

Coffee Talk

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Normally, I begin my Athenaeum paper preparation much in advance and although that early preparation does not translate into any appreciable effect on the quality of the paper, at least I get the job done with time to spare. This year, however, I have had more irons in the fire than I have cared to handle and things just did not get done in the usual manner. For this, I apologize in advance, for the quality of this presentation will probably sink to an even lower standard than I have already established.

As usual, subject matter is always hard to come up with as one tries to think of a topic which some or all might find interesting. This year, I decided I did not really care about that, I just needed to get it done and knew it would be a challenge to have anything to present at all. With that in mind, I reflected on an NPR radio presentation that I heard while traveling some 5 or 6 years ago. I found it interesting at the time and actually thought that, in this day of instantly retrievable information that I could find that discussion, plagiarize the whole thing and be done. Unfortunately, I was not computer savvy enough to pull that off, and was forced to do my own research in an effort to prepare an inferior presentation on the same subject. Tonight, I would like to enlighten you about a subject, which unlike turkey hunting or betting on horse races, we all have some experience. The title of my paper is "Coffee Talk."

Civilization, in its onward march, has produced only three important non-alcoholic beverages – the extract of the tea plant, the extract of the cocoa bean, and the extract of the coffee bean. Beans and leaves – these are the vegetable sources of the world's favorite non-alcoholic table beverages. Of the two, tea leaves lead in total amount consumed; coffee

beans are second, cocoa beans a distant third. But in international commerce, coffee beans occupy a far more important position than either of the others, being imported into non-producing countries to twice the extent of tea leaves.

Coffee is universal in its appeal. All nations do it homage. It has become recognized as a human necessity. It is no longer a luxury or an indulgence; it is a corollary of human energy and human efficiency. People love coffee because of its two-fold effect – the pleasurable sensation and the increased efficiency it produces.

Coffee has an important place in the rational diet of all civilized peoples of the earth. It is a democratic beverage. Not only is it the drink of a fashionable society; it is also a favored beverage of the men and women who do the world's work, whether they are toiling with brain or brawn. It has been acclaimed “the most grateful lubricant known to the human machine,” and “the most delightful taste of all nature.”

To explore all aspects of the subject of coffee from its roots, if you will, to the preparation of your daily Skinny Mocha Caramel Macchiato would be exhausting to all of us. After all, the subject is not as interesting as say, salt, for example. What I would like to do is primarily inform you of the historical aspects of coffee becoming our favorite drink and also discuss some, hopefully, interesting facts of how it happened.

It is reported that the coffee plant originated from the highland forests of Ethiopia around 858 AD. It is believed that the first plants were found growing wild in the province of Kaffa, from where coffee gets its name. Legend has it that a goatherder named Kaldi noticed his goats behaving in a bizarre manner. They were bleating loudly and chasing each other

about, quite full of energy. Kaldi observed, as well, that that they were eating red berries from nearby bushes. Kaldi was feeling a little tired himself and thought he might try some of the berries as well. To his surprise and delight, his fatigue turned into a new-found burst of energy.

Kaldi, feeling these berries were “heaven sent”, filled his pockets and proceeded to the monastery. He advised the Abbott there that the berries had a wonderful energizing effect on both he and his goats. The Abott was not amused, condemned the berries as the “Devil’s Work” and hurled them into the fire pit.

Soon after, the smell of the roasting berries filled the pious hall. The Abbott, having second thoughts, ordered a monk to retrieve the beans from the fire. He raked the beans from the fire, stomping on them to extinguish the embers and placed the now-crushed beans in a jug, covering them with hot water to preserve their divine goodness. The Abbott took a sip from the jug and sampled the first coffee. From that day on, the monks vowed to drink coffee daily so that they would not become drowsy during their long devotions. That is a true story. I read it on Wikipedia.

No one is exactly sure when coffee was discovered. There is some evidence that between 550-850 AD, a nomadic mountain tribe, known as Oromo, mixed ground coffee with ghee, a clarified butter, to make sort of a primitive Power Bar. The tribe’s warriors consumed them to heighten their aggressiveness and to increase stamina during battle. To this day, similar bars are still eaten in Kaffa and Sidamo in Ethiopia.

There are other authorities who claim that coffee originated from the Arabian

Peninsula, rather than Ethiopia and that coffee was cultivated in Yemen around 575 AD. It is more likely, however, that coffee spread to Yemen through Sudanese slaves, who ate the beans to help them stay alive as they rowed ships across the Red Sea between Africa and the great Arabian port of its day, Mocha.

The oldest documents describing the beverage coffee were written around the 10th century. Two Arabian philosophers, Rhazes and Avicenna of Buckham both refer to a drink they call "Bunchum," thought to probably be coffee. This literature primarily centered around the medicinal properties of coffee.

The Koran forbids Muslims from drinking alcohol. The soothing and stimulating effects of coffee made it a popular substitute for wine. The very first coffeehouses are said to have been established in Mecca. Known as Kaveli Kanes, these were public places where Muslims could socialize and discuss religion.

