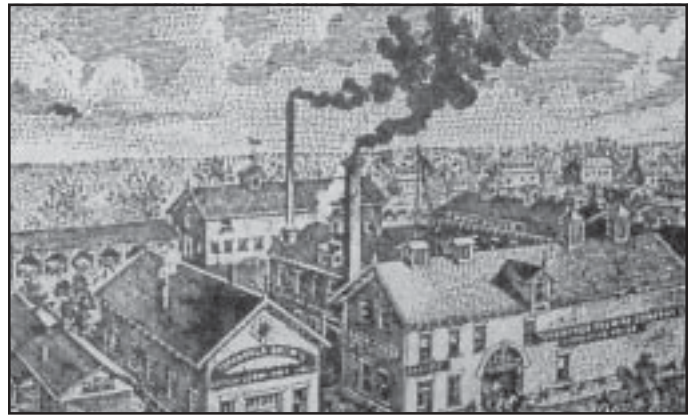


The History Of Brewing In Tonawanda, New York (1867-1948)

533 Niagara Street, Tonawanda, New York

by John P. Eiss

*Looking at a slice of history across time can give us
a glimpse into history as a whole.*



Lithograph of The Tonawanda Brewery, Circa 1900 (HST)

The Cities of Tonawanda and North Tonawanda are located just north of Buffalo, New York, where the Erie Canal meets the Niagara River. Because of their location and large deep-water port, the Tonawandas began to emerge as a lumber and shipping center in the 1840s. Lumber came from Michigan, Wisconsin and Ontario, Canada. The lumber was then transferred from great lakes cargo ships to canal boats and shipped to the nation's eastern coastal cities. A large and growing labor pool was needed to work on the lumber docks and in the lumber mills. German, Prussian and Alsatian immigrants flocked to the Tonawandas, by way of the Erie Canal, to fill the many available jobs on the docks. A large saloon and red light district grew up on the Erie Canal along North and South Canal Streets, catering to the needs and wants of these immigrant workers, lake sailors and canal boatmen. In the late 1890s the Village Fathers made a mostly failed attempt to clean up the area including changing the name of South Canal Street to South Niagara Street.

Nearby Buffalo was a large brewing center, with over 35 breweries operating in 1872 alone. The Tonawandas had only one brewery, operated over an 81-year span, under several different names and owners.

Author's Note: The story of brewing in the Tonawanda's can only be told because of Prosper Peuquet, the brewery's longest serving brew master, and his grandson Leon Peuquet. Prosper kept extensive notes on the brewery's activities during the many years he worked there, and Leon was the brewery's unofficial historian. Much of the information gathered for this article came from these two men.

Prosper Peuquet was born in Belfort, Alsace, France in 1845. At the age of 12 he came to America with his family. Prosper's father died soon after and when his mother remarried, he went to live with the George Zent family. It is believed that George Zent operated a brewery on Main Street near Ellicott Creek in Williamsville, N.Y. during the 1860s.

George Zent moved with his family and Prosper Peuquet to the city of Tonawanda in 1867. Several factors must have appealed to the businessman in George Zent. Shipping costs were relatively inexpensive on the Erie Canal. There was an unlimited supply of fresh water from the Niagara River. In winter, ice was available from the canal and nearby Two Mile Creek. Last and most important, beer was the staple daily drink of the new and growing immigrant work force. Providing that beer locally rather than shipping it from Buffalo and elsewhere was looked on as a good business opportunity by George Zent.

George Zent Brewery, 1867-1883

George Zent built his brewery at the northeast corner of Hinds and South Canal Streets, across from the Erie Canal and Niagara River, in the Town of Tonawanda. The brewery he built was a large wooden barn-like structure with two arched stone cellars for ice storage. Prosper Peuquet learned the brewing craft from George Zent and became the brewery's longest serving brew master.

Ice was harvested from nearby Two Mile Creek and the Erie Canal. The water supply came from the Niagara River, pumped through a pipe built over the Erie Canal. The brewery had a capacity of 6,000 barrels per year.

