



# What's Old is New Again

Boston's Bully Boy Distillers prove that yes, the Victorians knew best.

by Cassandra Landry

**HUB PUNCH**  
Is made of the best materials, joined in judicious proportions.  
**ITS USE SAVES EXPERIMENTING**  
A nip when fatigued is restful and satisfying.  
Licensed Grocers, Druggists and Dealers Sell Hub Punch in Sealed Bottles.  
Draw the cork and with fine ice serve it.  
**C. H. GRAVES & SONS,**  
Proprietors,  
35 Hawkins St., Boston, Mass.

**DELICIOUS DRINK,**  
is said to contain Only the Best  
Quality, Choice Fruit Juices  
and Granulated Sugar.  
CLEAR, or MIX WITH  
LEMONADE, SODA, or  
ICE WATER.  
HUB PUNCH is good at all times,  
and just the thing for use in  
MILITARY ENCAMPMENTS,  
ON YACHTS AND OCCASION PARTIES,  
SUNDAYS, HOLIDAYS AND WEDDINGS.  
Preparation of Chemists  
has proved it to be one of the  
most refreshing and healthful  
of all beverages.

**POWDER**  
Absolutely Pure.  
Made from Grape Cream Tartar.—No other pre-  
paration makes such light, salty hot breads, or  
luxurious pastries.—Can be eaten by Dyspeptics  
without fear of the ill results from heavy in-  
digestible food. Sold only in cans, by all Grocers.  
Royal Baking Powder Co., New York.  
418-17.

**Hub**  
**Punch**  
C. H. GRAVES & SONS.  
DRANK CLEAR AS A CORDIAL.

... was born in Sunder-  
... He was educated in  
... y. He came to Boston  
... owing entered the house  
... cturers of and dealers in  
... he remained until 1849,  
... f with the house of John  
... was connected for a  
... In 1861 he engaged in  
... subsequently he associated  
... sons Edward C. and George  
... A. Graves, and these two now carry on the business  
... under the firm name of C. H. Graves & Sons.  
... Their "Hub Punch" is one of their specialties.

The story of Bully Boy Distillers' historical beginnings has always been a popular yarn for fans of the two tallest, friendliest brothers and their award-winning whiskeys, vodka, and rum. When Will and Dave Willis stumbled upon a vault stocked with Prohibition-era spirits on their fourth-generation family farm a few years back, it kicked off a determined production of small-batch, quality hooch that has brightened the backbars of New England for the better.

As of this month, there's a new girl at the dance. It's called Hub Punch, and it's a revival of a liquor made seriously popular by the drinkers and carousers of the late 19th century.

After the subject of the original Hub Punch—a product of Boston’s C.H. Graves & Sons—was brought to their attention a year ago by bartender friends Fred Yarm and Stephen Shellenberger (of Cambridge’s Russell House Tavern and Brookline’s Pomodoro, respectively), the two set their teeth and started digging. We’re talking full Nic Cage in *National Treasure* digging. With less guns and Sean Bean, but you know, history! It didn’t look promising at the outset; most of what remains of the wholesaler and their punch are empty bottles floating around on eBay.

“One of the strange things about Hub Punch is that at a certain point in time, not surprisingly right around Prohibition, the historical record evaporates,” Dave Willis says. “Before Prohibition, there are advertisements for Hub Punch as far flung as Washington state. C.H. Graves was really pushing the product, and then it just disappears. So every nugget mentioning Hub Punch or C.H. Graves was gold.”

A major discovery in their research centered not around a recipe, but rather the origin of the name.

“I’d assumed the ‘Hub’ in Hub Punch was a reference to Boston,” he explains, “but the drink actually originated in a debaucherous outpost in upstate New York.”



A clipping from Puck, vol. 7, 1880.



The Hub House. © Thousand Islands Museum Collection, Clayton, NY.

