

317 Farmer Street

1850-52 Princeton Tiger Brew Brewery

The Tiger Brew Brewery is probably one of the older buildings in Princeton. The latest addition was in 1894. The brewery is thought to be built in 1850-52. The brewery has gone through many changes. It was originally a blacksmith shop. After the blacksmith shop closed its doors, it was transformed into a brewery; it was also a mushroom growing center. Cheese was also aged here from about 1930 to 1970. This building has its own water supply, making it one of the few that does not rely on the Fox River for water.

Early Breweries

“A market for their products” was the explanation accounting for the wide distribution of breweries in Wisconsin listed in the 1915 Wisconsin Blue Book. The local flour and grist mills and many of the sawmills existed for the same reason—“because there was in every community a market for their products.”

Milwaukee, with its output from nine breweries, sent its products throughout the United States and to foreign countries and became a brewing center. Area history records the importance of the Princeton Tiger Brew Company and the Berlin Brewery, both a part of the industrial history of the past. The Milwaukee breweries dated on some instances to the 1840’s.

The Berlin Brewery is first mentioned in a July 25, 1867 news note in the Berlin Courant. An article entitled New Brewery read: “Mr. August Buhler, of the town of Berlin Brewery, is preparing to remove his establishment to the city and run it on a more extensive scale. The building for the new brewery is now in process of erection, on the rear of the lots near Hodgkins’ (old) Tannery. The building is of brick, the main part being forty by sixty feet on the ground, and will be carried up two stories high, with a deep cellar under the whole. The beer cellar is eighteen by forty feet arched, and flagged with stone perfectly dark, and will be entered only from an ante room. The rest of the building will be arranged on the latest plans for the manufacture of this much used beverage. Two wings, one twenty-six by forty, and one of lesser dimensions will be added to the main building in due time. One hundred thousand bricks will be used in its construction.”

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The landmark formerly Princeton Tiger Brew building on Farmer Street is dated “J. Ernst-1894,” in a faded photograph. The Princeton Quas Qui Centennial 125th Anniversary book, however, notes that the one-time famous brewery was built by August Weist.

Tiger Brew gained a reputation as a fine product. There are those who recall the flavor and head on the beer. Competition with the large breweries, and a prohibitive license fee of one thousand dollars (the

same as the Braumeister Brewery in Milwaukee) forced the Brewery to close in the 1930's, after a lively business for several decades.

The site of the building figures prominently in Princeton's early history. Henry Treat and Nelson Parsons had obtained the original patent on the land, with numerous transactions involved from the time the site was platted.

Lot 36 was sold in 1856 to Noah Hall for \$400. Just four years before it brought \$150 and in 1851 it had sold for \$20 indicating the great increase in land values in the growing village of Princeton. August Thiel was the next purchaser. When he sold the land, it included a blacksmith and wagon shop. Weist, who had come to Princeton from Germany where he was a brewer, had good business until the prohibition amendment forced the brewery to shut down.

The plant was rejuvenated with the repeal of the amendment and returned to modern beer making.

The Quas Qui Centennial book states: "In 1934 operations were resumed in the brewery which had a capacity of 1,800 barrels. There were fermenters, with a 75-barrel capacity on the upper story. The resting tanks were 55-barrel size. There were three cellars in the brewery. The ingredients used such as barley and malt were trucked from Lomira. Paasch Brewery Supply Company of Milwaukee supplied the hops, syrup and yeasts."

Many people felt that the \$1,000 license fee was an injustice, considering that the Princeton brewery was so much smaller than the Milwaukee firms.

During those busy years Paul Bobisch from Germany was the brewmaster; Theodore Radtke was his assistant; Paul Hunt served as engineer, with Jerry Boyle as 'boss' and Guy Johnson working as his assistant. Mike Sommerfeldt was hired to haul the wagonful of kegs to Germania in Marquette County, where it was served to tavern customers."

Most of the beer in the 1930's was put in kegs, one-eighth barrel, which sold for about seventy-five cents per keg. Farmers frequently would drive into Princeton during threshing season or barn-raising affairs to pick up a keg or two to serve the crew of neighbors who had gathered to help.

It is not difficult to imagine the importance of flavor and enjoyment of a glass, stein or mug of Princeton Tiger Brew back in the days of the businesses of the past. Especially after a hard day's work in one of the other business places that are also only memories. An 1890 business directory lists 'a brewery' at Princeton and Berlin.

A 1909 reference book explaining the process involved in fermenting brew proves interesting. It states that this drink has been known since the Egyptians first used it three thousand years before the Christian era. A fermented or worked liquor is made from malted grain, usually barley, although in India rice is also used. Table beer, pale ale, mid ale and porter are names used to mark differences in the process of fermentation or in the proportions of materials used.

