

BREWING RETURNS TO 'GOOD OLD POTOSI': A RESTORATION SUCCESS STORY

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The picture is easy to imagine. [A] boy, bound for day-long imprisonment in a classroom, dawdles as he passes and takes in all the delicious excitement of the big brewery; the mutter and laughter of the working men and the steam rising off the flanks of the big draft horses in the cold air. There were smells, too, of the barley and the beer fermenting in the wooden vats.¹

A brewery in a small town has a distinctive place in the life of the locality and its citizens. The smokestack and other brewery structures tower over the neighbourhood. The brewery's taproom is one of the centers of communal life. The beer itself, whether bearing on the label the name of the place or one of its leading families, may be one of the few ways that anyone outside of the area has ever heard of the town. On a more personal level, everyone either is employed by the brewery, or knows someone who is. Old-timers have stories about long hours and occasional accidents, and argue about whether the beer is really as good as it used to be. The brewery is a point of pride as well as an engine of the local economy. When a small town loses its brewery, it loses part of its life as well as a large portion of its livelihood.

Wisconsin was rivaled only by the much more populous state of Pennsylvania in the number of breweries that survived into the last third of the 20th century; most of them were in smaller towns and cities.² A combination of relative geographic isolation, dedicated family ownership, and local pride kept these businesses open for several decades beyond what economies of scale and competition from national shipping breweries would suggest was possible. Most ultimately succumbed to economic pressures, but they helped keep alive a fading world of small local firms and, in a few cases, left

enough of a physical presence to make reviving the business possible.

Potosi, Wisconsin, is a good example of a small municipality with a long brewing tradition (by American standards). As of the 2010 U.S. Census, the Village of Potosi had a population of 688 and has an obscure claim to fame as supposedly having the longest Main Street in the world without a cross street.³ The town was originally settled in 1833, after a major discovery of lead ore, and a group of 60 mostly Cornish and Welsh miners relocated from northern Illinois to exploit the rich vein.⁴ The town grew rapidly, and by the middle of the 1840s was the biggest settlement in southwestern Wisconsin. Over the next few decades, the British miners moved away in search of other minerals, and the population gradually became dominated by German farmers.⁵

Given the number of presumably thirsty miners in the area, it is perhaps surprising that Potosi had no known commercial brewery until 1852. Wisconsin's first two breweries - those of John Phillips 40 miles away in Mineral Point (1835) and of Rablin & Bray 25 miles distant in Elk Grove (1836) - may have supplied part of the local need, and there was a small brewery in neighboring British Hollow for a few years around 1840. One later account holds that beer was brought overland from Galena, Illinois more than 30 miles away and shipped up the Mississippi River from other cities.⁶ The need for imports decreased when Gabriel Hail arrived with other Germans in the 1840s, and brought lager beer brewing to southern Grant County in 1852.

The story of Potosi's brewery from 1852-1972 is important not because it was unique, but rather because it was



Figure 1. The Potosi Brewery in 1908, prior to the expansion projects of the next decade. Source. Potosi Brewery Foundation/ABA Archives.

typical of the founding, growth and decline of so many American breweries. According to local accounts, Hail came to Potosi in 1845 as a farmer. He apparently did not begin brewing for several years, but by 1852 was producing small amounts of beer at his farm for two local taverns. In 1854, Hail and his new partner, John Albrecht, began construction of a two-story brewery near a spring with clear water for brewing. The structure, valued at \$1,100, also took advantage of caves in the adjacent bluffs as a cellar for lagering the beer at sufficiently cool temperatures.⁷ By 1860, when the U.S. Census of Industry released the first reliable production figures for the brewery, Hail and Albrecht had \$5,000 invested in the brewery and equipment and produced 900 barrels of beer worth \$5,850 (or \$6.50 per barrel, slightly more expensive than most of their rivals in the region).⁸ Their output ranked them among the larger rural breweries in the area, and compared favorably to the breweries in the much larger city of La Crosse, approximately 100 miles away.

During the next few decades, the brewery grew slowly but steadily. John Albrecht left the partnership in 1872,

and Gabriel's brother, John, joined the company and became brewmaster a few years later. At its peak in the mid-1870s, the brewery employed eight hands and produced about 1,250 barrels annually. However, the Hail family suffered business and personal problems later in the decade. The population of the town declined, as did business, and Gabriel Hail took his own life in 1879. John Hail took over the company for a few years, but production continued to decline, and he shut down the brewery and sold the property to John Schreiner in 1882.⁹

The Schumacher era

Adam Schumacher came from Bavaria to southwestern Wisconsin in 1879. He was employed by the Hail family at the Potosi Brewery for the next few years, but when it was sold Schumacher moved to the brewery owned by Joseph Vogelsberg at nearby British Hollow. Sensing opportunity in Potosi's economic recovery, he moved back in 1886 and leased (and later purchased) the Potosi Brewery from Schreiner. As was common



Figure 2. Brewery wagons posed on a rutted Main Street in 1915. The brewery is on the left. The bottling works is in the right foreground, with the stables behind. Source. Potosi Brewery Foundation/ABA Archives.