"Dock gangs" unloaded ships along the

miles of docks on the Niagara River in the Tonawandas. The gangs would receive two breaks a day to eat. The beer wagon from the brewery delivered a barrel of beer to each gang to drink during their breaks. One gang refused to drink beer and was called the "Temperance Gang." Drinking



G. Zent, Tonawanda, New York

beer during work breaks was a normal practice of the times. In Buffalo, boys would bring growlers (small metal pails) of beer to the factory workers to drink during their breaks.

Soda pop was probably produced and sold at the brewery during the hot summers when lager brewing operations were not possible. Evidence for this is the existence of eight-ounce blob top bottles bearing the name "G. Zent, Tonawanda N.Y." The bottles were probably made by the nearby Lancaster Glass Co.

Niagara River Brewing Co., 1883-1893

In 1883 George Zent sold his brewery and moved back to Williamsville, N.Y. The brewery was purchased by an investment group, including Chris Schwinger as president, Dr. H. B. Murray as vice-president and Martin Riesterer as treasurer. Mr. Riesterer was also president of the German American Savings Bank in town. Prosper Peuquet remained as brew master and Lucius Zent was hired as bookkeeper. Prosper now lived at 274 S. Canal Street, a couple of blocks from the brewery.

The new owners remodeled and modernized the brewery over the next couple of years. The brewery employed twelve to fifteen men in the early 1880s. This included drivers for their three beer delivery wagons. The bottling of beer was started at the C. & H. Rech Niagara Bottling Works, nearby on Wheeler Street. Before 1890, Federal law required bottling operations be housed separately from brewing operations. Most breweries did not bottle their own beer at this time.

The bottling works on Wheeler burned down on October 13th 1888. The legally required separation from the brewery saved the wooden brewery from burning down along with the bottling works. It was common for the old wooden breweries containing plenty of flammables, like barley dust, to burn down. The first telephone was installed at the brewery on October 16th of that same year.

A new 125-barrel capacity copper brewing kettle was installed in 1889. The kettle had to be cleaned after each brewing operation by a man wearing wooden shoes in order to prevent damage to the kettle. A new malt mill was purchased from the Ziegler Brewing Co. in Buffalo. The work crew was comprised of fifteen men and the brew master.



Niagara River Brewing Company, 1893 (HST)

The brewery produced 6,000 barrels of beer annually; requiring 12,000 bushels of barley malt, 15,000 Lbs. of hops and four carloads of a flaked corn product called "cerealine".

The lumber shipping business continued to grow, and in 1890, Tonawanda was the busiest lumber port in the nation, even surpassing Chicago. In addition, there were numerous lumber mills and canal boat and ship building facilities.

Two twenty-ton "Krausch" ice machines were installed at a cost of \$20,000. Two 60-horse power boilers were also installed with automatic pumps to circulate ammonia for beer cooling and refrigeration. This allowed for the year round production of lager beer and eliminated dependence on natural ice and the weather.

Then the pipe bridge over the Erie Canal carrying water to the brewery from the Niagara River collapsed.

In 1890, a new brewery worker, August Glanz, was hired at \$45.00 per month. He typically would work ten hours a day, six days a week.

An example of the notes kept by brew master Prosper Peuquet follows:

March 22, 1890 – Raised smoke stack.
 April 7, 1890 – Started engine No. 2.
 April 9, 1890 – Prosper Peuquet and Philip Welch started fire in new boiler.
 April 18, 1890 – Kumro and Geltz (movers) brought in ice machines.

April 25, 1890 – Started ice machines.

Natural gas was piped into the brewery and lit for the first time on March 20th 1891. The pipe bridge over the Erie Canal was replaced. Charles Fleischauer was hired at a wage of \$50.00 per month.

Clam bakes and other parties were held at the brewery from time to time for the brewery workers and special friends. Fisherman would provide fish from the Niagara River in return for beer. Farmers in the area would feed their livestock with the breweries spent malt, and in return, provide meat for the cookouts and parties at the brewery. Sometimes these parties would be held down the street at Ringler's Woods (now Veteran's Park) or across the Niagara River on Grand Island. I'm sure these parties were an excellent way for the brewery to promote their product.

