History and Cultural Significance:
Audrey: Asheville’s food scene is one of its most defining factors. Not only does Asheville offer a wide array of cuisines from all over the world, but many of the restaurants in the area are famous for their reinventions of traditional Appalachian dishes. While cultural shifts have caused many of these dishes to fall out of popularity, Asheville’s twist on Appalachian classics seem to have brought considerable attention to mountain foodways.

Olivia: This is certainly true for hard cider, which is fermented apple juice that typically has between 4-10% alcohol by volume (Peck and Miles n.p). Sitting in one of Asheville’s many popular bars, kitchens, or lounges, it is common to see at least one cider on draft from one of the area’s local cideries, such as Noble Cider, Urban Orchard Cider Company, or Bold Rock Hard Cider.

Audrey: But a common problem with many of the Appalachian foods served in Asheville, North Carolina is that they are often served to the masses without any note of their histories or cultural significance in the region. As explained by numerous mountain cookbooks and articles written about Appalachian foodways, many of the Appalachian foods that are consumed today have long and dynamic histories, much of which involving class, race, and food sovereignty. Hard cider is no exception.

Olivia: For the 17th century American drinker, hard cider was a staple. While apple trees had no trouble taking to American soil, it was hard to cultivate barley and other grains necessary for the production of beer. Easily, apple cider became the beverage of choice (Lehault n.p).

Audrey: In addition to being the most widely available beverage in America, hard cider’s purifying alcohol content appealed to early Americans, who were often vulnerable to poor health outcomes due to their relatively underdeveloped environments. Most of the water available to settlers was highly contaminated, and exposed them to diseases such as typhoid, cholera, and dysentery. Cider was considered a healthful alternative, and was renowned as being a digestive aid and preventative treatment for rheumatism, gout, kidney stones, and fever (Rupp, n.p).

Olivia: Moreover, hard cider was said to promote longevity, which is why John Adams, who lived to be 91 years old, began every day with it. While running the Board of War and Ordinance in Philadelphia, where cider wasn’t as plentiful, Adams wrote to his wife, “I would give three
guineas for a barrel of your cider,” before complaining that with a lack of cider, “milk has become the breakfast of many of the wealthiest [...] families [in Philadelphia]” (Felten n.p).

Audrey: And while no one ever built an entire political campaign around milk, William Henry Harrison, also known as “Old Tippecanoe,” won the presidential race by using cider as a symbol of core American values. Positing that the opposing candidate, Martin Van Buren, indulged in luxuries that the average commoner could not afford, Harrison appealed to the whig party by promoting himself as a rugged man of the people, who shared the same affinity for cider as the common folk (Felten n.p).

Olivia: With the power to win someone a presidential election, it is hard to understand why cider might fall out of popularity. While several factors contributed to cider’s waning prominence, most sources point to the ratification of the 18th amendment as the primary cause for the fall of the cider industry.

Audrey: Prohibition served as a devastating blow to the cider industry. In addition to outlawing hard cider, the Volstead Act even limited the production of sweet, or nonalcoholic cider to 200 gallons per year per orchard. In addition, many die hard temperists burned countless fields of apple trees to the ground in order to limit the production of cider. Surviving orchards began to cultivate the sweet, non-cider apples out of necessity (Lehault n.p).

Olivia: Even after the repeal of the Volstead Act in 1933, cider never recovered. Many of the heirloom cider apple varieties simply disappeared from the American landscape, and the apple crop turned almost exclusively to eating apples (Rupp, n.p). Additionally, breweries could almost immediately go back into production, as barley fields could yield crops within a year.

Audrey: The early 1900s also saw a huge influx of German and Eastern European immigrants who favored beer over cider (Lehault n.p). Their arrival in America, and our westward expansion into barley friendly territories, ultimately turned beer into America’s preferred beverage.

Olivia: But while it’s easy to say that Prohibition sparked the demise of the cider industry, that wasn’t exactly the case for the Appalachian region. Although Prohibition halted the production of alcoholic beverages across the country, it didn’t stop many mountain farmers. Josh Bennett, a cidery owner in West Virginia said of Prohibition, “Just like with moonshine, when anything was illegal, we were still doing it up here in the hills. It was a just a farmstead practice, and if you weren’t in the city where they really had their eyes on you, farmers were going to keep doing what they traditionally did for hundreds of years. It’s just that simple. People were still gonna grow their orchards and make their hard cider” (Nelson n.p).
Audrey: Today, many people share the same spirit for hard cider that the mountain farmers once did. Since the 1990s, cider has seen a revival, following the microbrewery trend that has altered beer consumption in America (Valois et al n.p).

Olivia: While many consumers have participated in cider’s revival, some market analysts have pointed to millennials as key players in its resurgence. A group that has traditionally been a core consumer in the craft beer industry, young, often affluent millennials are becoming increasingly drawn to cider (“Small Cider Category Poised for Big Growth” n.p). It has been speculated that their attraction to cider stems from its “gender neutral marketing,” which contrasts many beer advertisements hyper masculine rhetoric, it’s naturally gluten free quality, and simply, its emergence as something new on the market (Tuttle n.p).

Audrey: Apple cider’s resurgence may sound like any other case of America’s younger generation returning to old school traditions, but the implications of its revival are complicated. In the time that hard cider fell and returned to popularity, the American apple market had changed considerably.

