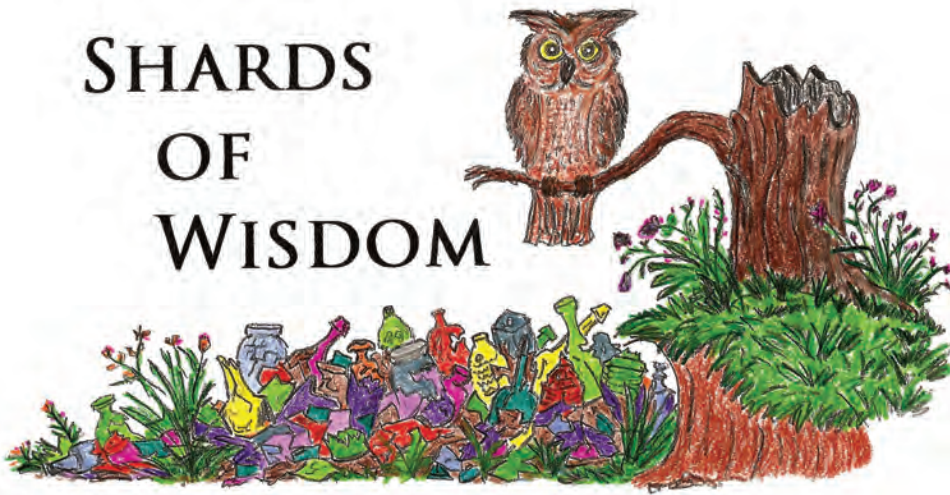


# SHARDS OF WISDOM



## Bottle & Product Histories - Beer

By Tod von Mechow

Beer was brewed from ancient times and no doubt it was bottled soon afterwards.

The first records of brewing are about 6,000 years old and refer to the Sumerians. Sumer was between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, and in the area of Southern Mesopotamia. An ancient clay tablet engraved with the Sumerian language outlines the steps for making beer. This tablet has pictographs that represent barley, baking bread, crumbled bread being put into water and made into mash and then a drink. The Sumerians perfected this process and are recognized as the first civilized culture to brew beer. They brewed beer that they offered to their gods as in an 1800 B.C. hymn to Ninkasi, the goddess of brewing. The beer was drunk out of jars with a straw to help filter out the sediments and soggy bread that was part of the brew.

When the Sumerian empire collapsed, the Babylonians became the rulers of Mesopotamia and incorporated the Sumerian culture into their own. As a result, they acquired the knowledge to brew beer. The Babylonians brewed at least twenty different types of beer. The beers were brewed with pure emmer (prehistoric grain

type and similar to spelt), pure barley or a mixture of grains. The Babylonian King Hammurabi enacted a law that established a daily beer ration. The higher ones rank, the more beer that was rationed. High priests received two and a half times the ration of a common worker. The Babylonians also exported beer to Egypt.

The Egyptians soon learned the art of brewing and carried the tradition into the next millennium. They continued to use bread for brewing beer but also added dates to flavor it. The ancient Egyptians even had a hieroglyph for the word brewer, which illustrates the importance of brewing to the culture. Ancient Egyptian documents show that beer and bread were part of the daily diet and was

consumed by the wealthy and poor alike. Beer was an important offering to the gods and was placed in tombs for the afterlife.

With the rise of the Greek and Roman Empires, beer continued to be brewed, but wine was the drink of preference. In Rome itself, wine became the drink of the gods and beer was only brewed in areas where wine was difficult to obtain. To Romans beer was the drink of barbarians. Tacitus, a Roman historian, wrote about the Teutons, the ancient Germans, and documented "a liquor from barley or other grain" that these people drank.

During these ancient times, brewing beer was a woman's job. In some cultures beer was brewed by priestesses in the temples. During the Middle Ages this changed when brewing was carried on in monasteries. It is interesting that monks were able to drink beer when fasting. Beer was a drink and not food. This runs contrary to later beliefs where beer was considered "liquid bread."

When Columbus first arrived in the New World, the American Indians that he met served him a corn-based beer. The Aztecs, Incas and Mayans had been brewing such beers for hundreds of years before the arrival of Europeans.



Circa 1845

Circa 1860

Circa 1870

Circa 1885

Circa 1890

Circa 1910

Circa 1915

Beer was considered a healthy drink for most of its history and was a good source of nourishment. It was often advertised as good for the sick and elderly. But perhaps its biggest health advantage was that beer was brewed. At a time when impurities and microbes in water were unknown, beer provided a safer drink as it was boiled as part of the brewing process. Beer drinkers were less susceptible to waterborne diseases and thus healthier. Over the centuries this trend was noticed but was not understood until pasteurization was discovered.

