

PRICHARD'S DISTILLERY

Tennessee, United States



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Contributed By Brad Martens, Columbia, Missouri - Whisky University: The Lincoln County Process is a requirement for today's Tennessee distilleries to meet the classification "Tennessee Whiskey". However, there is one distillery that has been granted an exemption from this requirement - and today, is the only distillery in the state of Tennessee to not produce their whiskey using these guidelines. The distillery CEO & Master Distiller Phil Prichard opened the distillery in 1997 in search of creating America's first rum in over 250 years, but credits his fifth-generation grandfather Benjamin Prichard with being an early pioneer for distilling whiskey in Tennessee's Davidson County in the late 1700's. Philip Edward Prichard was born on August 17th, 1939 in Memphis Tennessee. He worked as a dental technician for some 30 years before moving to Vermont in 1980 - two years later he would marry his wife Connie. After becoming bored with his career he was presented with an opportunity to purchase a small farm in upstate New York. Included in the purchase was a Christmas shop. Both he and Connie operated the storefront for roughly 6 years, but a three-fold increase in property taxes forced the two to make the decision to close the store and move back to Tennessee in 1993. Phil found work in Tennessee working for a telemarketing company in sales. After being terminated from his position - despite often leading the team in sales, he recalled a past conversation with his cousin Mack Prichard. Mack shared that his father had a belief rum could be made with a pot still using sorghum molasses. After doing some research, Phil had converted his wife Connie's old canning pot into a still and was soon making batches of rum from sorghum molasses on their stovetop. After winning Connie's approval ? Phil reached out to an old classmate from high school by the name of Victor Robilio, whose family was in the wine and spirits business in Memphis. It was Robilio who would motivate Phil to take his leap into the spirits business saying it was one of the finest rums in the world. One major obstacle to an upstart was that only two Tennessee counties allowed distilling at the time. The two counties were home to the likes of Jack Daniels in Moore County and George Dickel in Coffee County. With Phil seeking a home and permit for distilling - he met with the county aldermen for Coffee County seeking the necessary referendum. A couple of county officials not in favor of another distillery shared their disapproval with local media outlets - however, the news would backfire and provide free advertisement for Prichard. Unbeknownst to Prichard, Lincoln County had gone through the referendum process in the mid-seventies and came calling. The county's mayor



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Jerry Mansfield would pitch an old school house in Kelso Tennessee as a potential destination. Ironically, its location is just a few miles south of where Phil's triple great grandfather Benjamin distilled whiskey nearly two centuries prior. Prichard's Distillery would be the first legal distillery in Tennessee in nearly fifty years and only the third since prohibition. Prichard's Distillery would incorporate in the Fall of 1997 and begin distilling rum in December 1999. Prior to going all in, Phil would learn that sorghum molasses was not an option from his friends at the TTB, but identified a quality replacement to continue moving forward with production. Equipment and volume are important with start-ups - thus, Phil reached out to Todd Sherman with Vendome to locate a larger still to increase production. After locating a slightly used still in Vermont and personally transporting it back to Tennessee - Phil used his soldering skills learned as a dental technician to get the still installed and functional. Rum would be his gateway spirit and a much-needed revenue source to further invest in growth. When production commenced, they quickly identified other products they could make without having to age them - including Sweet Lucy. Sweet Lucy was a popular bourbon liqueur born in a duck blind and frequent companion amongst duck hunters whom following their hunts would take a swig and enjoy its peach, apricot, and orange elixirs. Sweet Lucy accounted for greater than 50% of Prichard's sales. In approximately 2005, Prichard would lean on his family roots to begin distilling whiskey. Despite having success in the rum business - it was time to branch out and diversify his spirit selection. Following in his triple great grandfather Benjamin Prichard's footsteps he used white corn in his mashbill for producing whiskey - learning that white corn on a red cob was what was farmed in Tennessee during the late 1700's. This was different than other distilleries who used the more common yellow corn. Additionally, he chose to use a pot still to mimic production knowing the column and coffee still had not yet been invented. In 2013, the State of Tennessee would pass new regulations related to the whiskey and bourbon industry called the Lincoln County Process - without much pushback from current distilleries and distillers. The process involved filtering whiskey through hardwood charcoal before being aged to remove impurities and unwanted flavors from the whiskey. The law was vague with little additional requirements - however, Phil Prichard was not having it. He would get his crash course in politics and find himself before the state defending his distillery and grandfather Benjamin Prichard's distillation process pre-prohibition. Prichard's Distillery was successful with getting an exemption and today is the only distillery in the State of Tennessee to NOT be



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held to the Lincoln County Process distilling guidelines for Tennessee Whiskey. A win for Phil Prichard and his team at the distillery, but maybe more importantly a great marketing tool for his triple great grandfather's legacy and the brand today. For anyone looking to visit a distillery on the Tennessee Whiskey Trail today - you will almost certainly hear of the Lincoln County Process and its requirement for distilleries throughout the state. Whether the Prichard name is mentioned, nearly everyone is aware that there is an exception to this rule being the Prichard's Distillery and Phil Prichard deserves credit for defending his family's legacy.

Owner : Phil Prichard

www.prichardsdistillery.com/home.html

