Some Afterthoughts on Apples

Apples were grown almost exclusively for cider making until the advent of the temperance movement in the 1830's. Consumed by rich and poor alike, the refreshing beverage also served as currency and from earliest colonial days provided a principal item of export to the southern colonies and the West Indies.

According to U. P. Hedrick, author of *A History of Horticulture in America to 1860*, the product sold as 'cider' was always hard cider; freshly extracted juice was offered as 'sweet apple juice'. Many bought the latter to age according to their individual tastes.

Although the commercial demand for cider declined as a result of the temperance reformation and many orchards were destroyed, interest in home production continued unabated, judging from the lively correspondence to be found on the subject in various early gardeners' journals. Advocates of abstinence branded the golden liquid unsafe, unwholesome, and nonnutritious, while health faddists attributed laudable properties to it in the treatment of such disorders as dyspepsia, biliousness, and even alcoholism.
W. F. Heins of Paterson, N. J., writing in *The Horticulturist* in 1868, had these directions to offer the home brewer:

A good and pure article of cider requires but little labor in its manufacture. The apples are gathered before they are fully mature, and placed in a cool, dark room . . . for about a week . . . then take two thirds tart and one third sweet apples, rejecting carefully any that have appearance of decay; put them in a tub of water, to free them from dirt . . . then grind to pulp. To avoid particles of fruit getting into the juice, a clean, coarse bag is put into the press to receive the pulp. Fill the receiver with pulp, close the bag, and apply the screw gradually until the juice ceases to run freely. After waiting five minutes, apply strong pressure, and press all out. For barrels, those used for whisky or alcohol answer well . . . The barrels should be placed in an airy and cool cellar, on skids, and are then ready for the juice as fast as it comes from the press. When full, the holes are closed with corks, in which are inserted glass tubes of an inch in diameter, made air-tight at their insertion by sealing-wax. A cup, or other vessel, filled with water, is placed under the free end of the tube, which should be covered by the water at least one and a half inches. Fermentation will soon begin, and violently at first. The water in the cup must be replaced as evaporation takes place . . . to prevent air coming in contact with the liquor in the cask. The tubes are not removed from the casks until the bubbling in the water cups entirely ceases, . . . The nearly clear liquor is then drawn off — carefully avoiding shaking the casks — into new ones . . . filling the casks full. To have a supply, to keep the barrels continually full to the bung, which is a matter of the first importance, some of the cider is put into small casks, turned over, that the contents may cover the bung, to prevent acidity. During the following autumn, about the end of October, the cider is again drawn off into prepared barrels kept always full, and in the following spring it is ready for bottling, and will keep for years.

By contrast, this entry in a late 19th century cook book offers a simple receipt for unfermented cider:

Cider should be made from ripe apples only, and for this reason, and to prevent fermentation, it is better to make it late in the season. Use only the best-flavored grafted fruit, rejecting all that are decayed or wormy. The best mills crush, not grind, the apples . . . Press and strain juice as it comes from the press through a woollen cloth into a perfectly clean barrel; let stand two or three days if cool, if warm not more than a day, rack once a week for four weeks, put in bottles and cork tightly. Do not put any thing in it to preserve it, as all so-called preservatives are humbugs. Lay the bottles away on their sides in sawdust.

Home cider making is enjoying a modest revival, accompanied by a volume of disparate directions. In the interest of
quality control, one might be well-advised to first consult the USDA Farmers' Bulletin No. 2125 (revised 1972), "Making and Preserving Apple Cider".

Through the joint efforts of the Worcester County Horticultural Society and Old Sturbridge Village, selected old varieties of apples are to be perpetuated in a preservation orchard at the Village. A tract of land has been cleared for the project which was launched officially at dedication ceremonies this spring. Presently about 90 varieties have been planted of stock moved from the Society's North Grafton experimental orchard established 20 years ago by S. Lothrop Davenport, former Secretary of the organization.

The search continues for additional old varieties to expand the collection at Sturbridge. As the trees mature, scion wood and bud sticks from them will be available through the Society to supplement that which they sell from their original orchard. The fruit from the preservation orchard will be sold at Old Sturbridge Village.

For a list of nurseries specializing in under stock of old varieties of apples, consult the Society (30 Elm Street, Worcester, Massachusetts 01608).

Jeanne S. Wadleigh