Most beers brewed over the last four hundred years have been made of the following ingredients:

Barley malt for fullness  
Hops add bitterness  
Yeast to convert barley malt sugars into alcohol  
Water to serve as a medium for the fermentation process  
Brewers over the years have substituted other grains for the barley. These include corn, wheat and rice.

The early brewing centers of modern times were England, Holland and Germany. English beers had the greatest influence on American consumers at the country's founding and through the mid-Nineteenth century. The first brewing center in the New World was run by the Dutch on Manhattan Island or New Amsterdam. During the second half of the Seventeenth Century, the Dutch were exporting some beer, but much beer was still imported. The problem in Manhattan was getting a good supply of water and this problem was not addressed for another 150 years. Even so, the brews were various ales and beers also common in England.

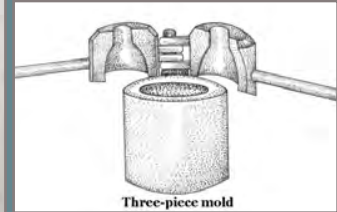
Starting around 1700, Philadelphia started to emerge as the brewing center of the English Colonies in America. A good supply of water, the productive farmlands that surrounded Philadelphia, a thirsty population and the skills of the English trained brewers were responsible for this. Soon Philadelphia beers were exported to all of the English Colonies in America. George Washington was an ardent fan of Philadelphia porter and ordered quantities of it for consumption at his Mount Vernon home. The beer bottles of this period were the common black glass bottles that were also used to bottle wine and other spirits. In the late 1700s, the shapes of wine and beer bottles started to evolve in different directions. Wine bottles started to be more slender with higher shoulders, while beer bottles tended to be shorter with lower shoulders. This beer bottle shape, known as the porter shape, was associated with English beers and remained in use until well after 1900. In the 1840s, a new English bottle form started to evolve from the porter shape. These bottles grew taller and narrower and the neck evolved a bulge. This style was exported to North America and is known as the export beer shape. American glass manufactures started to produce this form in about 1855. The earliest form of this type is known as an early export beer. Later, in the 1880s, a bottle with a softer shoulder and gentler bulge in the neck evolved called the later export beer shape. This shape endures today in many beer bottles.

During the 1830s, a new style of beer, lager, was being brewed in Germany. The Germans had isolated a strain of yeast that produced a lighter beer. This yeast was a bottom fermenting yeast (*Saccharomyces uvarum*) as opposed to the top fermenting yeasts (*Saccharomyces cerevisiae*) used to produce the heavier

## HISTORY'S CORNER

In Memory of Dick Watson

longtime FOHBC Historian



Sometimes when you hear people talking about old bottles you hear the term "It is a three piece mold." So what does that really mean? Just what it says, the bottle was blown in a mold made out of three pieces. Note there is no seam up the side of a bottle made in a three piece mold. It must also be noted that many three piece molds had a removeable base. So it really is a four piece mold.

Watch each issue for a new installment of History's Corner.

English style beers. In 1840, John Wagner smuggled some of this yeast out of Germany and to Philadelphia, where he brewed the first lager beer in America. The earliest lager beer bottle had a distinctive shape that is called an early lager. This beer did not find popularity immediately in Philadelphia where the German population was well established, but did become very popular in the Midwest where many of the new German immigrants were settling. Slowly, lager beers gained in popularity in the older settled areas of the United States, but it took almost thirty years until the German style lager beers usurped the English style beers in these areas. Lager beer bottles of this period are called late lagers. By this time, the Midwestern breweries in Saint Louis and Milwaukee had a firm handle on the market and would eventually dominate beer production in the United States. Around 1875, a new style of beer bottle appeared in the New York area. This style is called the champagne beer style and remained popular until well into the twentieth century and its shape can be seen in many of today's beer bottles.

Around 1875 beers start to acquire trade marked names. Prior to this point beers were advertised by their brewer, the type of beer or the region it was from. Widely advertised types of beer included; lager, ale, brown stout, cream ale, weiss beer and bock. Regional branding included; Philadelphia Porter and Ale, Saint Louis Lager, Milwaukee Lager, and Pentucket Ale. Of the branded beers, one of the most enduring is Budweiser (1876), but others include Pabst Blue Ribbon (1882) and Miller High Life (1903).

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