Beginning on September 23rd 1892, water was brought into the brewery through wooden pipes from the new village water system, eliminating the need for the pipe bridge over the Canal and the pump house at the Niagara River.

The last clam bake of the 1892 season was held for the "Brewery Boys" on October 9th.

Busch Brewing Co. 1893-1898

Besides the canal, the railroad also carried freight through the Tonawandas, and in the 1890s, 16 different railroad companies were in operation. On any given day, 100 trains passed the



The Busch Brewing Co. on the Erie Canal, circa 1885. (HST)

Tonawanda train station.

The Niagara River Brewing Co. was acquired on June 19th 1883 by Jacob Busch and renamed the Busch Brewing Company. The new officers were; Jacob Busch, president, who continued to live in Buffalo on Delaware Avenue near Kenmore, James Hertle, vice-president and Fred Busch, secretary. Of the new officers only John Busch, the manager, lived in Tonawanda. Chris Schwinger stayed on as a director, and Prosper Pequet stayed on as the brew master. Before purchasing the Tonawanda Brewery, the Busch's operated the Busch Brewing Co. at 817-825 Main Street in Buffalo, from 1891 until it closed in 1893.

The new owners spent \$10,000 on improvements. The brewing capacity was tripled to 18,000 barrels and there were now five cellars for storing beer.

Beer was being delivered to Buffalo, Lockport, Akron, Williamsville and other towns. Beer continued to be delivered to the lumber "dock gangs" for their two daily breaks.

On August 16th 1894, at 12 PM, the icehouses burned. Disaster was avoided and brewing continued because of the new ice making machines that had been installed in 1890. A new brewery worker Lenhard Schmidt, was hired at \$12.00 per week.

In 1895, Prosper Pequet, the brew master, left over a disagreement concerning the quality of the brewing ingredients and E. A. Krampetz became the new brew master. Prosper's twenty year old son, George, who was working for the brewery, also left. Prosper became the village Streets Commissioner for a year. He also ran the St. Louis Hall, a

dance hall and saloon on South Canal Street, for two years. Busch hired Prosper back, as brew master, sometime in 1897 or 1898.

The Tonawanda City directory of 1898 lists Fred Busch as the new president and F. A. Busch as the new Secretary. Other records also indicate there was an unusual amount of staff turnover at the brewery, including the brew master.

Niagara River Brewing Co., 1898 -1900

Anthony Golembieski bought the brewery in 1898. The brewery directors were Julia Golembieski and Simon Usienski. Again, Prosper Pequet stayed on as the brew master. Mr. Golembieski may also have had a part interest in the Susquehanna Brewing Co. of Nanticoke Pa., controlled by the Stegmeyer Brewing

Co.

Bottled Beer was first delivered to private homes at this time, usually on Saturdays. It came in wooden cases of 12 or 24 bottles, and cost 50- cents a dozen. The Brewery brewed lager beer. Porter and cream ale.

In 1903, Anthony Golembieski died unexpectedly of acute appendicitis at the age of 39. His wife put the brewery up for sale that same year.

Author's note: Records at the Erie County Clerk's Office indicate the Tonawanda Brewing Co. was incorporated in 1900 and was still owned by Anthony Golembieski. Other local evidence indicates the brewery operated under the ownership of Anthony Golembieski until 1903. The 1900-1 Tonawanda City Directory lists the Tonawanda Brewing Co., Anthony Golembieski, proprietor. An ad in a local area atlas also shows the Tonawanda Brewery with Anthony Golembieski as proprietor. The name of the brewery changed in 1900, but the brewery wasn't actually sold until 1903.

Tonawanda Brewing Co. 1900-1924

Peter Buerger, whose family owned a large malt house in Mayville, Wisconsin, did business with the Niagara River Brewery. He approached Bernardt Voelcker, a friend of his family and a hotel owner in Rochester N.Y., about buying the brewery.

