

PRE-PROHIBITION PORTER

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Porter is a style of beer older than America. With America's first porter brewery opening in 1774, American porter is two years older than the country's founding date of 1776. Porter as a style of beer has changed as much as the United States. At times its characteristic flavors and means of production reflected the progenitor of Porter, Great Britain. At other times, porter employed new and popular methods of the German immigrant lager brewers.

What exactly is Pre-Prohibition Porter? It is a beer, or was a beer, brewed in America from roughly 1774-1920.¹ Whereas the homebrewing of Pre-Prohibition Porter remains largely undocumented, that timeline goes back even further to the 16th Century and the early ale brewers of the Virginia colony. Today, we and other brewers, can recreate historic porters through the study of old recipes, mimicing former flavor profiles, affording us an insight into American brewing culture and so bringing this history back to life for us all.

In recognizing the work of historic homebrewers, the Beer Judge Certification Program (B.J.C.P.) created a special category for Historical Beer in its most recent update of 2015. The nine styles hosted in this category, some tremendously popular in American craft beer, are Gose, Pivo Grodzksie, Litchenhainer, Roggenbier, Sahti, Kentucky Common, Pre-Prohibition Pilsner, Pre-Prohibition Porter, and London Brown Ale.²

In June, 2016, we presented a talk, 'The Progress of Pre-Prohibition Porter', at the request of the B.J.C.P. The Judges Reception was held prior to the 38th Annual National Homebrewers Conference in Baltimore, Maryland. This meeting and reception takes place

annually where Certified, Advanced, and Master Judges all gather to reflect on topics such as the history of Porter in North America from the 18th to the 21st centuries.

Prior to our presentation, we brewed several porters targeting various places and time periods in the history of the style. The earliest was 'Colonial Panic' a colonial-style Porter brewed with Pen Druid Brewing in Sperryville, Virginia. This porter drew inspiration from the latter-day colonial period in the mid 18th century. The recipe borrowed a key and essential ingredient from George Washington's 1757 recipe 'To Make Small Beer', molasses.³ It was hopped with a Cascade cultivar from Maryland and Pennsylvania sorghum molasses was used at the end of the boil. As for the mash bill, 'Colonial Panic' was brewed with Virginia-grown and Virginia-malted barley and oats.⁴

Prior to our brewing 'Colonial Panic' we produced a blended porter in Washington, D.C. with the Bluejacket brewpub. This porter was blended from three ales, the same ales brewed by the Washington Brewery in Navy Yard in 1812; X Ale, Strong Ale, and Table Beer.⁵ The Washington Brewery at Navy Yard was in operation during the British burning of the White House in 1814 during the War of 1812.⁶ The porter blended in 2014 featured the same recipe for all three ales in lessening proportions; molasses, unmalted Virginia wheat, American and English specialty brown malts, as well as English-grown barley of the Marris Otter variety, malted by the Thomas Fawcett Maltings. This maltster existed in 1812, which complemented the beer's title '1812 Project Porter'. James Fawcett, Managing Director of the Thomas Fawcett's Maltings, wrote 'I



Figure 1. Michael Stein cleaning out Pen Druid 'Colonial Porter' fermentation vessel. Photograph courtesy of Michael Stein

have no idea sadly whether or not we sent any malt to Washington DC 200 years ago. It's possible but I think highly unlikely'.⁷

Of course sending malt from England to America would have greatly contradicted George Washington's stance that British beer should be imbibed no more in his home country. Washington wrote to the Marque de Lafayette in 1789, 'I use no porter or cheese in my family, but such as is made in America-both those articles may now be purchased of an excellent quality' and indeed he did buy beer from brewers in his home state of Virginia as well as Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.⁸

Fittingly, the B.J.C.P. has categorized Pre-Prohibition Porter as its own style though 'sometimes known as Pennsylvania Porter or East Coast Porter'. It is not coincidental that Pre-Prohibition Porter is also known as Pennsylvania Porter, after all, that is where the two commercial examples are brewed. In the history of American porter the name of Philadelphian Robert

Hare is of great import. Hare emigrated from Limehouse, London (from where of his mother, Martha Harford, originated) in 1773 and began porter production. Born in Woolwich, Kent, Robert's father, Richard was both a noted London Brewer and Justice of Middlesex.⁹

Hare's brewery and the history of American porter brewing exist later than the English timeline of porter production, similarly to the lager beer timeline in Germanic lands. Both lager and porter went on to write new chapters in the new world. Pennsylvania porter experienced a resurgence in popularity as it shifted from an English-style ale closer to a German-style lager. Of course this shift was not monolithic and not every porter producer changed from a top fermented product to a bottom fermented one.