among small-town breweries, Adam brought his brothers, Nicholas, Henry, and George, to Potosi and enlisted them in the business. They incorporated the Potosi Brewing Company (PBC) in 1906, with family members as directors of the firm. The Schumachers expanded their operations by adding a bottling facility and embraced advances in technology which some of their smaller rivals were unable to afford.¹⁰ The brewery was run by electricity by 1900 - this power came from its own power plant, since the Village of Potosi was not electrified until 1912.¹¹

Throughout the early years of the 20th century, the brewery (Fig. 1) expanded both its physical plant and its market area. Since the local market was severely limited in size, the Schumachers sought customers throughout the region - eventually reaching markets in Iowa and Illinois, as well as in southwestern Wisconsin. The company built a refrigerated storage depot in East Dubuque, Illinois, to handle the southern portion of their market. Increased markets also required expansion of the brewing and packaging facilities at the brewery. From 1911 to 1916, the company added an office building, a tavern, a blacksmith shop, stables (Fig. 2), a new ice house, and the brewery itself grew taller and bigger (Fig. 3) to accommodate a new 100-barrel copper brew kettle and other equipment.¹² The elevation of the central portion of the existing structure dates mostly from this period. Eventually the brewery and associated farm across the street included 35 structures ranging from a chicken coop to the five-story brewhouse.¹³ Little is known about the architects or the construction during this period. The structure creates a sense of economical additions rather than an attempt to advertise the wealth of the company.

The expansion, while similar to programs at other breweries in the region and essential to keeping up with them, was poorly timed, given the politics of the era. Prohibition sentiment had been on the rise for decades, even in a beer-loving state such as Wisconsin, as progressive politicians viewed limiting or banning alcohol as part of their campaign of social improvements.¹⁴ World War I brought hatred of Germans and suspicion of any German Americans even if they supported the U.S. war effort. Alcohol was considered detrimental to the war effort, both because of the physiological effects on drinkers and the labor and raw materials it diverted from more urgent uses. As a consequence, America

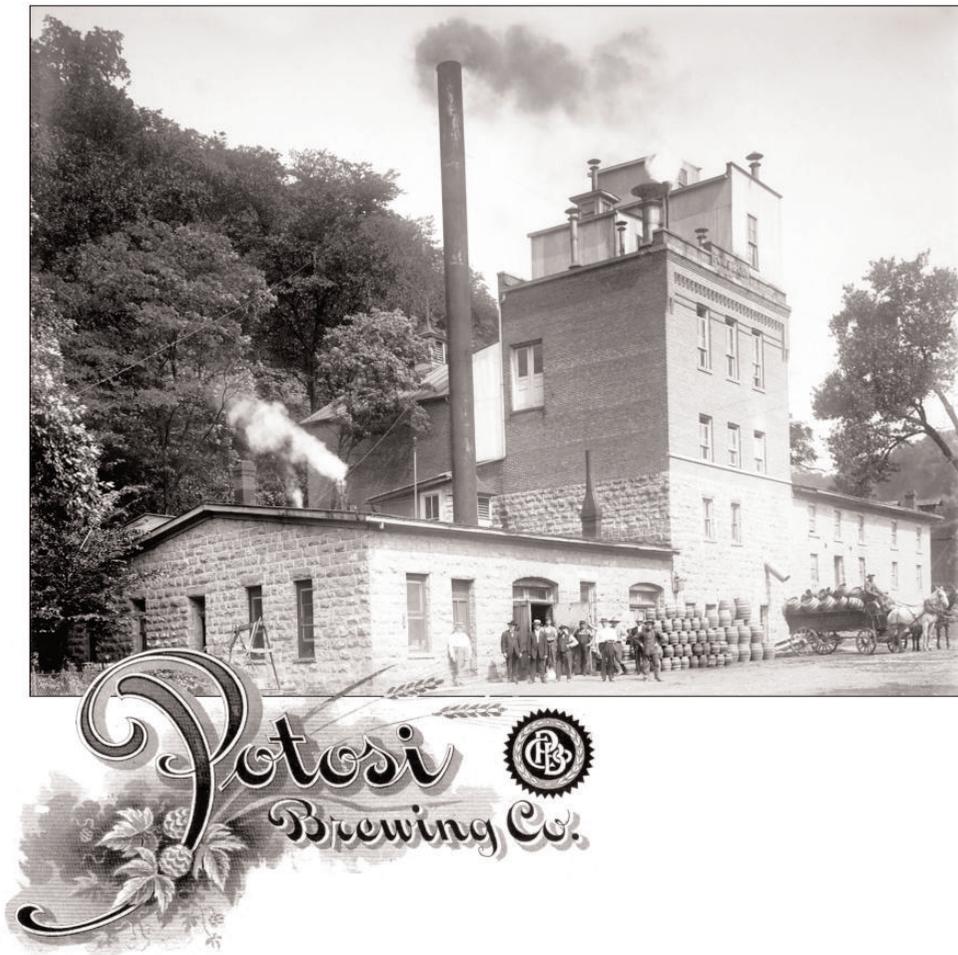


Figure 3. A classic brewery view from 1913, showing the brewhouse constructed in 1911-12. The power house is to the left of the five-story brewhouse, the malt house to the right. Source. Potosi Brewery Foundation/ABA Archives.

