01 / ORIGINS & PEOPLE

FEW Spirits

Evanston, Illinois / An alley, a still and an open mind

FEW founder Paul Hletko approached distilling with a family memory behind him. In a 2024 interview, he recalled his grandfather’s Czech brewery, confiscated during the Nazi occupation, and relatives murdered in concentration camps. A new drinks business honored that interrupted history. It was an act of continuity through making something new, rather than an attempt to reproduce the lost brewery. [S23]



Established: 2011, in Evanston, Illinois. The brand describes its first building as a former automotive workshop. [S01]

A city beyond its dry years

Evanston’s local prohibition tradition dated to an 1855 charter amendment. Liquor sales returned in 1972. FEW arrived decades later, bringing manufacturing into a city that had already changed its drinking laws. Distillation and permission to sell alcohol mark different chapters. The city’s social history and the producer’s founding deserve their own dates. [S03]

A founder’s changing role

The Spirits Business reported Hletko’s departure in January 2026, citing his own announcement. He remains the founder and a central figure in FEW’s history; older pages retaining his distiller title are read in that context. [S20]

Watercolors are symbolic interpretations, not exact buildings or documentary portraits.

02 / HISTORY & PLACES

More possibilities, one maker



2018 / A composed whiskey. American Whiskey combines FEW bourbon, rye and experimental cherrywood-smoked malt whiskey. Different styles become ingredients in one blend. [S08]

2021 / Time becomes an ingredient. A six-year, four-grain bourbon marks the tenth anniversary. Corn, rye, barley and wheat share the recipe. [S12]

2022 / A wider company. Heaven Hill acquires Samson & Surrey on February 1, bringing FEW into a broader portfolio of spirits brands. [S05]

2022 / Rye enters bond. September’s bonded-rye announcement specifies at least four years in new charred American oak, with an October rollout. [S15]

2023 / A musical encore. All Secrets Known returns with its six-month tequila-barrel finish and 101-proof strength. The reissue follows the original collaboration. [S16]

A workshop in the working city

At 918 Chicago Avenue, a brick alley leads to a converted industrial garage. Illinois tourism describes custom copper pot stills in this Evanston setting. The workshop scale is part of the story: whiskey production belongs to the working city as well as the rural landscape. [S04] The address anchors a story of urban making.

Selected chapters; the website retains the complete chronology and qualifications.

03 / WHISKEY, STORIES & SOURCES

Grain, yeast and a creative finish



FEW identifies saison-style yeast for its bourbon. Its suggested bourbon-and-hefeweizen pairing draws on a shared fermentation vocabulary. That brewer’s reference is a reminder that flavor begins before maturation, with decisions in the fermenter as well as the barrel. Beer pairing does not mean beer is blended into the standard bourbon. [S22]

Bottled in bond requires one distiller, one distillery and one distilling season, at least four years of aging, and bottling at 100 proof. This language offers a precise way to read a label. It identifies production constraints, while an experimental release’s description explains its own treatment. Neither should stand in for the other. [S24]

Cold Cut makes the proofing stage part of its identity. The 2019 launch describes cask-strength bourbon brought to 93 proof using cold-brew coffee. Coffee enters after maturation, rather than as grain in the mash or through a coffee-seasoned barrel. Following that sequence gives the expression a clearer story than simply calling it coffee whiskey. [S10]

Research notes & linked sources

Researched October 19, 2026. The website presents the complete illustrated history and qualifications. Specifications describe named releases. Watercolors are symbolic interpretations, not exact buildings, equipment or portraits.

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[S07] Brainville launch
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