Bernardt Voelcker bought the brewery in 1903 with Peter Buerger and his brother, Anton, investing an additional



The Busch Brewing Co.'s Bottling Works, 1897 (HST)

\$40,000. Peter Buerger became the company secretary after the investment. Prosper Pequet again stayed on as the Brew Master.

The brewery was now selling between 10,000 and 11,000 barrels of beer annually. The beer was called "Rheingold," and was quite popular locally. Ale and porter were also being produced. A motorized truck was first used at this time to deliver beer to Buffalo.

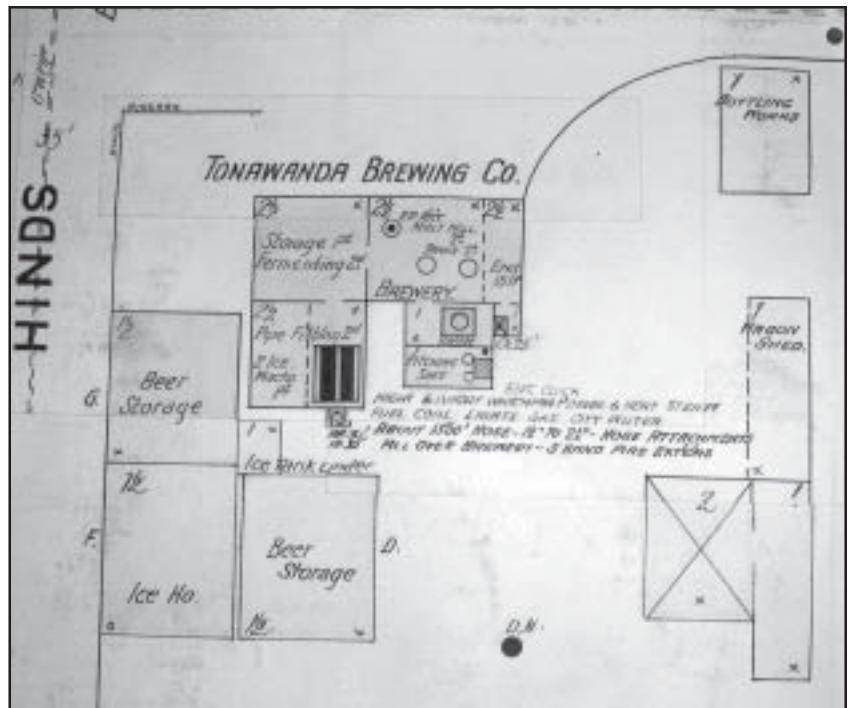
After spending most of 41 years working at the brewery, Prosper Pequet died in 1908 at the age of 63. His brewing techniques and style were carried on after his death and the beer remained unchanged.

In 1909, Anton Buerger wrote a letter to his relatives in Germany, "The location here is so marvelous that probably there is no place that surpasses this view. Just opposite the brewery is Grand Island, 48 miles square" and "the river is $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile wide... The river is full of freight and pleasure steamers. Life everywhere. Good, warm weather increases the sale of beer."

The brewery produced between 18,000 and 20,000 barrels of beer per year. The going price for a barrel of beer was between \$6.00 and \$6.40. The brewery had six team horses, two carriage horses, and one delivery truck.

Tonawanda continued to be a great market for beer as one of the largest lumber ports of its time. 600 dockworkers, divided into dock gangs, loaded and unloaded lumber on steam ships and canal barges during the seven-month shipping season. The gangs were made up of European immigrants, who brought their love of beer with them from the old country. The dock gangs drank beer delivered from the brewery during their two allotted breaks. The old North and South Canal Streets, next to the canal, were now called North and South Niagara Streets, and continued to be a saloon and red light district for the dockworkers, steam ship sailors and canal boatmen.

In 1913, construction was started on a new brick brew house. On August 5th at 10 AM, a fire started in the roof of the hops room and destroyed most of the old wooden brewery. Several horse powered fire companies from Tonawanda and North Tonawanda responded to the fire, but only the bottling house, stable, wagon shed and machine shop were saved. The cost of the fire was estimated at \$100,000.