adopted temporary wartime prohibition in 1918 and made it complete in 1920. Potosi Brewing Co. had lost part of its market even earlier, when neighboring Iowa went dry in 1917, and the Schumachers had been preparing for the worst. They started ice, coal and dairy businesses, and purchased a dealcoholizer for the production of near beer. Unlike most breweries that offered the non-alcoholic beverage, Potosi Near Beer actually seems to have expanded the company's market, introducing the Potosi name to Kansas, Nebraska, and Minnesota.¹⁵ Like many other breweries during Prohibition, PBC was accused of continuing to produce real beer during the dry years, though the company was ultimately cleared of the suspicions.¹⁶

The end of Prohibition in 1933 brought increased prosperity to Potosi Brewing Co. While PBC was not one of the twenty-some breweries that were shipping on 'New Beer's Day' (7 April 1933), they were ready about a week later, and re-established their market quickly.¹⁷ In addition to the local market, Potosi trucks carried beer to all neighboring states, and rail cars brought beer as far south as Texas and as far west as California and Arizona. In order to meet this demand, the company once again built new facilities and modernized equipment. The brewery expanded to 50 year-round employees, augmented by another 20 or so during the peak summer months.¹⁸ Interestingly, PBC was relatively late to adopt one of the most important innovations in

American brewing - the beer can. Introduced in 1935 and widely used almost immediately, cans did not become part of Potosi's package mix until 1949, and even then they started with the cap-sealed 'crown-tainer', which could be filled on existing bottling lines.¹⁹

Consolidation

Potosi's survival through the decades after the repeal of Prohibition was based on a combination of careful management, geography, and luck. The brewing industry as a whole was going through a significant consolidation. Production kept increasing while the number of firms decreased rapidly. Nationwide production, which averaged about 53 million barrels per year in the five years before America entered World War II, passed the 100 million barrel mark in 1964 and grew to 140 million barrels by 1972 (the year of PBC's closing). Meanwhile, the number of breweries saw a precipitous decline. From a high of more than 700 in the heady days after Repeal, the number of breweries was still over 400 by 1950, but was down to less than 100 by 1972.²⁰ As a result, market concentration also increased. In the 1930s and 1940s, the top five firms typically had about 20% of the market, but by the 1970s the top five were approaching control of three-fourths of the American beer market.²¹

However, the story in Wisconsin was somewhat different. It is true that the general decline in the number of breweries in operation was also reflected in Wisconsin, but loyal drinkers of their local beer kept small town breweries open longer than their counterparts elsewhere. Part of this is probably due to the relative persistence of the small town bar or rural tavern in Wisconsin.²² Small brewers were able to compete better with their giant rivals in draught beer sales in taverns than by matching the variety of different packages that the large shipping brewers were able to offer due to economies of scale. While sales for on-premises consumption generally declined nationwide, and most states consumed about 10-15% of their beer on draught, Wisconsin's share of beer sold on draught was usually closer to 40%. The prevalent tavern culture would give breweries such as Potosi a better chance at survival.²³

Besides counting on the devotion of Wisconsinites to their pitchers of tap beer, Potosi punched well above its

weight class as a shipper of packaged beer. During the 1950s and 1960s, PBC purchased the right to a number of brands from defunct breweries, several of them from Chicago. One brewery employee recounted how different bottles would be shipped to the brewery; they would be filled with Potosi's regular Holiday beer, given a different label, and shipped to Chicago. Potosi also followed the practice of several larger breweries by making special labels for chains of shops in Milwaukee, Chicago and other cities.²⁴ Several students of the PBC contend that the brewery encouraged its employees to be represented by a union, not so much for fair labor practices (since there were few complaints), but so that the union label would allow the beer to be accepted in the heavily unionized cities of the Upper Midwest.²⁵

Ironically, the small size of the village of Potosi, its isolation and its relative lack of tourism may have helped the brewery endure longer than elsewhere. In the 1960s, William Baldwin demonstrated a correlation between the size of a town and the size of its brewery, and noted that it was much easier for a small brewery to survive in a small town than in a city of more than 100,000 people. Depending on the tourist trade was no salvation for small breweries. Tourists often were more interested in finding a national brand than developing a taste for the local product, and were often in town too briefly to be influenced by advertising.²⁶

While luck is hard to quantify and analyze, there are several factors that are inherent to a small family business that can determine success or failure. PBC was fortunate to have multiple generations of Schumacher family members who were able and willing to run the business, and who had the necessary training to do so. They were also able to attract skilled brewmasters from outside the family - no small task for a brewery far from an urban center with a limited labor budget.

Advancing gloom

The continued consolidation of the industry and the end of some of their past advantages marked the ultimate doom of the Potosi Brewing Co. The large shipping brewers increased their price-cutting promotions, many of which were designed to lower prices to a level the small breweries could not meet for a sustained period.²⁷ Increased television advertising and the advent of the

'light' beer era made it difficult for small and often indebted family breweries to match the exposure of other brands or to contradict the message that the local beer was anything other than a stale relic of the past (if not actually stale beer).

