favor of granting more affordable permits to distillers who only want to make enough booze for home and personal use. Who knows but what those mighty minions in the TTB might listen this time and agree that making a little liquor at home encourages more jobs and money than trying to tax it into oblivion, as author Miller argues. There is precedent. The biblical Jesus turned water into wine without rendering Caesar a single penny, so why should turning wine into brandy for your daughter's wedding be a problem?

But author and distiller Miller (her middle name really is Redhed) makes of her book much more than just a plea for common sense in the world of distilled spirits. The author also provides the clearest and most detailed information on the home distillation process that I have read to date. (A whole lot more detailed than my book, I cringe to say.) Then she moves through the how-to of every kind of unholy spirits ever imagined including a tequila-like drink distilled from Jerusalem artichokes.

She also includes information about how to get permitted to make ethanol fuel. Even though in my opinion the ethanol industry is causing more environmental harm than it does good and is not sustainable, I think small, on-farm production of ethanol might have some merit. I know from experience that if you go to your local TTB office, you won't get much help. At present what we have here is just one more amazing distillation contradiction. To guarantee survival of the huge industry that makes ethanol for piston engines to drink, the government hands out millions of dollars in subsidies to farmers and distillers. But if you want to make a little liquor just for your own home consumption, you, by heaven, must pay.

Lastly, author Miller includes lots of practical information about all the flavorings and additives that are so much a part now of making distilled spirits more interesting and enjoyable. The age of artisanal foods has arrived and artisanal drinks too. Cheers to this ground-breaking new book.

— Gene Logsdon,
author of *Good Spirits:
A New Look at Ol' Demon Alcohol*