

## LOCAL WHISKEY REBEL

1557 Thompson's Station Road West  
Thompson's Station - 615-478-2191

Tasting Bar & Retail Store hour Mon.-Fri. 10am-4pm & Sat. 12pm-5pm  
Tours are available Mon.-Fri. 3pm & Sat. 12pm, 1pm, 2pm, 3pm and 4pm

- [www.hclarkdistillery.com](http://www.hclarkdistillery.com) -

 /HClarkDistillery  /hclarkdistillery  /hclarkdistillery

# It Takes A Village To Raise The Right



The inclination to share a bottle and a dream began in childhood for Heath Clark, before he even knew what whiskey or gin were.

Though prohibition ended in 1933, it still took seven years from idea to sale of H Clark Distillery's first bottle of legal spirits in Tennessee's Williamson County. The Temperance Movement of the 1800s rendered Tennessee effectively and legally dry before federal prohibition did, with the exception of Nashville, Memphis, Chattanooga and LaFollette Counties, where liquor could still be enjoyed until 1920. By 1917, the distilling black market was in full swing: a hush-hush endeavor that took place on the quiet banks of outlying creeks and other areas, far from the eyes of the authorities who weren't on the take and already well known to those who were. Despite the nation having moved on long ago, it took until 2009 for distilling restrictions to be reexamined and lifted in the State of Tennessee. But it wasn't without work. It took the right combination of people and timing to finally bring the state's distilling industry from the past firmly into the future.

Nashville's Darek Bell of Corsair Distillery and former Williamson County State Representative Mike Williams of Collier and McKeel Distillery partnered with Heath Clark to advocate for changing the antiquated law. "Whiskey is one of Tennessee's biggest exports," Clark said, "and there are only three people making it. No one really did it. We wanted to change that. I wanted to

change that." Not just for the sake of selling his own brand of whiskey, but for the sake of the farmers and small business owners who just needed a chance, much like he did.

Despite boutique distilling exploding in growth from 24 small distilleries at the turn of the 21st Century to over 1000 by the year 2013, Tennessee was stuck. A mix of political molasses, corruption and just plain procrastination had kept the state stagnating until Heath Clark and crew combined their efforts, drawing on Clark's law knowledge and Williams' experience with the legislative mire. Fiercely debated, a bill proposed by Joe Carr (R-Murfreesboro) stewed on the Tennessee House floor for days while its counterpart in the State Senate carried by Bill Ketron (R-Murfreesboro) waited to pass. It finally did, but the struggles for Clark weren't over with the passage of the bill.

An initial crack at opening his own distillery fell apart for Clark in the early days after the bill passed, leading him to pursue practicing law on his own in 2010 while he watched with heartache as others surged forward, reaping the benefits of his advocacy. But it wasn't all for naught. The best lessons are the ones life teaches, a fact Clark can attest to. In 2012, he began work on renovating his current space in Thompson's Station. In 2014 he finally became licensed.

Now, a framed image hangs in the lobby of H Clark Distillery in Thompson's Station, paying homage

to the hard work it took for Clark and his two counterparts to bring a fond dream to fruition. Though the practice of law is what led him to his dream, the hard-won distillery is where Clark aims to spend most of his time these days. The making of his smooth, unique brands of Tennessee whiskey and gin are still painstaking endeavors undertaken by just a few people here, among the aged barrels that are a far cry from the massive Jack Daniel's distillery Clark had grown up idolizing, just a breath from his childhood home in Coffee County. Though he used to marvel at the caramel-colored corn mash and saccharine aroma that would one day become an international brand, there's something so much sweeter about it when it's your own.

