

Title:

The History Of Alcohol

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Throughout recorded history there has always been alcohol in of some variety, think of this, when you are sitting on a Friday night with your vodka and coke or Pernod and lemonade, does it ever cross your mind how exactly the drink came about. Below is a history of some of the more popular drinks that are enjoyed today such as vodka, gin, Pernod and cachaca.

Pernod

Pernod is an aniseed-based spirit that has been enjoyed in France for approximately 200 years as an aperitif and a zesty cooking ingredient. During the Babylonian era aniseed drinks were known as elixirs with unique qualities to cure a variety of stomach and digestive disorders. It has long been recognized that when you combine wormwood and aniseed plants it contains certain healing powers and has been known to have mood-altering effects.

Cachaca

Cachaça is made from raw sugar cane and the major difference is that the lighter rums are more commonly made from what's known as molasses, (A thick syrup produced in refining raw sugar and ranging from light to dark brown in color) this is a by-product from boiling the cane juice to extract as much sugar as possible. It is made from fresh sugarcane juice that is fermented and distilled.

Cachaça is Brazil's national spirit and the key ingredient in the classic cocktail caipirinha, the history of Cachaça goes back nearly 5 centuries when plantation owners began serving Cachaca to their slaves after seeing that it increased their vigor. Over the next lot of years better Cachaças were being distilled and soon people started drinking it in colonial Brazil while having dinner at home. Shortly after this slavery was banned in 1888, when Brazil was

declared a modern Republic.

Gin

The first confirmed date for the production of gin is the early 17th century in Holland, although claims have been made that it was produced prior to this in Italy. In Holland it was produced as a medicine and sold in chemist shops to treat stomach complaints, gout and gallstones. To make it more palatable, the Dutch started to flavour it with juniper, which has medicinal properties of its own.

British troops fighting in the Low Countries during the Thirty Years' War, were given 'Dutch Courage' during the long campaigns in the damp weather through the warming properties of gin. Eventually they started bringing it back home with them, where already it was often sold in chemists' shops. Distillation was taking place in a small way in England, but it began on a greater scale, though the quality was often very dubious. The new drink became a firm favourite with the poor.

In 1730 London had over 7,000 shops that sold only spirits. Abuse of alcohol by the poor became a major problem, which was tackled by introducing The Gin Act at midnight on 29 September 1739, making gin prohibitively expensive. The Prime Minister, Sir Robert Walpole and Dr. Samuel Johnson were among those who opposed the Act since they considered it could not be enforced against the will of the common people. They were right.

Riots broke out and the law was widely and openly broken, the Gin Act was finally repealed in 1742 and a new policy was introduced with the help of distillers: reasonably high prices, reasonable excise duties and licensed retailers under the supervision of magistrates. In essence this is the situation which exists today. Since then many companies established themselves as well-to-do manufacturers and the gin became the drink of high quality.

Vodka

Vodka is a drink which originated in Eastern Europe. The name stemming from the Russian word 'voda' meaning water or, as the Poles would say 'woda.' The first documented production of vodka in Russia was the end of the 9th century, but the first known distillery at Khylnovsk was about two hundreds years later as reported in the Vyatka Chronicle of 1174. Poland lays claims to having distilled vodka even earlier in the 8th century, but as this was a distillation of wine it might be more appropriate to consider it a crude brandy. The first identifiable Polish vodkas appeared in the 11th century when they were called 'gorzalka' originally used as medicines.

During the Middle Ages, distilled liquor was used mainly for medicinal purposes,

as well as being an ingredient in the production of gunpowder. In the 14th century a British Ambassador to Moscow first described vodka as the Russian national drink and in the mid 16th century it was established as the national drink in Poland and Finland.

Since early production methods were crude, vodka often contained impurities, so to mask these the distillers flavoured their spirits with fruit, herbs or spices. The mid 15th century saw the first appearance of pot distillation in Russia. Prior to that, seasoning, aging and freezing were all used to remove impurities, around this time (1450) vodka started to be produced in large quantities and the first recorded exports of Russian vodka were to Sweden in 1505. Polish 'woda' exports started a century later, from major production centres in Posnan and Krakow.

Types produced included: acorn, anisette, birch, calamus root, calendula, cherry, chicory, dill, ginger hazelnut, horseradish, juniper, lemon, mastic, mint, mountain ash, oak, pepper, peppermint, raspberry, sage, sorrel, wort and water melon.

In the 18th century a professor in St. Petersburg discovered a method of purifying alcohol using charcoal filtration. Felt and river sand had already been used for some time in Russia for filtration.

The spread of awareness of vodka continued throughout the 19th century, helped by the presence in many partdrunkenness of Europe and Russian soldiers involved in the Napoleonic Wars. Increasing popularity led to escalating demand and to meet this demand, lower grade products were produced based largely on distilled potato mash.

After the Russian Revolution, the Bolsheviks confiscated all private distilleries in Moscow. As a result, a number of Russian vodka-makers emigrated, taking their skills and recipes with them. One such exile revived his brand in Paris, using the French version of his family name - Smirnoff. Thence, having met a Russian ŽmigrŽ from the USA, they set up the first vodka distillery there in 1934. This was subsequently sold to a US drinks company. From this small start, vodka began in the 1940s to achieve its wide popularity in the Western World.

Following the Russian Revolution in 1917, a number of Russian refugees took their skills and their love of vodka to many parts of the world.

In the 1930s one such exile emigrated from Russia via France to the United States bringing with him the formula to one of the leading Russian makes of

vodka.

Through his dealings with another Russian emigre the first vodka distillery in the U.S. was set up in the 1930s. Although not particularly successful at first, this enterprise was sold on again to an entrepreneur who eventually made a hit in the 1950s with a vodka-based cocktail - the Moscow Mule. Vodka did not see a great boom in popularity in the West until the 1960s and 1970s when many more brands were launched in the USA and the UK.

The timing coincided with the cultural revolution in these countries - the 'swinging 60s.' With a more affluent younger generation and a generally more relaxed lifestyle and the emphasis on adventure and experimentation - vodka's mixability led to its huge and ever rising popularity.

Vodka cocktails are almost as numerous as those of gin and are seen in the same exclusive circles and stylish bars the world over.