Much has been made of the difference between German and English beer, or top and bottom fermentation, and certainly there are cultural and scientific differences. Still, both porter and lager were products that were aged. As Ron Pattison has written on early eighteenth century porter,

The innovation was in creating a beer that was aged at the brewery rather than in the pub. Before porter, London brewers had shipped their beer immediately after the end of primary fermentation, leaving any aging to publicans or third parties.¹⁰



Figure 2. Washington Brewery at Navy Yard, detail from a larger work, George Cooke, City of Washington From Beyond Navy Yard, 1833. Source: Library of Congress, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pga.00192>

Similarly, lager was aged at the brewery or in some cases in vaults off-site. In 1849 Engel & Wolf, the Philadelphia lager beer brewing firm, purchased property along the banks of the Schuylkill River where 45 feet below ground seven vaults were dug. Five of the seven vaults were 50,000 cubic feet and went 200 feet into the banks, in order to ferment and age their lager.¹¹

Philadelphia is also home to another American brewing first, lager beer. The question of ‘Who brewed America’s first porter with lager yeast?’ has not been considered as widely as the questions ‘Where was America’s first porter brewed?’ and ‘Where was America’s first lager brewed?’ These questions have the same answer, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. It stands to reason that the first porter fermented with lager yeast was produced in Pennsylvania. Until we find a porter brewer before Robert Hare in 1774, and until we uncover a lager beer brewer before John Wagner of Bavaria, who arrived in Philadelphia in 1840 carrying lager yeast, Philadelphia remains the keeper of these historical firsts.¹²

As Robert Hare was the son of a Limehouse brewer it seems natural that his beer was fermented in the London fashion.¹³ Though just given the lay of the land, Philadelphia was a city less suited for a porter brewer. With Hare’s brewery opening in Philadelphia in 1774, it would take another 66 years for lager beer to be produced in Pennsylvania, but by the time it started it would take off so fast that its effects still rattle American beer markets today. To this day, Americans still consume a greater volume of lager than ale. Of course the majority of that beer is straw colored and a far cry from the porter-colored beers of Pre-Prohibition Pennsylvania. At the start of the 19th Century Pennsylvania was the largest brewing state and by the turn of the 20th Century it still was the second-largest.¹⁴

In 1810 Pennsylvania had 48 breweries that produced 71,263 barrels annually. The second largest producer in the United States at this time was Massachusetts with 42 breweries producing 66,896 barrels of beer. By contrast the smallest states for breweries were the states of Georgia with one brewery, and Delaware with two breweries. In terms of production, Delaware produced the least amount of beer with 476 barrels and Ohio the second-smallest with 1,116 barrels.¹⁵ In 1904, Pennsylvania brewed 6,123,936 barrels of beer and by

1914 this had jumped to 8,008,786 barrels. In 1904 Pennsylvania was the second-largest beer producer in the U.S. behind New York who brewed 13,732,743 barrels. In 1914, Pennsylvania was seconded again by New York who brewed 14,040,387 barrels.¹⁶

The late 19th and early 20th Centuries America experienced a large influx of migrants from Germany.¹⁷ Modern American brewers can look to the well-documented change in immigrant ethnicity from British to German, and see a similar change in what happened in the brewing industry. Lou Farrell, a Pennsylvania brewer for the past 30 years is one. ‘Cream ale was likely a product of German immigrants producing beer in English breweries’, Farrell notes. Another distinction Farrell makes, which certainly has history in other brewing nations, is the notion of geographic tastes and the influence of country beer on city beer and vice versa. ‘Porter was less of an urban beer than cream ale. Places like Allentown and Philadelphia would have enjoyed cream ale, while porter and its markets would be more spread out over the state’, Farrell said.¹⁸ Certainly Philadelphia was not the urban center it is today when the first known porter brewer began production in 1774. In fact, porter production even stopped in 1777-1778 due to British troops occupying Philadelphia.¹⁹

While the exact dates and number of places are unknown, certainly, over the next century, porter was brewed and fermented with lager yeast. The reasoning for the switch in porter production from a top fermented beer to a bottom fermented beer is difficult to pin down and it did not occur uniformly throughout the entire United States. The change from porter as ale to porter as lager would be different from region to region and primarily happening in German areas, be they city centers or mining towns. So, while it is difficult to quantify, the opinion persists that porter fermentation changed with the change in ethnic mix of the American population.