The cost of improving the brewery to keep pace with their rivals was another hurdle that needed to be cleared. The dizzying array of package types and sizes coming out of Milwaukee and St. Louis gave the large brewers many options to offer their customers as well as free publicity each time they introduced a new can, bottle or label. Advances such as the 'pop-top' can required older breweries to purchase new equipment and made existing supplies obsolete. The market as a whole was shifting to non-returnable bottles, which either required new packing equipment or costly alterations to existing machines, as well as constantly purchasing new bottles. New or even secondhand equipment could be much more

expensive than a brewery could afford. In 1972, PBC estimated that it would take nearly \$1,000,000 to properly equip the plant for the next quarter century. The company did not have the cash on hand, and since production and market were both shrinking, banks were uninterested in making a loan likely to end in default.²⁸

Finally, time was running out for members of the Schumacher family and other key employees. President Adolph Schumacher was 81, cousin Rudolph had returned to run the bottling plant after having been retired for ten years, and all the other Schumachers were over 70. The next generation had little to no interest in continuing the business - Rudolph had returned because his son had left to take a job with John Deere in Dubuque, Iowa.²⁹ Replacing long-time brewmasters became harder as a generation of German brewers retired and small companies were confronted not just by a lack of qualified individuals, but the difficulty of find-



Figure 4. The Potosi Brewing Co. as it appeared in August 2004, on the day the partnership between the PBF and ABA was finalized. Photo by the Author.

ing brewmasters willing to work in a small town for lower wages than they could get at a major brewer or for a company in another field.³⁰ While the brewery was still making a small profit, it was clear that there was no future for the company.

It is hard to think that a business that never lost money should be closing [Rudolph Schumacher lamented]. I guess you could say that old age is creeping up on the Schumachers. And when you are old, you have to give up and quit.³¹

The closing of the brewery cast a pall over the village. PBC was the only industry in town, and residents feared not just unemployment for many of the 45 remaining workers, but also loss of the tax base, as well as water and sewer receipts for the village.³² The ripple effects were felt throughout the community. With the brewery gone, railroad business at the depot dropped significantly. Local businesses that supplied the brewery and its workers closed, forcing residents to leave town to get many of their needs.³³ Even with these more urgent concerns, a few residents were also concerned about the loss of a local product. One employee of a tavern and beer depot complained “while we will still be able to get it [Holiday and a few other labels were purchased by Huber Brewing Co. in Monroe, Wisconsin], it just won’t be the same. It won’t be a local beer”.³⁴

The gloom of the closing was accompanied by a forlorn hope that something could be done with the buildings. However, anyone who has been concerned for the future of an unused historic building knows that lots of people have ideas for it, but few have the money or energy to match. This may be especially true with old breweries - there seem to be stories about someone wanting to restart most of America’s shuttered breweries. Others hope that if the building cannot house a vibrant industry, the antiquity of the site could be a draw for tourists. By 1980, the PBC buildings were placed on the National Register of Historic Places, but this designation does little to promote the sites, and is no guarantee of preservation.³⁵ Talk of a restaurant and museum began within a few years after closing, with speculation serious enough to warrant inclusion in regional newspaper articles as early as 1981.³⁶ However, the discussions languished, and so did the property, which grew more dilapidated with each passing year. Eventually, the brewery looked ‘like a bombed out structure in a war-torn country’ (Fig.

4). The buildings were open to trespassers and the elements, but most of the damage was caused by time and erosion.³⁷ Years passed, and optimism faded.

Converging forces

Small communities from coast to coast are often the greatest places to see preservation in action. Local businesses understand the value of giving old buildings another chance - in addition to helping establish the surrounding community as an economic magnet by engaging residents and drawing in new visitors, reusing historic places adds to the charm and character of the surrounding area.³⁸

In recent decades, more preservationists and developers have become aware of the value of reusing old industrial spaces. As Brian McCormick, a preservation architect with the Wisconsin Historical Society, has noted, old factories (including breweries) are large, adaptable, and situated either near urban cores or natural features. Furthermore, they fulfill the current fashion favoring natural building materials and exposed structural elements.³⁹ Other defunct breweries in small Wisconsin cities and towns have been reused - as private homes, storage space, small industrial or agricultural businesses - but reopening a brewery for its original purpose was extremely rare, even as the craft brewery movement took hold.⁴⁰

In 1982, a group of brewery artifact collectors founded the American Breweriana Association (ABA) and wrote into their constitution: ‘The ultimate goal of the Association shall be the establishment of a non-commercial museum of brewing history and advertising’.⁴¹ Many members of the group hoped to locate the museum in a large brewery complex in St. Louis or Milwaukee, but cost kept most of these plans out of the reach of an organization funded mostly by small member contributions.

Meanwhile, Potosi resident Gary David had purchased the bottling house (Fig. 5) across the street from the brewhouse in 1995 and began to restore it. (An antique store and gift shop occupy the premises.) His success renewed interest in the much larger brewhouse. David purchased the building at the county auction, then enlisted the help of his cousin Denis David and his friend Rick Tobin. They, with Denis’ wife Madonna,



Figure 5. The former Potosi bottling house and stables, 1902, across the street from the brewery proper. Photo by Susan Appel, June 2008.

began to hold public meetings to enlist support, and the Potosi Brewery Foundation (PBF) was founded in 2000. The Foundation acquired the brewery by donation in 2001, and work began to raise funds to restore the building.⁴²

