

## *A GLORIOUS TEMPERANCE TREAT*

After the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution prohibiting the sale, use, import or export of intoxicating beverages in 1919, the Volstead Act was passed by Congress to further define it. Many viewed the Act as a disaster and some viewed it as a way of making money illegally, but a few industrious entrepreneurs took advantage of the Volstead Act to promote a purely honest business.

One of these enterprising men was Andrew Baker of Germantown. Baker had an apple orchard on his farm near the Germantown train station and made his own cider. He wanted an outlet on the main road to sell his cider -- something that would catch the eye of the passer-by and advertise his product at the same time – a product that was, incidentally, free from alcohol. So, in the early 1920s he built a roadside stand on the busy thoroughfare of Frederick Road (Rt. 355). His stand was in the form of a red, white and blue cider barrel the size of a small house, and in the popular Burma-Shave tradition, on the front of the barrel was the following verse:

*We bow before the Volstead Act  
And serve it to you sweet  
Tis better far than old and hard  
This glorious temperance treat*

Prohibition was repealed in 1933, and the cars speed by faster these days, but fresh apple cider, apples and apple butter were still sold at the Cider Barrel until 2002. To make sure this landmark would never be changed it was made a county Historic Site in 1989 as a unique example of novelty architecture.

In the 1920s Andrew Baker lived with his three maiden sisters, Anna, Louise, and Sophia, on his estate, Ballincara (where the Liberty Heights townhouses are today). After a jaunt to the Klondike, where he operated a general store during the gold rush, he had returned to the east in 1906 and established the A.H. Baker Insurance Company of Washington, D.C. In 1927 he founded the Germantown Bank, across from the train station. Baker was an amateur horticulturist and planted the grounds of the estate with English gardens and many exotic plants and trees -- as well as an apple orchard for making his special cider, and a peach orchard for making his special brandy.

The distillery house where he made his cider and brandy is still standing as the first house on the left on the old part of Liberty Heights Road. After his death the house was made into a chapel for the St. Rose group of Black Catholics, and is now a residence.

Baker found that the Cider Barrel was a great success and as word got around, became a favorite stopping place for motorists on the Frederick Road.



**The Cider Barrel,  
Germantown, Maryland**

In 1928 Minnie Underwood, opened a sandwich shop next to the Cider Barrel. Minnie's sister, Martha Cross, a widow, helped out at the sandwich shop and along with her came her twelve-year old son, William. Both Minnie and Martha had been school teachers in Georgia. In 1930 Minnie married Christopher Norton who was a marine engineer and for several years had made a business of buying oranges in Florida and bringing them up to the Washington area to sell.

The Cider Barrel did a brisk business from Labor Day to Christmas -- many people came up from the city to view the fall colors in the countryside and stopped at the "barrel" for lunch and to purchase cider and apples to take home.

Hard times came to Andrew Baker in the stock market crash of 1929 and much of his estate, including the Cider Barrel, had to be sold to pay off debts after his death in 1930. Christopher and Minnie Norton bought the Cider Barrel and Baker's foreman for the operation, Carroll Brown, stayed on with the Nortons for a few years. They had the cider pressed by Fred Marth at his place over on Clopper Road. About 1931 Marth also built the curving open stand attached to the Barrel where the apples and cider were sold.

When Christopher Norton died in 1934, Minnie and Martha continued the operation. Young Bill Cross was then 18 years old and, as the man of the family, ran the business, while the two widowed school teachers did the cooking and managed the sandwich shop. Business did so well that they soon built a fine big restaurant next to the Cider Barrel, and purchased twelve adjacent acres where they built "modern tourist cottages, with toilets, lavatory, and hot showers," according to an advertising postcard. Bill also put in a cider press so the cider could be made fresh on the premises.

People came from miles around for a taste of Minnie's fried chicken and the fresh apple cider. The Cider Barrel fruit stand, restaurant and cottages thrived for many years. Bill went away to college, then worked for the Navy as a civilian mechanical engineer. He was married and moved to Bethesda in 1941, but when his mother and aunt decided to retire in 1946 he took over the Cider Barrel business.

When I-270 was built, taking the traffic so essential to a roadside business away, Cross tore down the tourist cottages and built the mobile home park next to the fruit stand -- the first mobile home park in the county.

Minnie died in 1970 and Martha died in 1982. Both are buried at Neelsville Presbyterian Church. Bill Cross, "Mr. Cider Barrel," continued to operate the stand in the same tradition as when he was first introduced to Mr. Baker's cider at the age of twelve -- selling cider that was fresh, cold and made in a building behind the Barrel with a secret recipe mixing a variety of apples that he never divulged.

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Original Oct. 12, 1993, re-edited 2010

*Thanks to William Cross for information*