The United States wasn’t the only place experiencing the lager revolution that emanated from Bavaria, the change from top to bottom fermentation also occurred in the Czech and Polish lands. Czech brewing in the 19th Century reflects a dramatic shift from ale brewing to lager brewing. According to Evan Rail, lager breweries in Bohemia, the western half of today’s Czech Republic, rose from 135 to 831 breweries from 1860 to 1870. On



Figure 3. 1847 advertisement from Grzegorz Berlinski's personal collection. Reprinted here with permission.

top of the changes in fermentation for operating breweries, more than 260 top-fermenting breweries closed in that ten-year period.²⁰

We have yet to find as detailed an account in Poland, but some evidence can be gleaned from the advertising and marketing material of several 19th Century Polish breweries. One example is the firm of Haberbusch, Schiele and Klawe where we see the difference in marketing reflect what is likely a change in practice. It is entirely possible that the exact same beer did not change over 30 years, only the marketing did, though it is also entirely possible that their fermentation switched from top to bottom fermentation in the 19th Century. This Warsaw based firm opened in 1846 and the following year their porter was marketed as in the English style of 'Extra Double Stout' or what we believe is top-fermented. 30 years later, the same brewery, Haberbusch and Schiele and Klawe, would be fermenting their porter in the German style, making 'Bock'. Neither of us speak Polish, so we enlisted the help of Polish brewery owner, Lukasz Kierski of Ziemia Obiecana Brewing. He said this of the 1847 beer,

Full name of this beer was rather 'Extra Double Stout Porter' where 'stout' was referring rather to strength of the beer but still was sold as 'porter'. Certainly it was a beer brewed in Poland because in the first half of 19th century in Poland it was not allowed to import English beer. It could be brewed with ale yeast but there is no confirmation about that and no trace of yeast. There are some hints that top/ale porter was brewed in Zywiec, additionally before 1 World War Zywiec was also producing beer called 'Ale'.²¹

The question of fermentation temperature may never be solved. And we actually know more about strength



Figure 4. 1877 advertisement from Grzegorz Berlinski's personal collection. Reprinted here with permission.

than the temperature at which fermentation took place. We reached out to Grzegorz Berlinski, who wrote 'As far as I know the oldest confirmed information about porter from Warsaw are from 1821. But I do not have any source for this'. He then mentions the earliest Porter advertisements as an 1837 ad from the Schaefer brewery and an 1840 porter ad from the Limprecht brewery

Unfortunately I do not have any information about plato for the porter in 19th century. I can assume it was less strong than now or in mid 20th. I have one information about Plato for Porter in 1920s - 22,5. But I do not know how reliable is this source. Extra Ale beer have 18 Plato in 1930s - this is the info from beer label.²²

Certainly, porter is uniquely made whether in Poland or by historic or craft brewers in Pennsylvania.²³ According to the Brewers Association, Pennsylvania produced 4,059,330 barrels of Craft Beer in 2015, the most in the U.S. This is certainly a great deal of beer, but also far less than the 7,166,300 barrels brewed in the state a century earlier in 1915. For the purposes of the presentation, we focused on Pre-Prohibition Porter from the 19th and early 20th Centuries. The brands of beer that are offered as commercial examples in the style guide are Yuengling Porter and Stegmaier Porter. These two Pennsylvania breweries were founded in the 19th

Century with Yuengling starting in 1829 and Stegmaier in 1857. Stegmaier is the stronger and bitterer of the two at 5.6% alcohol by volume and 25 International Bitterness Units comparatively to Yuengling Dark Brewed Porter's 4.7% ABV and 20 IBUs. 'This beer is a time machine' writes *All About Beer* editor John Holl, on Yuengling Dark Brewed Porter. In more ways than one his statement is true; it is fermented as a lager, and the simple name of 'Porter' was one of Yuengling's original offerings in the early 19th Century.²⁴

We unearthed a classic porter recipe from a Philadelphia brewery, The Commonwealth Brewing Company, that shuttered in 1916. While the exact year of the recipe's creation is unknown, we know this recipe was brewed as early as 1906, when the Food and Drug Administration's product inspection files began, and as late as the year the firm closed:

The light beer brewed by this concern, put out under the 'Real German Lager - Pilsener Style' and 'Selecto' labels, is made from mash consisting of 120 bushels of pale malt, 2,000 lbs. grits, 55 lbs. domestic hops, and 25 lbs. imperial hops, this mash giving them 110 barrels of finished beer.²⁵

As the inspector in the source material states:

The dark beer, marketed under the 'Real German Lager - Muenchener Style' label, is made from the same mash to which is added about one pint of malt extract to the barrel, which is said to be a caramelized malt product manufactured by the New York Malt Roasting Company, New York.

