

## THE HISTORY OF CRAFT BEER IN OREGON

Significant numbers of immigrants began to move to the Oregon Territory in the 1840s. It wasn't long before they had a thirst for beer, so when German brewer Henry Saxer arrived in 1852, tasted the clear, soft water from the nearby mountains and recognized the prime hop and grain growing potential, he started brewing.

Fellow immigrant Henry Weinhard opened his brewery in 1856. For the next 50 years the new residents of the young state enjoyed the fresh, traditional German lagers brewed by Weinhard and others.

In 1888 Henry offered to send beer through Portland fire hoses to the dedication of the Skidmore Fountain a dozen blocks away near the waterfront. But the City's valuable fire hoses would have run close to Portland's seedy Skid Road, and civic leaders feared that the rough district's thirsty residents would puncture the hoses for a free drink.

Things changed when Oregonians voted to ban alcohol in 1914, five years before the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment established a national prohibition. Weinhard's City Brewery switched to non-alcoholic beer, soft drinks and fruit syrups and managed to survive the nineteen dry years until Congress repealed prohibition in 1933. Along the way City Brewery merged with Portland Brewing Company, owned by Arnold I. Blitz. The resulting Blitz-Weinhard Brewery produced Oregon's best-known beer until 1999.

During the economic boom following WWII, beer suffered from the same move toward national production and distribution that put more processed foods on American dinner tables. By 1980, the number of breweries in the entire country had shrunk to just 80, "and the prediction was that there would only be 10 left by 1990," said beer brewer and writer Fred Eckhardt.

But American palates were in revolt.

The social upheaval of the counter culture included the rejection of bland, processed, industrial food, and the college students of the 1960s were starting families and looking for alternatives.

In Portland, a group of college friends started Genoa, an Italian restaurant that didn't even serve spaghetti. Young wine makers were planting Pinot Noir on the red clay hills fifty minutes south of Portland, and two brothers named McMenamain were satisfying a growing demand for beer with flavor with a dizzying array of imports at a little café called Produce Row.

Cartwright's, Oregon's first craft brewery, opened in 1980. Aptly called a microbrewery since the production was miniscule compared to the industrial producers, its beer didn't attract a following and the brewery closed within a few years. But the response demonstrated that Oregon was ready for a different kind of beer, and when the state legislature made brewpubs legal in 1983, the brewers were ready.

Established winemakers Nancy and Dick Ponzi opened what would become Bridgeport Brewing in an old rope factory located in the industrial district in NW Portland. A few blocks away former home brewers Kurt and Rob Widmer were pouring their first batch of Altbier. Mike and Brian McMenamain opened Oregon's first brewpub in the Hillsdale neighborhood in 1985.

The beer-friendly Oregon laws, a growing awareness of the high quality local ingredients, and a seemingly voracious thirst for well-made beer triggered a micro-boom in microbreweries. Full Sail opened in Hood River and became the first craft brewery in the Northwest to bottle its beers. What started as a small brewpub in Bend in 1988 evolved into Deschutes Brewery.

The first Oregon Brewers Festival in 1988 drew 15,000 people to sample 16 beers from 13 breweries under a big top tent in Portland's Tom McCall Waterfront Park. By 1990, with more craft breweries and brewpubs per capita than any other city in the United States, Portland is proclaimed "America's Microbrew Capital." Unofficially, it's Beervana.

Over the past few years, a new generation of brewers has emerged. Trained in the region's larger craft breweries, they're opening small, independent brew pubs and making unique, individualistic beers. Oregon's now home to 56 breweries, and 40 of them are brewpubs. You can pick up a six-pack of local craft beer at almost any grocery store, and you can try special, seasonal brews right where they are made. Come have a cold one.