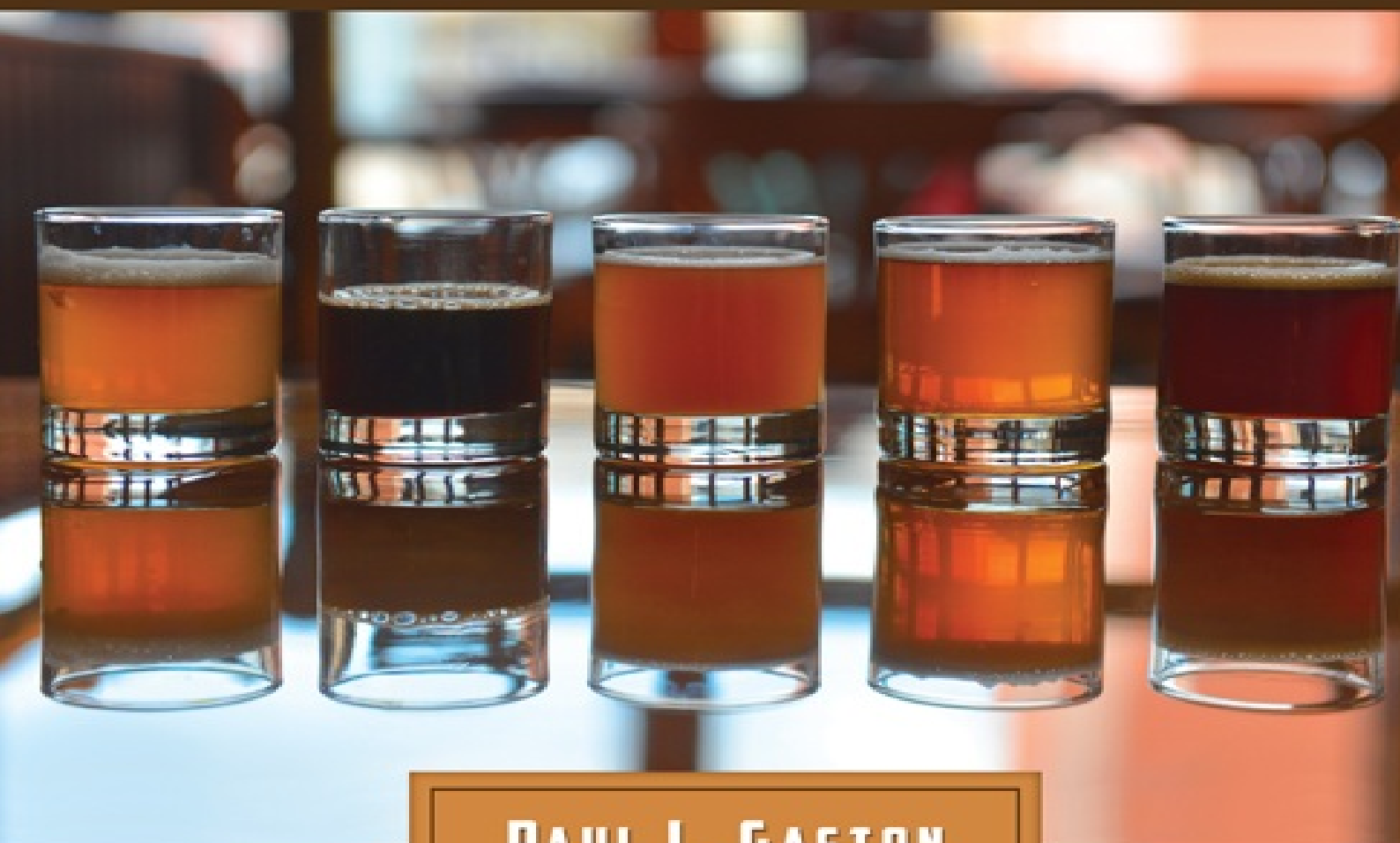




# Ohio's CRAFT BEERS

DISCOVERING THE VARIETY \* ENJOYING THE QUALITY \* RELISHING THE EXPERIENCE



**PAUL L. GASTON**  
FOREWORD BY LENNY KOLADA





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# Ohio's **CRAFT BEERS**

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**PAUL L. GASTON**



**Black Squirrel Books™**  
Kent, Ohio

Publisher's Note: In an industry as dynamic as craft brewing, changes occur frequently. The author and publisher have made every effort to ensure that the information presented in *Ohio's Craft Beers* was current at the time of publication. The author would like to hear from readers about the latest news on craft brewing in Ohio. Contact him at [plgaston3@gmail.com](mailto:plgaston3@gmail.com).

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**For Mark Wilson Kimble,**

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*Il mio compagno di birra*





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## FOREWORD

My mother always told me not to give advice when it's not asked for. But she died before I wrote this foreword, so I'm doing it anyhow.

But first, a few words about this book. Paul Gaston has written a book that serves two purposes for the craft beer enthusiast. On the one hand, it is a snapshot of craft brewing in Ohio at mid-decade, useful for navigating the multitude of brewpubs and microbreweries in the Buckeye State. As time passes, this purpose will diminish and it will transform into one of a more historical nature.