Sanborn Insurance Map of Tonawanda, N.Y., 1893-1910 (HST)

Fire was always a major threat to wooden breweries filled with highly flammable substances such as malt.

Bernardt Voelcker contracted with the Gerhard Lang Brewery of Buffalo to supply the brewery with beer for their customers until they could rebuild. Lang's Brewing and Pabst Brewing of Milwaukee already had distribution centers in Tonawanda.

The sight was cleaned up and the brewery was rebuilt with brick and concrete, including storage and fermentation cellars at a cost of \$50,000. The new brewery was operational in six months.

It appears the brewery still delivered most of their beer by horse drawn wagon and a keg of beer was still on tap at the brewery for the workers.

During weekdays the brewery wagons would rumble along Adams Street, loaded with beer kegs for delivery to local saloons and the lumber docks. On Saturdays, bottled beer was delivered to area homes. In 1917 the brewery sold bottled beer at 45-cents per dozen bottles.

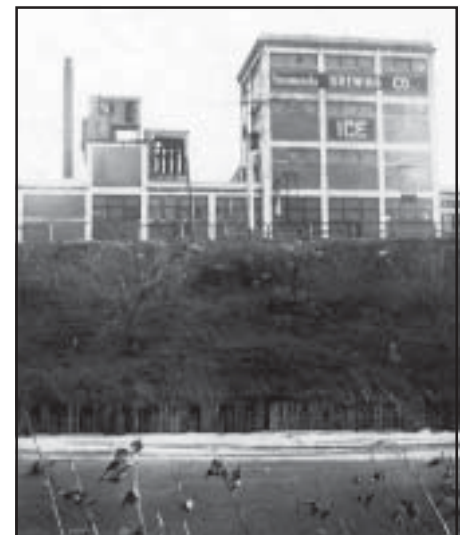
Some of the neighbors would gather hayseed from the brewery horse barns to plant in their yards as inexpensive grass. The brewery also provided brewers yeast to the neighborhood for baking fastnachts, a kind of German donut, on holidays and special occasions.

In 1918, because of wartime restrictions limiting the use of grain for

brewing purposes, and the approach of prohibition, brewing operations ended. Legal brewing would not resume until prohibition ended in 1933. The brewery was now used to manufacture and sell ice. It also served as a depot for the sale of coal. Bernhard Voelcker died in 1921, and the brewery property was sold in 1924, probably by the Voelcker family and Peter Buerger.

River Beverage Co., Tonawanda Beverage Co. 1924 – 1928

The record is not clear as to who purchased the former brewery in 1924. Leon Pequet thought it was a group of investors from Albany, New York. The brewery was started up again, and



Tonawanda Brewing Co., circa 1920

produced a less than one percent alcohol cereal beverage and soda pop. Jacob Barger was the brew master during this time.

Leon Pequet also believed the brewery was used to produce illegal full-alcohol beer during this time period. He remembered red vans coming from the brewery late at night, traveling down Adam Street, and ending up in boxcars at a Clay Street railroad siding, on Goose Island. A raid by Federal Dry Agents took place at the railroad siding on Clay Street, followed by court appearances in Buffalo. After that, illegal brewing operations stopped and the brewery buildings laid vacant until 1931.

Schwab's Liquid Malt, 1931-1933

Francis X. Schwab, the former mayor of Buffalo, along with some associates purchased the brewery in 1931, and formed a stock company in anticipation of the end of prohibition. They started producing and selling the ingredients to make beer at home. The product was a hop-flavored liquid malt extract sold in five-gallon containers. All that was needed was the addition of yeast, which may have also been supplied upon request.

