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# Southern Foodways: Bar Culture in Louisville, Kentucky — An Oral History Project

Posted by [Melissa Hall](#), February 15, 2008 at 11:15 AM

[Southern Foodways Alliance](#) appears on Fridays as part of our collaboration with the [Southern Foodways Alliance](#), an organization based in Oxford, Mississippi, that "documents and celebrates the diverse food cultures of the American South." Dig in!



Inspired by the rum infusions she was exposed to as a bartender in St. Croix, Joy Perrine has developed an entire menu of infused bourbons at Jack's Lounge in Louisville, Kentucky. Photograph by Amy Evans

Louisville is awash in bourbon. And beer. It's a drinking person's town, due in no small part to the state's bourbon heritage and the city's nickname-namesake brewery, Falls City. This is where the Old Fashioned was invented. It's where Al Capone dodged the law during prohibition, ducking out of the Seelbach Hotel through secret passageways. And it's where barkeeps plied their customers with rolled oysters and bean soup to keep them coming back. Louisville's private clubs, hotel bars, and neighborhood taverns are rich with drinking history and lore, and there's always time for another round.

In January Southern Foodways Alliance oral historian Amy Evans belled up to many a bar in Falls City, chatting up bartenders, bar owners, and bar patrons, gathering their stories one drink at a time. She met with John C. Johnson, 50-year employee of the Pendennis Club, where the Old Fashioned was born. Greg Haner, fourth-generation owner of Mazzoni's, talked about his family's 100-plus-year history of making and serving rolled oysters. Edward Winfield shared stories of the legendary Seelbach Hotel and the much-loved Louisville bartender Max Allen Jr., whom he had the opportunity to learn from before he passed.



John C. Johnson, 50-year employee of Louisville's Pendennis Club. Photograph by Amy Evans

While Louisville's cocktail culture is steeped in history, it's also rife with innovation. Jerry Slater, director of the Seelbach's Oakroom restaurant, has created the savory Bufala Negra cocktail made with basil, balsamic vinegar, bourbon, and ginger ale. Joy Perrine of Jack's Lounge, inspired by the rum infusions she was exposed to as a bartender in St. Croix, has developed an entire menu of infused bourbons.

And, of course, there are the regulars. Bill Tinker, a 50-year patron of Check's Café in Germantown, is an encyclopedia of neighborhood history. He's also responsible for bringing together the neighborhood taverns for the Schitzelburg Walk, a progressive night of drinking that happens each fall—just one of the reasons he was voted Schnitzelburg's Number One Citizen.

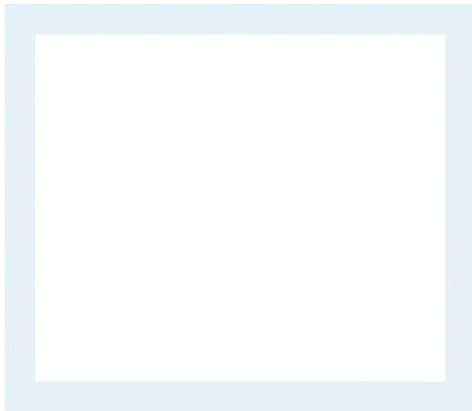


Bill Tinker, Schnitzelburg citizen No. 1. Photograph by Amy Evans

These and other oral history interviews were collected as part of the SFA's upcoming Blue Grass and Brown Whiskey Field Trip to Louisville, July 11 to 13. Visit [southernfoodways.com](#) for more information and to register. Look for the interviews to appear on the web this spring.

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