

# BOURBON+

THE PEOPLE, STORIES, AND SCIENCE BEHIND THE BOTTLE | VOL. 1, NO. 3

With Uncle Nearest,  
'Westworld' Star

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ILLUMINATES  
AFRICAN-AMERICAN  
WHISKEY HISTORY

AMAZE AND  
EDUCATE YOUR  
FRIENDS WITH A  
**BOURBON  
TASTING:**  
HERE'S HOW

barrel-making  
**BASICS**

FROM THE ACORN  
TO THE AGING

**BARBECUE  
& BOURBON**

PEG LEG PORKER  
& HIS FAVORITES

**78** | AMERICA'S FIVE BEST  
DRINKING TOWNS

**80** | LEARN HOW TO  
"TALK BOURBON"

**92** | DRINKING WELLER 12  
WITH LOCASH



# YOUNG SPIRITS

## NELSON'S GREEN BRIER

BY JAKE EMEN

Tennessee Whiskey's Future is Tied to its Past at Nelson's Green Brier

**O**n June 30, 2017, I moved out of my apartment in the Washington, D.C. suburbs and set off on a cross-country road trip. The first destination was Nashville, and some 750 miles later I arrived in Music City with enough time to catch a decent night's sleep before heading to Nelson's Green Brier Distillery the next morning. The visit was fortuitously timed, coinciding with the launch event for the distillery's inaugural self-distilled whiskey release, First 108.

"It's a taste of history, and an idea of where Nelson's Green Brier is going," Charlie Nelson, who co-owns the distillery with his brother Andy, told the crowd of enthusiastic local supporters.

With nearly 2,000 craft distilleries in the US jockeying for a unique marketing position or placement—*We're the first distillery to open on a Tuesday within 12.5 miles of that other distillery that was the first to open in the state since Prohibition!*—you'll forgive our glassy-eyed reaction to most such claims. The thing is, with Nelson's Green Brier, the claim is actually true.

### Jack Who?

The First 108, a wheated Tennessee whiskey, was so named not only because 108 barrels were used in the batch, but also because 2017 marked that many years since the family's original distillery was shuttered by Tennessee's state Prohibition in 1909. Yes, the whiskey roots run deep for the Nelson clan in Tennessee.

Although Tennessee whiskey has largely become synonymous with Jack Daniel's in the modern era, the script is flipped if you look back far enough. The original Nelson's Green Brier



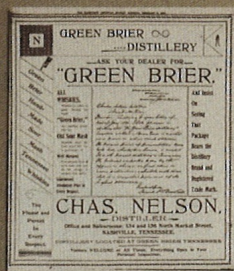
was outselling Jack Daniel's at a 16-to-1 clip circa the end of the 19th Century.

And while the category is now defined by the Lincoln County Process of charcoal filtration, a competing county had its very own system. "Our third-generation great-grandfather Charles Nelson, back in the day, did charcoal mellowing," Charlie explained. "He called it the Robertson County Process, and we have records of him doing that." The town of Greenbrier is located in Robertson County, about 20 miles north of Nashville.

It seems that just as history has largely forgotten poor Nikola Tesla, whose electric innovations equaled or exceeded those of rival Thomas Edison, Jack Daniel has been The Name to Know in Tennessee Whiskey, while Charles Nelson—along with his wife and successor, Louisa—was lost to time. Now nobody is expecting the new Nelson's to overtake Jack, but the craft spirit category's future looks all the brighter with more quality entrants, particularly one with such a sturdy historic foundation.

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Brothers Andy, left, and Charlie Nelson are quite the duo. Their uncle was Bob Einstein, the famous actor who played Super Dave Osborne. The Nelson brothers shared a dram of their whiskey in Super Dave's honor with family. Einstein, 76, died in January 2019.



**GREEN BRIER** Hand-Made  
Sour Mash  
Tennessee Whisky

Is the purest and best in the world, is well and carefully made. Sour Mash Tennessee Whisky is freer from deleterious substances than any other distillation.

It is Undoubtedly the Highest Form of Whisky Manufactured for Medicinal Use or as a Beverage.

**ONLY OPEN AIR CHARCOAL IS USED.**

Coal is burnt in the open air by expert burners, who do nothing else but prepare open air charcoal for the GREEN BRIER DISTILLERY.

Green Brier is hand burnt coal and other poisonous matter by a special process.

Green Brier is the Peer of all Whisky made in Tennessee. As a beverage or as a medicinal stimulant its invigorating effects is not to be excelled.

Green Brier is made on a 96-hour fermentation. Sour Mash plan, without the aid of chemicals, artificial agents or yeast.

The water is supplied in great abundance from the water spring at pure and hot as comes to the surface.

**GREEN BRIER WHISKY IS MATURED** in warehouses constructed of Brick, Stone and Iron on the rack system where the full benefit of light and air reaches each and every barrel.

**CHAS. NELSON**  
Distillery and U. S. Bonded Warehouse  
GREEN BRIER, TENN.

OLD NO. 5 WAREHOUSE  
134 and 136 North Market Street  
NASHVILLE, TENN.



Charles Nelson produced the original Tennessee Whiskey, and grew the distillery (aka "Old No. 5") into one of the nation's largest.

In 1885, he was selling over 380,000 gallons per year.

In 1891, Charles dies and his wife Louisa takes over as one of the only women to run a distillery.

In 1909, Tennessee Prohibition shuts down the distillery.

## Back to the Future

The First 108 was released after two years of maturation in 30-gallon barrels. Though young, it offered a tantalizing preview of what was to come. After all, it was merely a way station whiskey, designed to bide time. Two years down the track, the distillery is pulling up to its next destination in summer 2019 with the release of the 4-year-old rendition patiently matured in full-size barrels. The whiskey's wheated mash bill of 70 percent corn, 16 percent wheat, and 14 percent malted barley is based on a historic recipe, one that just happens to align neatly with today's field of trending wheated bourbons.

Beyond their self-distilled juice, the Nelson brothers remain busy with their highly acclaimed sourced Belle Meade Bourbon lineup. "Charles sourced from another distillery and produced and bottled Belle Meade Bourbon," Andy said. "Belle Meade allowed us to be more patient with the aging process for the Tennessee whiskey. It is a brand that is as important in the modern day as it was five generations ago."

Given its success, Belle Meade certainly won't be going anywhere, even as more of the distillery's own stock comes of age. The line expanded in 2018 with a string of limited-edition, cask-finished releases as part of the distillery's Craftsman Cask Collection, Belle Meade bourbon extra-aged

in barrels that had held Mourvèdre, Tannat, Spanish brandy, and honey. "We have seen that thinking outside the box can yield excellent results," Andy said. "Despite the subtlety of the different influences in the cask varieties, each has its own strong, unique fingerprint. The Mourvèdre is our favorite, with the Honey Cask Finish a close second."

In addition to its whiskey roots, the Nelson family also has ties to Hollywood. The late Bob Einstein, known best as Super Dave Osborne, a bumbling, doomed-to-fail stuntman, was Andy's and Charlie's uncle. "He wasn't much of a drinker, but his commitment to comedy was definitely a positive influence on us, and a reminder to not take ourselves too seriously," Charlie said. But if anyone thought that the Nelson brothers' plan to reclaim their legacy as one of the stalwarts of Tennessee whiskey was just a stunt, clearly they were mistaken. +

*In 2016, beverage conglomerate Constellation Brands took a minority investment in Nelson's Green Brier, helping the historic brand gain distribution and access to new markets. As the brand grew, Constellation grew more interested in the American whiskey market. It purchased the distillery outright in May 2019.*