In 2003, the Potosi Brewery Foundation made a presentation to the ABA at their annual meeting in Stevens Point, Wisconsin, which led some members of the ABA Museum Committee to believe that a smaller brewery building might be more financially viable, provided that local support was adequate. After several trips to Potosi and an ‘historic’ meeting on 3 December 2003, ABA president, Len Chylack, Museum Fund chairman, Tom Rejmaniak, and Fund member, Tye Schwalbe, were convinced that the project was viable and could be ready in five years. The ABA voted to enter into a partnership with the PBF to locate the National Brewery Museum and Library in the future Potosi brewery complex. On 9 August 2004, the agreement was signed at a ceremony in the meeting hall of the new Potosi Area Fire & Rescue complex, with nearly 40 area residents and members of the ABA present. The signing ceremony was followed by a tour of the brewery (with hard hats required for the hazardous site) (Figs. 6-9), after which ABA’s president at the time, Len Chylack, placed a

small collection of Potosi breweriana near the building as a symbol of the eventual museum to come. The restored brewery attractions were expected to bring both visitors and jobs to the community within a few years.⁴³ Some ABA members present privately expressed skepticism that the ruined hulk could be restored on time and on budget, if indeed at all.

While some funding was already in place, the majority of the \$7 million still needed to be raised. PBF obtained grants from state and federal government programs totaling approximately \$1.6 million. These included historic preservation challenge grants and Department of Natural Resources ‘brownfields’ grant for cleanup of contaminated sites. The Foundation was also able to raise funds from individuals, businesses and community organizations - many of which were in the form of matching grants. The largest single private contribution was a matching grant of \$400,000, which required raising \$1.2 million from other sources. The ABA Museum fund contributed more than \$260,000, most of which was raised through small contributions by ABA members under the leadership of John Ruckstuhl and Jon and Jim Cherry.⁴⁴ The project also acquired a \$2.6 million government-backed loan, as well as other loans.



Figure 6. The ruined interior of the malt house in 2004, viewed from the brew house. Photo by the Author.



Figure 7. This view of the interior of the malt house shows the diversity of building materials, as well as the decay of the structure in 2004. Photo by the Author.



Figure 8. View on an upper floor of the brewery before renovation. The old brewery garage is visible across the street, as are the rolling hills of the southwestern Wisconsin countryside. The beautiful landscape is another factor that draws visitors to the area. Photo by the Author.



Figure 9. Conditions such as this badly damaged wall forced careful review to determine if restoration and reuse of the brewery were practical. Photo by the Author.



Figure 10. Third floor of the brewery, prior to renovation. Photo by the Author.



Figure 11. The upper floors of the brewery showed the significant damage done to the structure by weather and neglect over several decades. Photo by the Author.

The architectural problem

Even before the PBF/ABA partnership was cemented, PBF retained River Architects, Inc., of La Crosse, Wisconsin, to provide a Historic Structure Report and to assess the possibility of restoring the brewery. River Architects had prior experience with adaptive reuse projects, as well as roots in the southwestern Wisconsin community. Tragically, the lead architect of the study, William B. (Bill) White, died in a car accident while commuting between Potosi and La Crosse. However, he had done enough to demonstrate the possibilities of the project, and River Architects carried on with Valentine J. (Val) Schute, Jr. as Project Architect and Andy Hudzinski as Project Director and Construction Administrator. The Historic Structure Report, completed in 2002, detailed the considerable work facing the team, including significant sections that would have to be removed before further analysis could be done.⁴⁵

Unlike many of its rival breweries, Potosi Brewing Co. was spared major fires or other calamities that caused significant structural damage. Thus, most of the building was left intact as it expanded through the years. Of course, many breweries that burned down took advantage of the opportunity to build impressive new complexes with the newest equipment and most convenient floor plans. PBC had no such opportunity, and the evolution of the brewery came through a series of additions that wrapped around previous buildings and incorporated existing structures and mechanics. As the architects approached the project, ‘finding’ the ‘original’ brewery and determining whether restoration of any historic sections was even possible was both intriguing and frustrating.⁴⁶ Very few blueprints or other documentation of the building exist, and some of those extant are undated.

A further problem involved determining what time period should be represented in the restoration. In contrast to restoring a private home to a relatively narrow period representing occupancy by its most important residents, PBC was the most important industry in the village for more than a century. National Register listings usually designate a ‘period of significance’, i.e., the span of time during which the structure was important. In this case, the National Register determined that the period of significance was from about 1890 to 1972. While this meant that some choices still had to be made, it reduced the necessity to unravel all the onion-like interior layers

around the ‘original’ brewery. (Most of the NRHP restrictions focused on the exterior building envelope.) Indeed, it is unclear whether the oldest part of the building, the cold storage cave nearest the spring, was part of the 1855 building or a later construction. Some members of the community hoped to return the building to its pre-Prohibition elevation and footprint; however, this would have involved tearing down significant portions of the building. Even if a determination could be made as to what era was most important, part of the historical importance of this particular brewery was its continuous growth and adaptation to new technology, so the uneven evolution of the building is part of what makes it significant.⁴⁷

The exterior of the building has little in the way of notable architectural or design features. The brickwork and stonework was often well crafted, but seldom ornamental. The constant additions make it impossible to assign any particular architectural style to the building, and even the identifiable sections were utilitarian rather than evocative. There were no attempts to echo breweries or castles in Germany or even in American brewing centers. As Schute and Hudzinski noted, ‘This building was more about the industry on the inside ... it was more about how to hold up a vat ...’⁴⁸