The porter is made from the same mash to which is added about one quart of 'Porterine' to each barrel of beer, the Porterine being a roasted malt product by the above named concern.²⁶

To clarify, all three beers brewed by Commonwealth, Real German Lager Pilsener style, Selecto or Muenchener style, and Imperial Porter, consisted of the same mash. The Muenchener when done fermenting and ready for packaging got one pint of malt extract to a barrel to turn it from Pilsener to Muenchener. The Porter when done fermenting and ready for packaging received one quart of Porterine to every barrel.²⁷

What is important to note is the distinction between the process used by Commonwealth and a 'brewed porter'.

Brewed porter is what Yuengling Porter is called because it has caramel and roasted malts in its mash bill.²⁸ Commonwealth has no caramel or roasted malts in the mash bill, only pale malt and corn grits. The color for the 'Selecto' or Munich style beer comes from a product made of caramel malt, but no caramel malt was used in the mashing of this beer. Likewise, the porter was brewed without caramel malts or roasted barley, but was later turned porter-color with 'Porterine'.

According to Pennsylvania brewer Lou Farrell, 'the way to think about Porter [during the late 19th and early 20th Centuries] is that there's a brewed Porter and a racking room Porter'. Brewed porter turned porter-color in the brewing process due to dark malts, whereas racking room porter turned porter-color in the racking room. The racking room was the final step before packaging, indicative of larger brewing operations. Farrell said of racking room porter

Porterine has a specific taste and it's a product darker than any malt we have available. We can't use it in microbrews because we can't control the measurement because that work has to be done with extreme precision in the racking room.²⁹

One example of a brewed porter from the early 20th Century is a porter brewed by the Weger Brothers Brewing Company, also of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. While their porter was actually sold as 'Hohen-



Figure 5. Commonwealth Brewing Co. Imperial Porter Label, Reproduced from the National Archives and Records Administration, Philadelphia, PA; Records of the Food and Drug Administration. (Record Entry ID: PH-3632) (NA ID: 631047).

schwanga Export Dark' to the brewers this was internally called Porter. The recipe, as it was brewed in 1911, is as follows:

55% Pale Malt
10% Porter malt
29% Grits
6% Sugar

Similar in composition to the Commonwealth 'racking room' porter, though the Weger Brothers Porter was turned dark by the 'Porter Malt' and by the sugar, called 'climax' in both the recipe and in many of the brewing trade publications of the time.³⁰

While neither of the B.J.C.P.'s commercial examples of Stegmaier or Yuengling, are 'racking room porters' there were plenty manufactured throughout Pennsylvania. As one Pennsylvania brewer who made beer in that city from the late 19th into the early 20th Centuries put it:

This brings me back to the old time good beer you hear people talk about. The saloon brewers almost all brewed a dark Munich type of beer, a good deal of it unfiltered, sold over the bar. But as time marched on, the demand was for a lighter, Pilsener type of beer; and this eliminated the saloon brewer. The same thing happened to the brewer of exclusive dark beers, who could or would not adjust to the existing conditions; and quite a few of these plants dropped by the wayside. We also had a few exclusive ale breweries who gradually disappeared from the picture.³¹

Of course 'better' is always relative and with so many American craft beer drinkers seeking a substantive porter the trend now amongst American craft and microbrewers seems back towards ales. Not necessarily harder drinking but certainly more complex than the easy-drinking nature of a clean lager. Of course the easy drinking lagered porters sell throughout regions of the country, especially in Pennsylvania where more of it is made than in any of the surrounding states of Delaware, Maryland, New York, New Jersey, or West Virginia.

It seems the story of porter in America is the story the world over; not as popular as it once was. Yet still for many American brewers, porter's history holds incredible value. We often hear brewers question, 'Porter as a lager?' A valid question but also a testament to how porter is still thought of as an English product and not

an American one. The historical nuance, that German immigrant brewers made porter anew in the new country, is difficult for modern minds to grasp. Due to the origins of a beer style being difficult to ascertain, it is easy to speculate what was the 'the first'. The hard part is the historical pinning down with primary documents. The first lager brewed in America and the first porter brewed in America, both are tied to the city of Philadelphia so we treat Philadelphia with great respect as the originator until documentation proves otherwise. However, what if there was a homebrewed porter in Virginia? And what if that first homebrewer was a woman, an enslaved African, a Huguenot, a Hebrew, a Bohemian or an incredibly far-flung Prussian prisoner of war? This is, of course, wild speculation. And while women or enslaved Africans are more likely candidates based on the data and makeup of colonial America, these kinds of historical discoveries push the American psyche in the direction of a more nuanced understanding of our history. The belief that history is black and white or all or nothing is a faulty one for it does not provide the shades of gray that are often written out of textbooks. By brewing porters that mimic the recipes of the 18th, 19th, and 20th Centuries we hope that history's nuances are as palatable as the beverages we bring back to the brewhouse.

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