Tonawanda Brewing Corp., 1933-1935

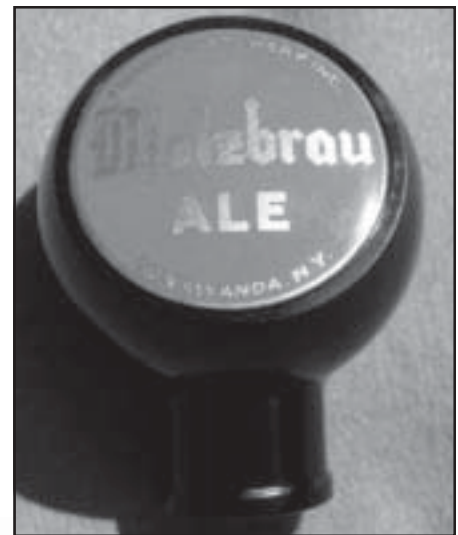
Prohibition ended on December 5th, 1933 and Mr. Schwab and his associates began selling beer again under the name Tonawanda Brewing Corp.

After prohibition ended, the Federal Government required all brewers to operate with a federal permit at a cost of \$1000 and they placed a \$5.00 tax on every barrel of beer produced. Before prohibition, a permit was not required, and each barrel of beer was taxed at \$1.00. The Tonawanda Brewing Corp. operated under Permit Number U-270. A New York State license, D-86, was also issued at an additional fee.

Frontier Brewery, Inc. 1935-1948

In 1935, Klocke and DeKob took over operation of the brewery and changed the name to the Frontier Brewery, Inc. They operated under federal Permit Number U-291 and named their beer and ale "Frontier Gold Label".

Julius C. Belzer purchased the brewery in 1939. Mr. Belzer was from Buffalo and had no previous brewing experience. The beer and ale he produced was called



"Malz-Brau". By all accounts the beer was quite good and the splits were quite popular locally.

In the summer of 1943, all local deliveries of beer were abruptly canceled and the brewery began producing beer for the troops overseas under a government contract. The beer, called "Frontier Premium," had a bad reputation among the servicemen. The ingredients and production methods were probably cheapened to increase profits.

After the war ended, the brewery returned to producing beer for local consumption. They continued to call their beer and ale "Frontier Premium", and also sold the "Falcon" beer brand. The quality of the beer never returned to pre-war levels, and production fell off, as customers were lost to competitors.

In 1946, business temporarily picked up because of an artificial grain shortage, and the brewery did well for a while using artificial ingredients. After the shortage ended, business continued to decline, and the brewery finally closed in 1948. When the brewery closed, the beer on hand was dumped into the sewer.

The brewery was turned into a machine shop for a short time until it closed sometime before 1951. The brewery buildings stood vacant until 1994 when they were demolished to make room for a convenience store plaza.

The Tonawanda Brewery saw much of this great country's growth, situated on the Erie Canal and Niagara River. Most of what traveled East or West in the country, for over 100 years, traveled on the Erie Canal and the Great Lakes.

**Brewing Companies located at 533
Niagara Street (South Canal Street),
Tonawanda, N.Y.**

1867-1883 George Zent Brewery
1883-1893 Niagara River Brewing Co.
1893-1898 Busch Brewing Co.
1898-1900 Niagara River Brewing Co.
1900-1918 Tonawanda Brewing Co.
1924-1928 (Prohibition) Tonawanda Beverage Co., River Beverage Co.
1931-1933 (Prohibition) Schwab's Liquid Malt
1933-1935 Tonawanda Brewing Co.
1935-1948 Frontier Brewing Co.

Brew Masters at 533 Niagara Street

1867-1883 George Zent
1883-1895 Prosper Peuquet
1895-1898 Mr. Krampetz
1898-1908 Prosper Peuquet
1908-1920 unknown
1924-1930 Jacob Barger (brewed nonalcoholic beer and possible full strength beer)
1933- Walter Heuer
Mr. Baum
Otto Adler
-1947 Wes Schneider

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Tonawanda Map. 1909.

Tonawanda Brewery letterhead receipt. May 1, 1917.

Tonawanda, Sanborn Insurance map. 1893-1910.

Tonawanda, Sanborn Insurance map. 1910-1953.

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