The condition of the building was probably the most important concern. Exact restoration was not possible, since some parts of the building, such as the 1916 office addition, had already been razed by the time the project began. Large holes had been created in the walls to remove the copper kettles in the 1970s (Fig. 10) and not repaired. Most of the roofs had caved in (Fig. 11), and there were no salvageable mechanical, electrical or plumbing systems. Of the intact sections, there were numbers of different rooms and different levels, which created constant forensic challenges of analyzing each room and its systems to understand how it went back together. Several times the team would open a wall and find something unexpected, such as the undocumented moving of a roof. The restoration site was therefore also an active archaeological site. Architect Val Schute remarked that the preservation process was ‘like putting a puzzle together without a picture to guide you and the realization that you didn’t have all the pieces’.⁴⁹

One unusual and persistent variable is the spring that runs through the building. Its presence was ideal for a

frontier brewery that needed fresh water and inexpensive cold storage. The Hail and Schumacher families presumably dealt with periodic floods in the lower levels, but they must have decided that the convenience of the site, the capital they had invested in it, and the cost of moving to a drier location outweighed any occasional losses. However, it was both a potential attraction and a liability for the restored building. Having a stream visible through a glass panel in the floor of a restaurant (Fig. 12) is memorable for the patrons, but running water being brought into the building is a hazard for a museum containing irreplaceable artifacts. As Schute and Hudzinski noted, 'That's not architecture school stuff ... There is no textbook for this one'. The passage of time meant that there were no living brewery employees who could describe how the brewery dealt with the spring on a daily basis or in times of flooding. Because the clients were patient, the architects and contractors were able to create a solution and install drain tile to control the water. However, just before the opening of the complex, a 'one-hundred-year rain' caused a new section of spring to open, significantly increasing the flow. Because there were no practical remedies that could be applied at that point, the spring, which is part of the attraction and importance of the complex, has created questions and concerns about the ability to prevent future flooding.⁵⁰

Almost immediately, as the restoration began it faced a major scare, when a fire broke out on 21 September 2004,



Figure 12. Potosi Brewery spring, channeled and visible through a glazed opening in the floor in the new brewpub. Photo by Susan Appel, June 2008.

as workers were removing an old metal tank. Luckily, everything that burned 'was stuff that was coming down anyway', according to Chad Walsh of Epic Construction. Work resumed the next morning without further incident.⁵¹ Though there were some delays, the renovation and adaptation of the Potosi Brewing Co. stayed on schedule. This was fortunate for many reasons, especially for the ABA, since their 2008 Annual Meeting was scheduled for Dubuque, Iowa, about 30 minutes away, and which intended to celebrate the opening of the museum onsite. On 16 February 2008, the building was opened to residents of the surrounding communities for a tour of the first floor of the complex. Approximately 1,000 people visited the building to witness firsthand the result of years of work. In June (Figs. 13 & 14), about 300 ABA members enjoyed their first visit to what had seemed a distant dream for three decades - a museum (Figs. 15-18) in which members could place their collections on public display and present the beauty and durability of brewery artifacts to the wider community.⁵²

Part of the community

The new museum, restaurant and brewery complex has spurred direct and indirect economic development in the area. The brewery is credited with directly creating seventy jobs, and bringing tourist dollars to the area. These tourists now have more ways to spend their dollars. Across the street from the brewery, the Bierman and Walsh families developed the Holiday Gardens Event Center (Fig. 19), an entertainment complex capable of hosting events for up to 500 people. The grounds are dominated by a 45-foot tall (13.7 meters) replica of a Potosi Brewing Co. 'cone-top' can, which uses the base of the original farm silo. If full, the can would contain 2,319,241 oz. (68,588 liters or 115,962 imperial pints) of beer.⁵³ Holiday Gardens hosts about 20,000 visitors a year for a variety of large and small events. In addition, Pine Point Lodge, opened a year before the brewery, offers rental cabins to visitors to the brewery and parties using Holiday Gardens. Other businesses include a new winery, the Potosi Inn (featuring a restaurant and guest rooms), a convenience store, and an art gallery due to open in Fall 2013. A report compiled in 2009 estimated that the restoration of the brewery and the related development had a \$4 million dollar impact on the area economy to that point, with the figure thought to be even higher today.⁵⁴



Figure 13. Potosi, WI, sign welcoming the ABA to the renovated Potosi Brewery and the National Brewery Museum & Library. Photo by Susan Appel, June 2008.



Figure 14. Potosi Brewery, view in the new brewpub, in the former power house. Photo by Susan Appel, June 2008.



Figure 15. Potosi Brewery, view into the large exhibition space for the National Brewery Museum on the former second floor of the old malt house. The museum is home to the Schuetz collection of Wisconsin breweriana, as well as to rotating exhibits by ABA members. Photo by the Author.

