01 / ORIGINS & PEOPLE

J.W. Rutledge

A lifetime of whiskey. Another chapter to write.



Experience before the label

Jim Rutledge entered the industry in 1966 and became Four Roses master distiller in January 1995. His later venture draws on that experience, without making its whiskey a Four Roses product. [S5, S17]

An old name returns

Cream of Kentucky traces its name to 1888. The modern company selected mature Kentucky bourbon to revive it. Its 2018 archive starts with an 11.5-year expression at 102 proof. [S1, S7]

Three partners, one ambition

In April 2016, Rutledge announced a distillery project with Stephen Camisa and Jon Mowry. Their plan combined production experience with commercial expertise. An announcement is distinct from an operating plant. [S5]

Keep the roles clear

J.W. Rutledge is the producer behind Cream of Kentucky and High Plains. Its official distillery page still describes a future campus. Released whiskeys have their own origins and specifications. [S1, S3]

02 / HISTORY & PLACES

The chapters that matter

1888 / 1933-1934

Cream of Kentucky begins with I. Trager; Schenley acquires the rights and reintroduces it. [S6, S7]

1966 / January 1995

Rutledge enters the industry, later becoming Four Roses master distiller. [S5, S17]

2001 / September 2015

Hall of Fame recognition precedes his departure from Four Roses. [S4]

April 2016

The partners announce the J.W. Rutledge distillery project near Louisville. [S5]

2018 / 2019

The revived brand archives 11.5-year and 12.3-year bourbons, both at 102 proof. [S7, S8]

2021

High Plains blends five straight ryes. A separate Cream of Kentucky bonded rye has Kentucky Artisan origins. [S9, S10]

2023 editions

The archive lists 16-year bourbon and 7.5-year rye. Their specifications remain edition-specific. [S11, S12]

Summer 2024

A 100-proof Small Batch bourbon adds a new chapter to the range. [S15]



A map of roles

Louisville is the listed business home. Crestwood’s Kentucky Artisan is the disclosed origin of the bonded rye. High Plains crosses four states. The proposed campus is not presented as an open visitor destination. [S3, S9, S10, S20]

03 / WHISKEY & STORIES

Follow the liquid

Selection creates a point of view

Cream of Kentucky’s revival depended on selected mature bourbon. Its bonded rye is a different proposition: a six-year, 100-proof edition with a named Kentucky source. Do not transfer one release’s origin or recipe to another. [S1, S10]

A label with a visual history

The brand highlights Norman Rockwell’s earlier advertising work. This guide’s illustrations are new symbolic scenes, not reproductions of those advertisements. [S6]



Blending across state lines

High Plains debuted at 97 proof, combining five straight ryes from Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio and New York. Different recipes and yeasts provided the starting materials for a new blend. [S9]

SOURCES & FURTHER READING

S1 Company brands
S2 Jim’s message
S3 Proposed distillery
S4 2015 retirement announcement
S5 2016 project announcement
S6 Cream of Kentucky history
S7 2018 11.5-year edition
S8 2019 12.3-year edition
S9 High Plains launch
S10 Bonded rye edition
S11 16-year bourbon edition
S12 7.5-year rye edition
S13 Small Batch bourbon
S14 Cask Strength bourbon
S15 Summer 2024 sell sheet
S16 Four Roses chronology
S17 2026 career interview
S18 Rutledge rye interview
S19 High Plains source review
S20 Release directory

Research checked October 18, 2026. Official material is prioritized; attributed interviews and contemporary reporting supplement it. Full source qualifications appear in the web profile.