



Carlyle House Docent Dispatch

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Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority

A Dip the in the Colonial Punch Bowl

“When wine inflames, punch does but cheer
Nor fuddles like the muddy beer
But like the fountain runs off clear”

While beer was the most frequently consumed of the colonial beverages, punch, made with fruit juices and rinds, sugar and liquor, was also a very popular beverage in the eighteenth century. Unlike our modern Hawaiian Punch, in the eighteenth century punch was considered as genteel as imported tea. It was routinely served before or after meals and during an evening’s activities. In fact, a punch bowl was often a sign of hospitality. The Boston merchant Harrison Gray Otis, for example, owned a ten-gallon blue and white bowl filled and placed on his stair landing every afternoon so that his visitors would not be thirsty.



The origins of punch are not clear. Some historians contend that the term punch was Hindi, learned in India as early as 1632 by the British who were trading and colonizing there. In Hindi, “panch” means five and the drink’s name might have been derived from its five ingredients: tea, arrack, sugar, lemons, and water. Another argument suggests the word “puncheon” as the origin. Punch in early references is frequently a sailor’s drink of limejuice, sugar and water mixed with a ration of rum doled out from a puncheon. It is not really clear

where the term punch came from but according to Peter Brown, “What is clear is that punch was promptly introduced into England once stable trading patterns developed with the Far East from the 1680s onwards.”

Eighteenth-century punch was typically made with similar ingredients, even though there were many regional and national variations. Arrack, an Eastern liquor distilled from molasses or rice, was the primary ingredient in early versions of punch. John Jordon of Maryland must have used arrack for his punch because his 1771 inventory lists *2 cases of arrack the bottles some of them broke and the arrack not fit for use*. By the mid-eighteenth century, brandy, white wine, a variety of citrus juices, and sugar seemed to be the most common ingredients, along with rum or gin, Madeira or other wines and milk. Lord Botetourt must have served punch frequently when he entertained because his inventory listed twenty-seven bottles of arrack and eleven dozen bottles of peach brandy. In England, punch was consumed at room temperature,

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<p>Carlyle House</p> <p>Mary Ruth Coleman, Director Heidi Miller, Curator Caroline Neely, Curator of Education</p>



Punch (con't)



but in America some recipes called for the use of ice.

Lime punch was the most popular version of the drink and this beverage was aptly described as “sower punch.” Phillip Vickers Fithian, the tutor at Nomini Hall, writes, “Mr. Inspector dined with us again to day – we had after dinner, lime punch & Madaira.” In 1775, when Daniel Smith, City Tavern owner, made lime punch for Philadelphia’s Committee of Safety, he used 200 limes on one occasion and 100 on another. Another variety of punch was made from eggs and milk. Ben Franklin suggests this process to make milk punch, “Take 6 quarts of Brandy, and the rinds of 44 lemons pared very thin; steep the rinds in Brandy 24 hours, then strain it off. Put to it 4 quarts of water, 4 large nutmegs grated, 2 quarts of lemon juice, 2 pounds of double refined sugar. When the sugar is dissolv’d boil 3 quarts of milk and put to the rest hot as you take it off the fire, and stir it about. Let it stand 2 hours; then run it thro’ a jelly bag till it is clear; then bottle it off.” The *Cyclopedia London* in 1741 provides a more potent ‘punch for chambermaids’ that consisted of “4 parts brandy, two parts white wine, one part lime juice sharpened with a little orange juice; sugar to taste.”

Punch was typically served in a punch bowl. Punch ladles and

strainers were also important items required in the preparation of punch. Col. John Addison of Maryland listed *3 china punch bowls* on his 1765 inventory. Daniel Dulany, also of Maryland, listed *4 punch bowls, 2 punch ladles and 2 punch strainers* on his 1754 probate inventory. Punch was probably consumed at the Carlyle House because John Carlyle lists on his 1780 inventory *1 silver punch strainer and 2 silver punch ladles one broke*. In private homes punch was served in punch glasses using a punch ladle. John Jordon lists *3 1/2 dozen wine punch and beer glasses* on his 1771 inventory.

Punch bowls were sometimes used differently in the public sphere. Kym S. Rice in *Early American Taverns* writes “the scarcity of punch bowls and the lack of punch cups in early American tavern inventories suggest that punch bowls were shared between gentlemen.” A Frenchman reported in 1782 that, “one who is thirsty drinks himself and [then] passes it to his neighbor...in America one would pass for the most uncivil man if one refused to drink after one is offered it...” Not everyone liked this social practice. An Englishman visiting a tavern in Norfolk in 1785 complained, “the long legged Virginia planters...help themselves to any bowl of a stranger’s toddy and make no apology...”

Punch was such a popular beverage in the eighteenth century it

is hard to imagine why people stopped drinking it. The main draw back of this drink was the amount of labor required to produce it. Taking the fruit off the rinds, squeezing out the juice, mixing the sugar and spices all made the process labor intensive. It is no wonder that by the end of the eighteenth century serving punch fell out of fashion.

Sources Consulted:

- *Come Drink the Bowl Dry*, Peter Brown
- *Early American Taverns*, Kym Rice
- *The Festive Tradition*, Louise Conway Belden
- *The Art of Dining*, Sara Paston Williams