Olivia: The apple market saw a shift in the early 1900s, with the rise of refrigerated train carts. This new technology meant longer shelf life for apples, making commercial orchards much more profitable. Farmers began to breed apples for aesthetically pleasing colors and shapes, tough skins, and longer shelf lives (Lundy 179). This resulted in an influx of the apples that we see at the grocery store today, but it considerably hurt the cider industry.

Audrey: At one point in time, there were 1000 to 1,600 apple varieties found in the Appalachian mountains, contributing to what was once a flourishing cider industry (Lundy 177) Today, despite a diverse array of apple varieties, only a few in North America are known by name. These include Gala, Golden Delicious, Red Delicious, Fuji, Pink Lady, and Granny Smith. These varieties dominate the western market, creating a problem for cider makers in the United States (“What is a Cider Apple” n.p).

Olivia: As Diane Flynt, the former owner of Foggy Ridge Cider says, “if you know the name of the apple, it’s likely not a good cider apple,” but the monoculture system of American agriculture has largely focused on the apples with high sugar content, perfect for snacking or baking in pies. While plenty of apples are produced across the US, the thousands of apple varieties that contain high levels of acid and tannin, characteristics of apples that make them perfect for cider making, go largely ignored (“What is a Cider Apple” n.p).

Audrey: In response to the apple industry’s lack of accomodation, many cider makers have started growing their own cider apples, just like the ones their forefathers grew. While these
apples may not taste the best, they add color, body, and mouthfeel to hard cider, making it perfectly balanced (“What is a Cider Apple” n.p).

Olivia: To learn more about the resurgence of cider across the nation and the complexities of cider making, we talked to ________ at Noble Cidery, located in West Asheville.

Representations in Literature and in Cookbooks:
Audrey: In her cookbook, Food and Recipes of the Smokies, Rose Houk states that “everybody knows people in the mountains made moonshine. It was a fine, long standing tradition” (148). To claim that everyone knew the mountains for its moonshine is not a far reach, especially in the literary world. In an effort to produce a countless array of novels, biographies, films, and television shows about moonshine, writers have left little space for hard cider to make an appearance.

Olivia: While many books have been written about hard cider, the likelihood of stumbling across a passage about cider in other, less specific texts, is very slim. Presumably, the stories of the mountain farmers who continued to grow apples in the face of Prohibition aren’t quite as compelling as the action-packed stories of bootleggers who took to racing cars full of moonshine through the night to avoid local police (“Moonshine in the Mountains” n.p).

Audrey: With hard cider missing from the vast literature, it is natural that we turn to cookbooks for representations of hard cider. Often, narrative cookbooks can supplement literature with personal stories connected to the recipes that they provide. In some cases, this is true for hard cider, but depictions of hard cider in cookbooks are also lacking.

Olivia: Cider is represented very differently from one cookbook to another, and the type of cookbook, as well as its publication date, is very telling about how it will depict cider.

Audrey: Rose Houk’s cookbook Food and Recipes of the Smokies, published in 1996, relies on stories from Dorie Cope, a renowned mountain woman, to explain how cider was made prior to 1912, which was likely the year that a modern cider press made its way into the mountain town that she lived in. According to Cope, men spent months looking for a white, poplar log to use as a cider press. After finding one, they stripped away the bark and removed the limbs, before hollowing out one side and putting a hole in the bottom for the juice to drip out of (Houk 150).

Olivia: Next, apples were quartered and placed into the hollowed part of the log to be pounded with a mallet. After pounding the apples to the consistency of course sand, cider makers put a weight on them to force the juice down the spout and into a bucket, where it was caught. The juice would then get strained through a cheesecloth and put in barrels, where it quickly fermented (Houk 150). In the cookbook, Dorie Cope boasts that the hard cider her family made
could “make you as drunk as moonshine,” implying that Cope had quite a few anecdotes tied to hard cider.

Audrey: With a rise in the popularity of hard cider, many newer commercial cookbooks appeal to readers by promoting various craft ciders and discussing the potential of the hard cider industry. Ronni Lundy’s 2016 cookbook *Victuals*, for example, paints the revival of hard cider as an opportunity to restore ecosystems, support the economy, and educate the nation’s agriculture students (183-185).

Audrey: While many contemporary cookbooks are beginning to incorporate cider into their narratives and recipes, it is important to assess where cider is still underrepresented. What a cookbook says about hard cider is certainly important, but what it doesn’t say can have equally important meaning.

Olivia: To find hard cider in a community cookbook would be extremely atypical, which is most likely due to the sociopolitical origin of the cookbook genre. Since the Civil War, community cookbooks have been published by women in nonprofit groups throughout the United States, benefiting churches, schools, cemetery associations, and notably, the temperance movement (Gardner n.p). While temperance was a popular cause among most Protestants, women had a particular interest in the cause because they felt that the drunkenness of others was particularly burdensome for women and children (Gardner n.p). Since many of the community cookbooks preserved today were published by church groups, it is clear why cider fails to make an appearance.

Audrey: It is also notable that many cookbooks donning the word “Southern” in their title fail to address hard cider. This prompts the question, is hard cider an intrinsically Appalachian beverage, or has its fiercely dynamic history pushed it out of mountain culture? The answer to this question may not lie in the cookbooks, but in the hard work of cider producers at Noble Cider, Urban Orchard, and Bold Rock. With the farm to table food movement we see today, hard cider seems to be as Appalachian as ever, and we must rely on Appalachian cider producers to tell its valuable history.
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