

Follow-up article

Eichelberger Distillery and the Eichelberger Dew Drop Bottle

By Mike McKillop



Leonard Eichelberger



Originally Dills tavern, in 1800 it was sold to Leonard Eichelberger

The Eichelberger Distillery at Dills Tavern in Dillsburg, Pa. spanned several eras on the timeline of American history. Dills Tavern was established before the American Revolution near the northernmost gap of the South Mountains. Settlers heading west to the frontier passed through the crossroads with local farmers and drovers who all stopped into the tavern for meals and whiskey on their travels.

In 1794, amid the controversy of the Whiskey Rebellion in western Pennsylvania, the third generation of Dills converted the log tavern to the stately stone tavern seen today. In 1800, the Scotch-Irish Dills sold the tavern to the German Eichelbergers. The new proprietor was Leonard Eichelberger. Before 1800, small farm distilleries operating copper pot stills dominated whiskey making in America and provided whiskey and other spirits for local consumption.

After 1800, farm distilleries became less widespread and production more dominated by larger efficient distillers. The Eichelberger Distillery was no exception. Prior to the purchase of Dills, the Eichelbergers had been tavern keepers and wagon builders, in addition to distillers. These additional assets helped them expand the distillery business and take advantage of the means to transport their rye, corn, barley spirits to distant markets like Baltimore. From their old ledger records list the amounts of grain they

purchased for the distillery indicate that their whiskey mash was rye, corn and barley. So they made a Maryland-style rye. This makes sense since it was to be sold in Baltimore. It also makes sense because Leonard Eichelberger, the proprietor and distiller, was from Frederick, Maryland. It was barreled and shipped to Baltimore by wagon taking ten days.

Today, the Eichelberger Distillery at Dills Tavern is a state park and museum operated by the Northern York County Historical & Preservation Society.

As for the Eichelberger Dew Drop bottle, I believe that the rye whiskey in the bottle came from the Eichelberger Distillery. In whiskey terms, the phrase Dew Drop comes from the dew of aging whiskey in barrels which is considered the best whiskey around. So it is possible that a hogshead or barrel of Eichelberger Rye aging for 20-plus years was used for that bottle, and that it was bottled exclusively for Truett, Jones & Arrington for their involvement with the San Francisco Vigilante Committee.

This also makes sense since Miers F. Truett was born in Pennsylvania on October 6, 1816. The background of the Dew Drop bottle is truly extraordinary and is now a piece of American history.