By the late 16th century, the use of coffee was widespread throughout Arabia, North Africa, and Turkey. Coffee was considered as important as bread and water; so much so that a law was passed in Turkey making it grounds for a divorce if a husband refused his wife coffee.

Wherever Islam went, coffee followed. With the expansion of the Ottoman Empire, coffee quickly spread to the Eastern Mediterranean. Not everyone was a fan of coffee, however. Observers noticed that people drinking alcohol would just get drunk and sing and be jolly; whereas coffee drinkers remained sober and, therefore, must be plotting against the government. Sultan Murad IV, a ruler of the Ottoman Empire, was not a Starbucks fan. Under his rule, the consumption of coffee became a capital offense. He was so intent on

eradicating coffee that he would disguise himself as a commoner and stalk the streets of Istanbul with a 100-pound broadsword. Unfortunate coffee drinkers were decapitated as they sipped.

His successor was much more lenient. First offense was a mild beating. Caught with coffee a second time, the perpetrator was sewn into a leather bag and tossed into the river. But people still drank coffee. Old habits die hard.

It is believed that no coffee seeds sprouted outside of Africa or Arabia until the 17th century. Coffee beans exported from Mocha were rendered infertile by boiling. Legend has it that a pilgrim named Baba Budan smuggled fertile beans out of Mecca strapped to his stomach, and returned to his native India, successfully cultivating them there.

Coffee spread to Europe around 1615. Venitian traders started to import coffee into Italy, and the consumption soon spread. This was not without controversy, however. A group of clerics tried to have coffee banned before it became widely available. They claimed that coffee was for Satan's followers and that those that drank it would lose their souls to the Devil. However, before Pope Clement VIII would ban coffee, he insisted on tasting it. After his first cup, the Pope was so impressed with the flavour, he reasoned that something so good could not possibly be the work of Satan and declared that coffee should be baptized to make it a Christian drink.

Coffeehouses soon opened throughout Europe, where people would meet, discuss theories and research, and share ideas. One of the world's largest insurance companies, Lloyd's of London, started as a coffeehouse in 1688. Lloyd would circulate amongst his

customers, primarily seafarers and merchants, creating a list of their insurance needs, drawing underwriters to his coffeehouse to sell insurance to those who needed it.

It is believed that the custom of tipping originated in English coffee houses. There would be a small box hung near the counter of these establishments with the words "To Insure Promptness" (TIP) inscribed on them. Customers dropped a coin in the box to encourage swift service.

Coffeehouses soon began to replace taverns as the meeting place of choice, as coffee was significantly cheaper than beer. Subsequently, not only did tavern owners mount an attack against coffeehouses, but women; who were banned from setting foot there, and upset that their men would spend more time there than at home with them, also protested. A document labeled "Men's Answer to the Women's Petition Against Coffee" was published, defending coffee and claiming that women should be thankful for coffee, as it was in fact, an aphrodisiac.

With the popularity of coffee increasing in Europe, the Europeans wanted to start producing it themselves. Up until this point, all coffee imported to Europe came from the Arabian Peninsula.

In 1616, Dutch spies smuggled a coffee plant out of Yemen and started small-scale cultivation. In 1658, they defeated the Portuguese to take control of Sri Lanka and coffee plantations soon spread all over Sri Lanka and into Southern India. In 1699, the Dutch started production in Indonesia when cuttings were transplanted from India to Java. By 1706, the first coffee beans from Java reached Amsterdam along with a plant for the Botanical Gardens.

A number of cuttings were made and these plants found their way into various Botanical Gardens throughout Europe as gifts to visiting dignitaries.

One such plant was given to King Louis XIV of France in 1714. Several years later, a French naval officer, Mathieu deClieu, while on leave from his station in Martinique, asked the King's permission to take a cutting from the plant back with him to Martinique. The King refused. Convinced that the Caribbean was indeed ideal coffee habitat, deClieu led a midnight raid on the King's Botanical Garden to secure a cutting.

He returned to Martinique with his cutting in tow in a glass cabinet, which he took onto the deck daily to get sun. During the long journey, they were attacked by pirates and went through a storm which shattered the cabinet. The potable water supply ran so low that he had to share his water ration with the plant. He did, however, successfully cultivate the plant and plantations spread all over Martinique. Coffee production was so successful in the Caribbean that King Louis XIV forgave deClieu for his transgressions and made him governor of the Antilles.

In 1727, the Brazilian government decided they needed to join the coffee market. Brazil sent Lieutenant Colonel Francisco deMello Palheta on a mission to acquire a coffee plant from the French. Palheta befriended the governor of French Guinea's wife. When Palheta left, the governor's wife presented him with a farewell gift, a coffee cutting concealed in a bouquet of flowers. From this shoot grew the world's largest coffee empire.

The period from the mid 19th to the late 20th century is considered the dark age of coffee, because it was during this era that coffee lost its Middle Eastern charm and became

commercialized and ordinary.

Traditionally, coffee was roasted at home or in coffeehouses in small batches which insured that the coffee was fresh. With the onset of the industrial revolution and mechanization, commercial roasters were invented capable of roasting much larger batches of coffee, so it was possible for the few to meet the coffee needs of the masses.