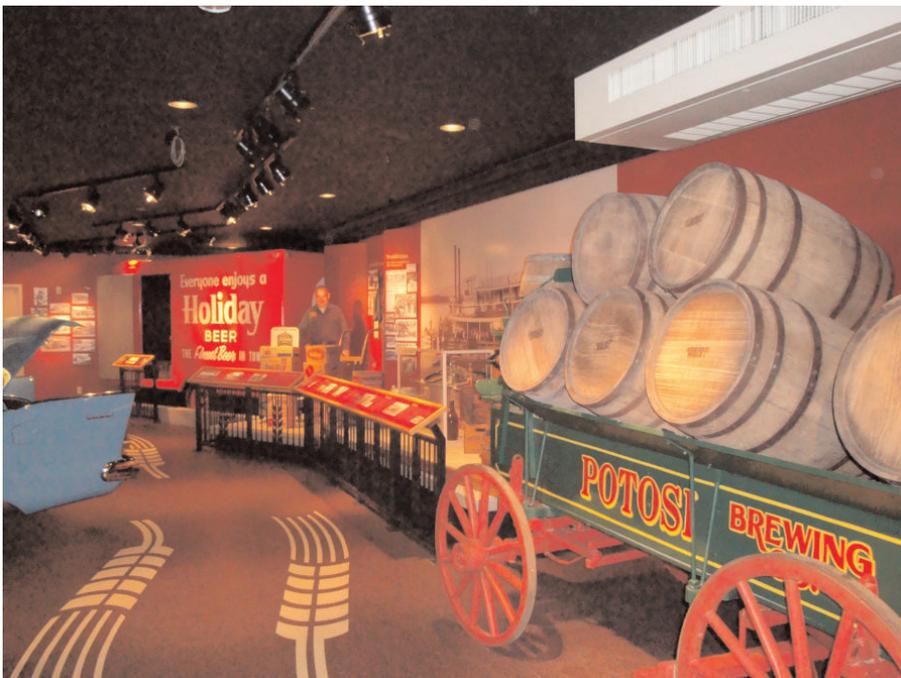


Figure 16. The first floor of the former malt house contains the Potosi Brewing Co. Transportation Museum, which demonstrates the different ways Potosi beer was shipped through the years. Photo by the Author.

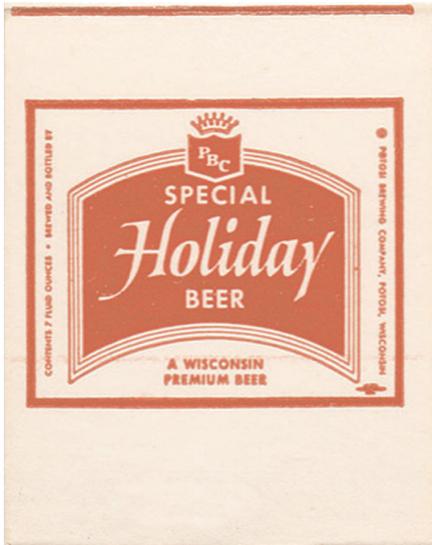


Figure 17. Potosi Brewing Company, Holiday Beer Matchbook Cover. Given the prevalence of smoking in Wisconsin taverns in the years after Prohibition, matchbooks were a popular way to promote a brewery's products. The label replicated here was from the mid-1950s, and was from the 7 oz. bottle-another popular tavern product. Source. ABA Archives.



Figure 18. Potosi Beer Sign, 1940s. Signs such as this were popular in the early 1940s. They were designed to sit on the backbar of a tavern, and were lit with a fluorescent bulb. Source. ABA Archives.



Figure 19. The Holiday Gardens Event Center has become a popular destination for local parties of all kinds, and the 'World's Largest Conetop' symbolizes the glory days of the Potosi Brewing Co. Photo by the Author.



Figure 20. The renovated Potosi Brewery, Potosi, WI, evening view. Photo by Susan Appel, June 2008.

While the restoration of the Potosi Brewing Company (Fig. 20) is a success story which could serve to guide similar projects, there are unique factors in its success, just as there were in the survival of the brewery until the 1970s. First, the new Potosi Brewing Co. beers are good. The two brewmasters - Steve Zuidema followed by Steve Buszka - have created a mix of beers that will introduce customers to craft beer and satisfy those with more adventurous palates. The presence of Potosi six-packs on store shelves in Wisconsin, Illinois, and Iowa generates revenue and encourages visitors to the museum and brewpub. Another critical factor is the presence of a large staff of volunteers who raise money, invite publicity and keep the ABA museum running. More than 100 people volunteer in some capacity each year. Local leadership was critical to initiate the project and see it to completion, and not every community has people with the necessary mix of time, desire and ability.⁵⁵

Signs on the brewery, around the region and in the six-packs, proclaim that 'The good ol' days are back'. Whether true or not, once more a brewery is not just the most important structure in the skyline, but the most important part of the economy in a small Wisconsin town.