"The Brewery Extension Plans Are Developing Rapidly For A Four-Story Structure" were Thursday, January 11, 1906 headlines in ***The Berlin Courant***.

“The plans for the new structure at the Berlin Brewery are developing rapidly, and it is expected that the complete specifications for the entire structure will be received from the architects in Chicago before another week has elapsed.

“The plan is to use the present building for a cellar, washing and ice house purposes only. A large part of the present ice house has already been converted into cellar and the rest is constructed so that at any time the entire ice storage rooms can be converted into cellar rooms. That will not be done however until such a time in the future when an ice making machine will be installed for the immediate future cooling.

“The new building will be built to the south of the present structure and will encompass the main part of the new plant. The brew house itself will be four stories high, twenty-four feet wide and will be as long as the present brewery. The additions to the brewery house will be two and one stories high. The structure will be a model of up-to-datedness. In all places, there will be an economy of space and appliances. Where in former breweries it was necessary to pump the amber liquid from place to place, it will now be run by gravity. The present plans are that there will not be a belt in the entire establishment.

“To bring this about, it will be necessary to use electricity for power, whether or not that will be installed will depend largely upon the electric light company and its willingness to dispose of its product.

“That the new brewery will be large may be judged from the fact that 300,000 brick have already been ordered and at that a large part of the new building will be made of stone and concrete. The plans are now to put up a building in the spring that will have a capacity just about double the capacity of the present plant. This is the way we like to see our local industries grow.

December 16, 1909 *Berlin Courant* headlines verify the fact that “Business Good in 1909.”

“From all over the country comes reports that the brewery business has suffered materially on account of the recent crusade against the licensed liquor traffic. We were interested to see whether the effect had been felt locally and made a call at the Berlin Brewing Company’s office. We were told by manager Feiner that the product of the plant had almost doubled in the last year and that never in the history of the institution had they enjoyed such a prosperous year as this last one.

“The plant at the present time employs thirteen people and this number will materially increase in the future if the business maintains its growth. When the new brew house was built about two years ago the capacity was made so large that it was necessary to brew but twice a week to maintain the supply. Beer must be stored in the cellars for a long time in order that it may be palatable. The cellar capacity determines the possible output of such an institution. This last year the cellar capacity was materially increased but the increase in the output has made it necessary that the cellar be further enlarged. This work will be undertaken in the near future.

“Mr. Frank Feiner tells us that the output of bottle beer was more than doubled this last year and that the keg beer almost kept pace with it. The bottle beer seems to have struck a very popular chord and a large part of the output goes to private homes where the beer has found great favor as a table beverage.

“Material improvements have been planned for next year. It is quite likely that an ice machine will be installed. The present plan of cooling included a large cistern that contains ice. This ice is artificially melted and the liquid which is below freezing point is pumped through pipes and coils that run through the cellars and the coolers.

“The new ice machines will make the ice artificially and then use a similar cooling process. The plans for next year include material improvements in the bottling house. The increased output is just about taxing the capacity of this part of the plant now. The market for the beer is mostly local. Berlin uses a large part, but Redgranite, Omro, Princeton, Green Lake and Markesan take a large part of the product. The beer that goes to Markesan and Fairwater is shipped.

“All the rest is delivered by wagon. It takes twelve hours to distribute the beer to the different points and the expense of maintaining these is no small item.

“In addition to the regular beer the brewery has the last few years been turning out a product that for the lack of a better name we will call ‘two-percent beer.’ It is a beverage that comes within the definition of a non-intoxicating drink and for the sale of it a license is not required. In the near future it is planned to put on the market a malt tonic that will be sold for medicinal purposes.

“It will be seen that the brewery is a large institution. Good and careful management has made it so. The administration of the brewery is in the hands of a board of directors. M. Safford is president; Perry Niskern, secretary; and Frank Feiner, formerly of Rockford, Illinois, has management of the plant as far as the plant itself and the manufacture is concerned. Charles Kulnick markets the product.”



THE HOP CRAZE OF 1864 TO 1870

The great increase in the output of Wisconsin breweries because of the discriminating tax levied on whiskey as a Civil War measure sent the demand for hops soaring. The dried flower clusters used to flavor beer and other malt drinks grew on a vine which was trained to twine on twelve-to-fifteen foot poles and then to reach out of the top to other poles to form a canopy of vines overhead.

A few vines may be found today in the growing season, trailing on a forgotten log rail fence in some of the forty Wisconsin counties which had been involved in growing the vines in the hop craze of 1864 to about 1870.