It was in the United States where coffee initially started to be commercialized. John Arbuckle, in 1865, marketed the first commercially-available packages of ground, roasted coffee. Others soon followed suit and by World War I, there were a number of roasters including Folgers, Hill Brothers, and Maxwell House. They offered consistent packaging and quality for the home at a price: freshness. It could be weeks or months before the end product ever reached the consumer.

Once ground, coffee quickly loses its flavour and should be consumed as soon as possible, at the very latest 48 hours, but this was the age of the brand, consistency ruled over quality.

As regional roasters turned into national roasters and then into international roasters, the pursuit of profit intensified. Traditionally, coffee came from the “Arabica” variety of the coffee bush. In the 1850’s, a different variety of bush, known as the “Robusta” was cultivated on the West Coast of Africa by the French and the Portuguese. These beans were cheaper because they were easier to grow and had an inferior flavour. To minimize production costs, coffee roasters started blending Robusta beans with Arabica beans and used shorter roasting times to reduce weight in shipping, stopping the coffee from fully developing its complex

flavour. With the coffee industry focused on price rather than quality, it was little wonder that coffee sales became stagnant. Coffee drinking became more about a caffeine fix than about savouring the taste, to be drunk in a break from work, rather to be enjoyed over conversation or while reading the newspaper. Subsequently, younger generations born in the 70's and 80's turned their backs on coffee and got their caffeine fix from Coca-Cola or Pepsi.

With large multinational coffee companies focused on coffee as a commodity, it allowed a new sector to emerge into the industry: Specialty Coffee. Specialty Coffee is really nothing new, rather the opposite; it stripped coffee making back down to the basics: pure Arabica beans roasted long enough for coffee to fully develop all of its flavour. There was always excellent coffee available if you knew where to look in the United States, but most were small cafes and shops that traded in high-quality beans and were frequented by immigrants.

In the 1960's, as baby boomers grew up, coffee cafés became a place to meet, read poetry, take drugs, and experience alternative culture. A shop in Berkely, California is widely credited as being the main inspiration for the emergence of the specialty sector.

Peet's Coffee and Tea Store was opened in 1966 by Alfred Peet. He developed a distinctive roasting style and opened his shop and built a loyal customer base. His coffee was so loved that he had his own set of groupies called "Peetniks."

Two of his customers were from Seattle named Jerry Baldwin and Gordon Bowker. They were inspired to open their own coffee store back in Seattle called Starbucks. Starbucks opened as a bean only store that built a loyal customer base during the 70's and 80's.

In 1984, Starbucks director of retail operations and marketing, Howard Schultz, tried

to convince Baldwin and Bowker to open the first Starbucks coffeehouse. He had just returned from Milan where there was a coffeehouse on every corner. He wanted to recreate this in the United States, but Baldwin and Bowker refused to get into the restaurant business.

Schultz left Starbucks in 1985 to open his own coffeehouse "Il Gioranale's." He used Starbucks beans to make espresso drinks and his business flourished, so much so, in fact, that he was able to buy Starbucks from Baldwin and Bowker. Schultz changed "Il Gioranale's" name to Starbucks and began to rapidly expand, opening over 1,000 stores in a decade.

Alfred Peet was also involved in Britain's first specialty coffeehouse. Scott and Ally Svenson, also from Seattle, wanted to open a coffeehouse in Covent Garden, London. They knew nothing about coffee and approached Steven Macatonia and Jeremy Torz, the founders of Union Coffee Roasters in London to get some help.

The Covent Garden coffeehouse, which they named the Seattle Coffee Company was an instant success and grew rapidly and expanded, causing such demand on Union Coffee Roasters that the two companies eventually merged. After opening 60 outlets throughout the United Kingdom, Starbucks then came knocking at their door looking for a way to get into the United Kingdom market. Soon, the Seattle Coffee Company was no more, with all its stores rebranded as Starbucks.

Today, Starbucks is the largest coffeehouse company in the world with more than 20,000 stores in 61 countries, including greater than 13,000 in the United States alone. One can lounge at a Starbucks with friends, exchanging ideas and enjoying free internet access while sipping your Iced Caramel Mocha Macchiato Skinny Latte Frappuccino, not remarkably

different from the first British coffeehouse in 1652.

The importance of coffee to the world's economy cannot be overstated. It is one of the most valuable primary products in world trade, in many years second in value only to oil as a source of foreign exchange to producing countries. Its cultivation, processing, trading, transportation, and marketing provide employment for hundreds of millions of people worldwide. Coffee is crucial to the economies and politics of many developing countries. For many of the world's least developed countries, exports of coffee account for more than 50% of their foreign exchange earnings.

To start my day without my morning cup of coffee is a fate I do not care to experience. Good coffee, carefully roasted and properly brewed produces a natural beverage that, for tonic effect, cannot be surpassed, even by its rivals, tea, cocoa, and Mountain Dew. Here is a drink that 97% of individuals find harmless and wholesome and without which life would be drab indeed – a pure, safe, and healthful stimulant compounded in nature's own laboratory and one of the chief joys of life!