



WHISKEY WITH A LEGACY

A PREMIUM WHISKEY
BRAND HONORS THE LIFE
OF FORMER SLAVE
NATHAN “NEAREST” GREEN

History can be as vital to whiskey as grain. And for Uncle Nearest, heritage has not only paved the way for the Tennessee whiskey brand, but it’s also been quintessential to the label’s success.

Established in 2017 by author and real estate investor Fawn Weaver with her husband, Keith Weaver, Uncle Nearest honors the legacy of Nathan “Nearest” Green, also known as Uncle Nearest Green (Uncle Nearest to friends and family). Green was the first African-American master distiller on record, who lived from 1820 to about 1890.

Though Fawn developed a fondness for the spirit while sipping her first bourbon neat, her devotion ran deeper. “My passion for the whiskey business had very little to do with the whiskey itself,” she says. “It was the ability to use whiskey to tell a story of unity during the most racially divided time in our country’s history that flamed the fire.”

It was Fawn’s curiosity that motivated her to launch Uncle Nearest, which became a standout among whiskey drinkers, landing it a slew of awards in 2019 and 2020.

Likewise, her deep-rooted desire to bring Nearest Green’s story to light was the brand’s inspiration.

She was so curious she trekked from Los Angeles to Lynchburg, Tenn., on her 40th birthday, determined to uncover the lost tale of Tennessee whiskey. Through extensive research, countless conversations, and the expertise of archaeologists, genealogists, historians, archivists, and conservators, Weaver unraveled the untold narrative, piece by piece. “We knew we’d be creating a brand with one of the most remarkable backstories in American whiskey history,” she says.

As a slave, Green crafted whiskey on preacher Dan Call’s

farm in Lynchburg, and became known locally for producing the best in the area. At Call’s request, Green taught a young boy named Jasper Newton—who would become recognized as Jack Daniel—his art of whiskey-making.

After the boy grew up, he took over the farm and its distilling operations, only to hire Green to be his first master distiller. The longstanding partnership between the two families would endure postemancipation, and even after Green’s retirement, as his sons and grandsons went on to distill Jack Daniel’s whiskey too.

Though largely uncredited, Green perfected what’s known as the “Lincoln County process,” or sugar maple charcoal filtering, most likely brought from his West African ancestors who filtered water and purified food by the same method. The process is what differentiates Tennessee whiskey from Kentucky bourbon and what lends the spirit its rich yet mellow flavor.

“Rarely do you taste anything at 100 proof that has such an incredible smoothness,” says Kate Jerkens, Uncle

Nearest’s senior vice president of sales and marketing, when she speaks of the brand’s 1856 Premium Whiskey, the bottle that jump-started the label. “It is enjoyable neat or on the rocks, but also stands up in classic cocktails.”

Carrying the torch for the Green family, Victoria Eady Butler—the world’s first African-American master blender and the great-great-granddaughter of Nearest Green—curates the 1884 Premium Small Batch Whiskey. “Everyone has been so drawn to this expression due to Victoria’s connection to Nearest,” Jerkens says. “They become fans of her flavor profile, which has signature hints of vanilla and tobacco, with a subtle, sweet finish.”

While the 1820 Single Barrel Edition’s popularity also holds firm, Jerkens calls this whiskey a unicorn, noting that only a few people manage to secure the bottle each year. “Every barrel of 1820 is unique but will always be a minimum of 108 proof and at least 11 years old,” she says. Less than 1% of Uncle Nearest barrels are chosen as single barrels, and each is handpicked

by the founders and then approved by a panel of whiskey industry experts.

These days, Sand Creek Farms, a horse-farm turned distillery occupying 270 acres in Shelbyville, Tenn., about 16 miles from Lynchburg, is devoted to producing the same smooth Tennessee whiskey that Nearest Green did generations ago. Meanwhile, the Weavers purchased Dan Call’s 316-acre property in 2016, restoring the farm, now a historic site open to friends of the brand.

“Outside of the extraordinary history, it’s really about the legacy we are building,” Jerkens says. “From day one, Fawn has told us all that we are building a brand to outlive us all.”

Beyond overseeing the lauded spirits collection, the Weavers spearhead Nearest Green Foundation, a nonprofit providing full tuition and books for all of Green’s college-bound descendants. The Legacy Scholarship honors the legendary whiskey maker while offering assistance for undergraduate studies, as well as advanced degrees, ensuring the life and accomplishments of Nathan “Nearest” Green will prevail. ▣

Fawn Weaver, shown on opposite page, started her whiskey company, Uncle Nearest, in 2017. The company name pays homage to the first African-American master distiller on record, Nathan “Nearest” Green.



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