On the other hand, this book is a general reference of the lay of the beer land and beer-related terminology. The introduction and first chapter set the tone. This use is timeless.

Both are welcome, so kudos to Paul for taking the immense time that it takes to write a book of this magnitude. It's a thankless task.

I have been involved with craft beer in Ohio since almost the beginning, having opened my first brewpub in 1992, almost a quarter century ago. Much has changed, and much remains the same. With more than one hundred craft breweries in Ohio today, and the commensurate cast of characters who make up the craft beer industry, it is literally a community unto itself.

While I read these pages, several thoughts came to mind. Considering these thoughts is a useful frame of reference as you read this book for yourself.

There are scores of beer styles, with many more substyles. Moreover, like a talented jazz musician, craft brewers riff on styles more than at any time in the history of this iconic fermented beverage. A couple of decades ago, there was no such thing as an American pale ale. Imperial IPA? Unheard of until a virtuoso in the American craft community came up with one. Now, it's a sought-after style around the world.

So it pains me when I hear someone say, "I don't like dark beers," or, "I only drink hoppy beers. The more the better." For all the variety out there, and for all the going-out-on-a-limb experimentation that's happening in our craft beer community, some of us are in a rut. That's not a good thing.

When you've been drinking craft beer as long as I have, sometimes it's easy to get into a rut.

I also go through periods where this beer or that beer is my "go to." I get too comfortable with the routine. That's bad, because it can lead to boredom, and craft beer is not boring! Sometimes I even have to take a (short) break from beer. That's when I'll turn to a Manhattan or a vodka tonic to reset my palate.

Don't get in a rut!

We are blessed. There are a staggering number of microbrews we can now get that are fresh. And local.

The American craft beer scene came on because we didn't have a variety of beer to choose from. A quarter century ago we all bought yellow, fizzy beer made by macrobreweries because we liked the label. Or we had a fetish for Clydesdale horses or clear mountain water. These are not bad beers by any standard. Put simply, though, the richest nation in the world was lacking choice.

Today, in addition to the macrolagers that are still with us, we have available to us a cornucopia of beer choices. Today is a virtual beer renaissance in this country. Do not take this for granted. One day, perhaps within a generation, we may have fewer choices again.

Those of us in the craft brewing business want to brew beer you'll buy. We also want to make profit on the beer we painstakingly create. The downside to this is clear, and it is already happening. Given enough time, craft brewers will predominantly make the most popular beers. On a tour of Founders Brewing Company, for example, I was startled to learn that 70 percent of all beer they brew today is All Day IPA, a session IPA. Others of us will succumb to an "offer we can't refuse." Revolution Hook, Goose Island, Widmer Brothers, Kona, 10 Barrel and Elysian, among others, have already cashed their checks. In time, beer selection could be decided for us again.

This is not so much a prediction as a cautionary tale to not take what we have today for granted. This is a minor reason, though, to add variety to your beer sessions.

The real reason not to get into a beer rut is because you'll be doing yourself a favor.

What you thought was a great beer last year is now "meh" for you. You curse the brewery that brewed it, knowing they changed the recipe. Perhaps more likely, though, you have been drinking the same style for a year. Guess what? Your taste buds are likely fatigued. You're bored. Do you remember why you started drinking craft beer in the first place? It's because you were bored with the beer you were drinking then.

To combat "taste bud apathy," I offer a few suggestions for injecting some new life into your craft beer experience.

- **Take a Couple of Days Off.** Sometimes you just have to give your palate a rest. When was the last time you ordered a single malt? Or a glass of red wine? Is it heresy to suggest a glass of nonalcoholic root beer on the rocks? Recently, I had my first ever single malt mixed with vermouth and bitters. Heresy? I liked it and was mind-blown. Did I ask someone if I was supposed to? Nope. A couple of days off is all it takes for everything to taste fabulous again. Remember the first time you watched *The Wizard of Oz*, and the movie turns to Technicolor? Isn't that the experience you want from the craft beer in your pint glass?
- **Drink Local.** As much as I love many of the craft breweries from around the country, I ♥ our Ohio craft scene. We have more than one hundred craft breweries in Ohio now. Try some of the new ones. Rediscover some of the old ones. There is such a diversity now that it's a shame if you don't try them.
- **Drink Real Ale.** Don't turn your nose up at that cask-conditioned ale drawn from a beer engine, that firkin sitting on the bar. Every real ale is an Adventure with a capital A, just like Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. Softer notes, low carbonation, dry hopping. That's just some of the beer roads less traveled. Have you ever had a nitro? Really, never? They don't make this stuff in Saint Louis. Celebrate it.

If you've never had a cask-conditioned ale, you know why you should? Because it's awesome. And fear not the firkin. This is the playground where craft brewers try out new and out-there stuff.

Firkins represent how beer was consumed pre-Industrial Revolution. If you can order a pint and instantly connect to our forefathers and their beer experience, why wouldn't you? Party like it was 1699!

Beer engines came into being with the invention of hydraulics during the Industrial Revolution. For the first time in human history, beer was served in a closed system. No more air getting into the beer, spoiling it within a day. The cask could also be relocated to the cellar where now, on a ninety-degree day, you could enjoy seventy-degree beer!