That outpost was the old Hub House, a hotel in Thousand Island Park. From 1877 until 1883, business was booming. The bar here was particularly popular, since the surrounding areas were dry at the time, but in December of 1883, a defective chimney sparked a blaze that took down the entire building in minutes. The party was finally over, but twenty some-odd years later, Hub House nightlife was remembered in this 1902 article from *The Ogdensburg Daily*:

*“Midway between Thousand Island Park and Grenell Island, it [Hub House] was a convenient place for dancing parties and many are the stories told of days and nights of hilarity at the famous hostelry. The young people of Thousand Island Park, who enjoyed dancing, which was at that time strictly tabooed by the management of the association, would frequently join the many parties at this place as well as others from surrounding islands, and trip the “light” till the light of the morning.”* Trip the light, indeed, young hooligans.

Putting aside the sheer phenomenal nature of this next sentence—“Many will also recall the popularity of the famous “Hub

Punch” dispensed there, as well as other concoctions which a sleek “mixerologist” was constantly springing to tickle the palate of his customers”—the article goes on to note that though the name “Hub Punch” became famous after Graves adopted it, Bart Keether, an Oswego bartender, was originally responsible for the smash hit. As for the commercial brand, “it was never equal to the original,” the article assures. Maybe a mixerologist can hook you up with some turn of the century artisanal ice for that burn, Chester Hatch Graves.

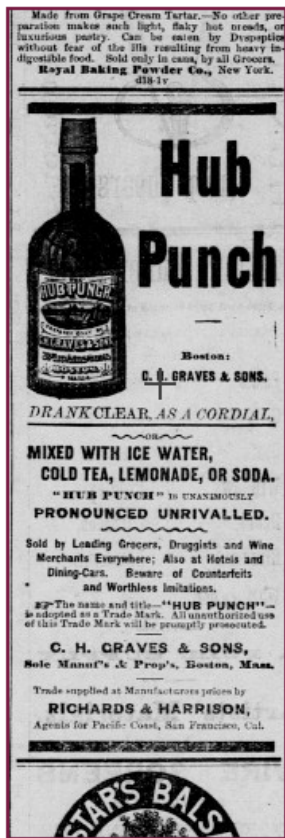
And that’s where the Hub Punch story dries up. Now, 100 years down the line, it’s the Willis brothers’ turn to take a crack at it. Question is, how?

“We were essentially working backwards. Since there was no record of the original recipe, we consulted historical accounts of Hub Punch, old advertisements, and the original bottle label to decipher what it could have tasted like, partly based on what people were drinking with it,” Willis explains. “On the original bottle, it called to be enjoyed with lemonade, iced tea or soda water, and a vintage advertisement noted that it had a fruit component.”

To make the modern-day Hub Punch, Bully Boy’s Boston Rum is steeped with orange peel, lemon peel and raspberry, then infused with a secret assortment of botanicals and herbs. Yes, it’s a secret. You don’t think that sly bastard Bart Keether would blab his formula either, do you?

GRAVES, CHESTER HATCH, was born in Sunderland, Mass., Jan. 5, 1818. He was educated in the schools of that locality. He came to Boston in 1844, and the year following entered the house of Seth W. Fowle, manufacturers of and dealers in patent medicines. Here he remained until 1849, when he associated himself with the house of John T. Hearn, with which he was connected for a period of twelve years. In 1861 he engaged in business for himself. Subsequently he associated with him in business his sons Edward C. and George A. Graves, and these two now carry on the business under the firm name of C. H. Graves & Sons. Their “Hub Punch” is one of their specialties.

An excerpt from “Boston of To-Day: A Glance at its History and Characteristics. With Biographical Sketches and Portraits of Many of Its Professional and Business Men,” by Edwin Monroe Bacon, circa 1892.



An ad for C.H. Graves & Sons  
Hub Punch appears in a clipping  
from the Sacramento Daily  
Union, Volume 3, Number 68, 11  
May 1881.



For those of you currently living it up in Boston, **Bully Boy** will be throwing a bit of a shindig—maybe not quite so raucous as a Hub House party, but still hoppin'—to celebrate the release of Hub Punch on Wednesday, Oct 22. It's at your favorite bar, **The Hawthorne**, so you should probably go. Buy your tickets [here](#).