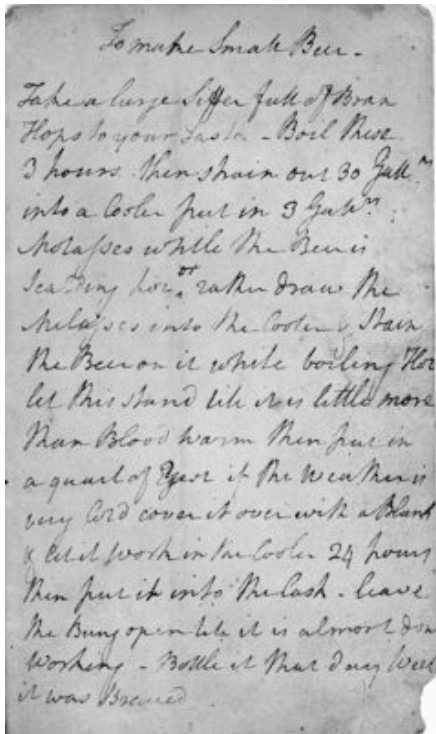


# SAVEUR

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## Drinking George Washington's Beer

By Leah Koenig



Last night I tasted history – or rather, I sipped it, in the form of a glass of beer brewed from George Washington's personal recipe. That's right, America's founding father was an avid home brewer (not to mention a whiskey distillery owner), and in 1757 at the age of 25, he scribbled his recipe for "Small Beer" – an English-style porter – into a notebook for reference and safekeeping.

Today that recipe resides at the New York Public Library, where it is part of their mammoth archival collection. In celebration of the 100th birthday of the library's flagship building on 42nd street, they teamed up with Shmaltz Brewing Company (known for their HE'BREW Beer and Coney Island Craft Lager lines) to unearth Washington's historic beer recipe and bring it back to life in the form of Fortitude's Founding Father Brew.

GW's version called for boiled bran, yeast and molasses, making it sound more like Sylvester Graham's breakfast than a tantalizing brew. Shmaltz Brewing Company's Jennifer Dickey admitted that when she first attempted to brew the recipe as written, it was overwhelmingly syrupy and bitter – more like mead than beer. Like other recipes of its era, the instructions are vague, inconsistent in their formatting and assuming plenty of prior beer making experience on the part of the reader – though Washington does offer some helpful pointers, like allowing the boiled beer to "stand till it is little more than blood warm" before adding yeast.

Not surprisingly, brewers Pete Taylor and Josh Knowlton, who spent last summer at Shmaltz's nano-brewery on Coney Island, took a few liberties when recreating the brew for public consumption. They kept the molasses, though significantly less of it, and added Brown Malt and Northern Brewer Hops to ramp up the beer's depth and complexity. The resulting porter is a rich cherry-brown with a sweet, roasty flavor, mellow carbonation (the alcohol content clocks in at just under 6%), and a gentle, tangy finish.

Taylor and Knowlton brewed a modest 30 gallons (about two kegs worth) of the beer in total, which will be served at a gala honoring the New York Public Library's centennial next week. And with any luck, they might just be convinced to run a second, larger production – a delicious toast to hops and history.

*Want to make George Washington's beer yourself? Here's the recipe as written, with a few clarifications:*

### George Washington's "Small Beer"

To Make Small Beer: Take a large Sifter [Sifter] full of Bran, Hops to your Taste. Boil these 3 hours then strain out 30 Gall[ons] into a cooler put in 3 Gall[ons] Molasses while the Beer is Scalding hot or rather draw the Melasses [sic] into the cooler & St[r]ain the Beer on it while boiling Hot. let this stand till it is little more than Blood warm then put in a quart of Yea[s]t if the Weather is very Cold cover it over with a Blank[et] & let it Work in the Cooler 24 hours then put it into the Cask -- leave the bung open till it is almost don[e] Working -- Bottle it that day Week it was Brewed."