As the National Trust for Historic Preservation states on its website:

Historic preservation champions and protects places that tell the stories of our past. It enhances our sense of community and brings us closer together: saving the places where we take our children to school, buy our groceries, and stop for coffee - preserving the stories of ancient cultures found in landmarks and landscapes we visit - protecting the memories of people, places, and events honored in our national monuments.⁵⁶

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2. Waterstreet, D.E. (2003) *Post-Prohibition United States Beer Statistics: 1934-2000*. Milwaukee: Badger Infosearch, pp.527-75. As of 1964, Wisconsin had 19 breweries outside of Milwaukee in smaller cities and towns; Pennsylvania had 18 outside of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. These 37 represented nearly a third of the 128 breweries remaining in the U.S. Due to ever-changing demographics and regional variation, it is difficult to precisely identify small towns, a fact made more difficult by a common American tendency to identify anything outside the metropolis as a 'small town'. Some agencies define them as municipalities less than 50,000 people, some less than 5,000. Moreover, in some states the terms city and town have specific legal meaning which may be unrelated to size. However, changing the definition would change neither the rankings nor the analysis, and Potosi certainly qualifies as a small town.
3. United States Census Bureau Population Finder (www.census.gov/popfinder/); Smith, S.L. (2002) 'Faded Symbol of a Town's Heyday', *Wisconsin State Journal*. Madison, archived at http://www.potosibrewery.com/news_archives_detail.cfm?newsID=18.
4. Baumann, E.O. (1939) 'The History of Potosi', *Wisconsin Magazine of History*. 23, 1, September, p.45. While no conclusive account exists, most suggest that the name comes from either the mining town of the same name in Missouri, or the mining region of Mexico.
5. *ibid.*, pp.46, 48-54.
6. Wilmott, E.M. (1921) 'With the Potosi Pioneers', *Lancaster (WI) Herald*. 2 March, from clipping file version found at www.wisconsinhistory.org/wlhba.
7. Tiegs, O. and Pirie, B. (2004) 'Potosi Brewing Co. - Preserving the History and Tradition', *American Breweriana Journal*. 132, November-December, pp.18-19. Several other accounts inaccurately claim Hail (sometimes spelled Hale) was British, but all official documents list his birthplace as Germany.
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15. Tiegs, O. and Pirie, B. (2004) op. cit. pp.22-3. Note: Jerry Apps claims that Potosi Brewing Co. was selling beer in Kansas, Nebraska, Minnesota and Iowa by 1919; however, sales in Kansas and Iowa were impossible in this year due to earlier statewide prohibition. Apps, J. (1992) *Breweries of Wisconsin.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, p.214.
16. Tiegs, O. and Pirie, B. (2004) op. cit. p.23.
17. *ibid.*, p.24; Author's research from collected newspaper sources for the number of breweries open on 7 April 1933. Conclusive evidence has not yet been found for a few breweries, but it appears that the number open on this day was definitely twenty-one, possibly two or three more.
18. Tiegs, O. and Pirie, B. (2004) op. cit. p.24.
19. *ibid.*, 25.
20. *Brewers Almanac.* New York: United States Brewers Foundation, 1948-1974 inclusive; McGahan, A.M. (1991) 'The Emergence of the National Brewing Oligopoly: Competition in the American Market, 1933-1958', *Business History Review.* 65, Summer, p.230, has a convenient table of the figures from 1933-58. Unfortunately, different sources use different sets of records, so it is possible to find multiple different numbers for the breweries operating in a given year. The *Brewers Almanac* lists 122 breweries open in 1973, but Waterstreet has production figures for only 68 companies. Several companies had multiple breweries, but there are still a few unaccounted for, possibly because the lists were compiled at different times during the year, and some firms had closed.
21. McGahan, A.M. (1991) op. cit. pp.231, 280; Yenne, B. (2003) *The American Brewery.* St. Paul, MN: MBI Publishing, p.105.
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31. Jaeger, R.W. (1972) op. cit.
32. *ibid.*
33. Honer, M. (2011) op. cit. p.9.
34. Jaeger, R.W. (1972) op. cit.
35. Wisconsin National Register of Historic Places, <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/hp/register/list.asp>, download 14 June 2013. The brewery was added to the State Register in 1989.
36. Seely, R. (1981) op. cit.
37. Fiorenza, F. (2013) e-mail to author, 26 June. Michael Jackson often recounted a visit to Potosi (not always named in the story), in which he spoke with an old brewery employee who praised the local beer, but when offered a beer in a local tavern said any beer would do. Jackson often cited this as an example of the lack of support that doomed small-town breweries. In a longer version of the story, he described helping a friend remove an old sign from the brewery. Unfortunately, I cannot find a copy of the story in my library at the present time.
38. National Trust for Historic Preservation, <http://www.preservationnation.org/what-is-preservation/support-local-communities.html#Uct6jj7TV5U>, download 26 June 2013.
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40. As of July 2013, only three commercial breweries have been opened in Wisconsin in plants of defunct breweries: RWS Brewing, which occupied part of the former Fox Head-Waukesha Brewing Co. building in Waukesha from 1994-2001; Hibernia Brewing Co., which took over the former Walter Brewing Co. in Eau Claire from 1986-1988; and Sand Creek Brewing Co., which is in its tenth year of operation in the former Oderbolz Brewing Co. of Black River Falls. In addition to the modern Potosi Brewing Co., one other Wisconsin brewpub is operating in an old brewery, the Stone

Cellar Brewpub in the old Muench Brewing Co./Appleton Brewing & Malting Co complex in Appleton. Several others have followed this model in other states, but using other historic buildings or new construction is much more common.

41. Constitution and By-Laws, American Breweriana Association, Inc., <http://americanbreweriana.org/about/constitution.php>, download 14 June 2013.

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