

# Root Beer

Charles Hires was a Philadelphia pharmacist who according to his biography discovered a recipe for a delicious herbal tea while on his honeymoon. The pharmacist began selling a dry version of the tea mixture and also began working on a liquid version of the same tea.

Hires, who was studying medicine at Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia at the time, was happy to comply, and was assisted by two medical professors. Conwell, smitten with the results, convinced Hires to call it a "beer," instead of a "tea," feeling it would be an easier sell to the working class. This seems to be the one point in the Hires story on which all parties seem to agree: marketing it as a "beer" instead of a "tea" was the key to its success.

The result of was a combination of over twenty-five herbs, berries and roots that Hires used to flavor a carbonated soda water drink. Hires would become the largest manufacturer of the soft drink "root beer" in the world. But at first the drink was slow to catch on. Four years later, Hires marketed a liquid concentrate and in 1893 launched a bottled, ready-to-drink product. According to DeLuca, the demand for the drink (the recipe supposedly consisted of sugar or honey with such ingredients as sarsaparilla, sassafras, licorice extracts, and vanilla and wintergreen) skyrocketed.

Hires sold his drug business and went into the wholesale business, specializing in vanilla beans. He made a trip to Mexico, studied the vanilla plant and wrote a small book on the subject - long considered to be the authoritative work on vanilla. Conwell persuaded Hires to present his product at the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition. The Hires family continued to manufacture root beer and in 1893 first sold and distributed bottled root beer.

The origins of root beer can be traced further back in history.

Root beer has its origins in what is referred to as "small beers." Small beers are a collection of local beverages (some alcoholic, some not) made during colonial times in America from a variety of herbs, barks, and roots that included: birch beer, sarsaparilla beer, ginger beer and root beer. Ingredients in early root beers included allspice, birch bark, coriander, juniper, ginger, wintergreen, hops, burdock root, dandelion root, spikenard, pipsissewa, guaiacum chips, sarsaparilla, spicewood, wild cherry bark, yellow dock, prickly ash bark, sassafras root\*, vanilla beans, hops, dog grass, molasses and licorice. Many of these ingredients are still used in root beer today along with carbonation. There is no one recipe.

Another famous brand of root beer is A & W Root Beer, now the number one selling root beer in the world. A & W Root Beer was founded by Roy Allen, who began marketing root beer in 1919.

\*In 1960, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration banned sassafras as a potential carcinogen, however, a method was found to remove the oil from sassafras. Only the oil is considered dangerous. Sassafras is one of the main ingredients in root beer.