- **Try a New Beer Every Week.** Yeah, I know. You might order something you don't like. So what?

It's about the adventure. Tell me, Explorer, is it more fun to follow the road less traveled, or to constantly circle a cul-de-sac? Every new experience makes you that much more, uh, experienced. It will make your favorite stand out that much more. Get together with your friends for the express purpose of going out and trying something new. Just like when panning for gold, you may go a long time before you strike pay dirt. But you'll never find your next nugget if you're not panning.

- **Introduce Someone New to Craft Beer.** Don't be greedy. Share your knowledge. Someone turned you on to craft, so return the favor. But please don't do it as a beer snob. No one likes a know-it-all. And don't turn your nose up at someone who's drinking a beer you haven't had since 1999. Everyone starts somewhere. Usually with the cheapest stuff they can find. You left that static and so will they, as long as they don't think you're an asshat.

If we stayed in a rut at the Smokehouse, we would have never branched out into Belgians. Or multiple styles of IPAs. We would have never researched how to make nitros. We would never have put our ale in a bourbon barrel.

Right now, we have a bourbon barrel of sour beer that we don't know what we're going to do with. We also have a carboy that is full of wild yeast, pulled out of our brewery air. Why do we do this? It's for the same reason you shouldn't get in a beer rut—we want to explore!

Shake that tendency of same-old, same-old. It's good for your taste buds. It's good for your life. After all, that's why you picked up this book. Now go grab an Ohio-brewed craft beer. No, the other one.

Cheers!

Lenny Kolada

Owner, Smokehouse Brewing Company

Columbus, Ohio



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Anyone who writes on Ohio craft brewing owes an immense debt to Rick Armon. I did not read his *Ohio Breweries* (2011) as I was preparing this book, so as to avoid the “anxiety of influence” and any possibility of inadvertent narrative echoes, but now that I feel free to do so I will doubtless find information I should have cited and insights I should have shared. Rick’s reporting on beer in the *Akron Beacon Journal* is always thorough, judicious, and deliciously readable. Rick continues to make a special contribution to craft brewing awareness in Ohio through his Beer Blog, a daily clearinghouse for news on craft brewing and a treasure of his and others’ stories on trends, openings, and new releases. In a notable “anthropological experiment” (his term) in 2014, Rick reported on every ounce of beer he had tasted in the course of the year and took a selfie to record each occasion. I’d call his experiment a success! Because the priorities of this book and those of *Ohio Breweries* are somewhat different, there should be little overlap between the two, but I am grateful for his reporting, his advice, and, above all, his example.

Similarly, through his weekly recommendations Marc Bona at the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* has pointed me and many others to good brews. He and Rick are friendly competitors in northeast Ohio, which is fortunate to have two experts who wear their expertise lightly.

I am grateful also for my appointment as Trustees Professor at Kent State University. My position provides ample motivation for my more traditional scholarship in English literature and higher education administration while allowing some latitude for less traditional scholarship. The university exemplifies a commitment to excellence, and I like to think of this book as itself a celebration of excellence—that pursued by the entrepreneurial, creative, and quality-obsessed craft brewers of Ohio. Although I did not seek or receive support from the university for this project, I am grateful for an environment that encourages scholars to try something different from time to time.

I thank the many good friends who have encouraged—or have at least tried to understand—my lifelong fascination with good beer. I suspect that some do not share my interest in arcana such as wild hopping, cask conditioning, and service on nitro, but for the most part they have at least made a show of interest. While I have enjoyed many a beer while traveling by myself, beer always tastes better when enjoyed with friends. Eileen, my wife, has been an especially valuable ally. When we travel, she sometimes has sought out the good brewpubs before I have even begun to think about lunch. And her proofreading! Superb.

This book would not have been possible without the gracious assistance of Ohio’s craft brewers—including, of course, Lenny Kolada, who wrote the foreword. Without exception, they welcomed me to their breweries, showed me around, provided small samples of their beers for me to taste, and shared with me their love for what they do. I offer special thanks to the executive director of the Ohio Craft Brewers Association, Mary MacDonald, who has kept me up to date on the expanding list of Ohio craft brewers and who has made it possible for me to become acquainted with the Ohio Craft Brewers Association. In fact, I inaugurated work on this project at the fall 2013 meeting of the OCBA in Cincinnati. To celebrate my completion of this project, I now wear the OCBA T-shirt: “Drink Beer

Made Here.”

Finally, I thank Will Underwood and his associates at the Kent State University Press. As the craft brewing industry in Ohio has evolved (and continues to grow) at a precipitous pace, I have had to modify—then modify once more—the intent and focus of this book. Their counsel at each stage has been invaluable, and their patience with necessary deadline extensions has enabled me to work with a sense of urgency without succumbing to panic.

# INTRODUCTION

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A first-time visitor to a taproom or brewpub is often well advised to order the sampler, a judicious selection of a few taster glasses that represents the range of what the brewer offers. A sampler is not meant to be comprehensive or definitive, nor does it rank the beers according to their quality. It's a sampler.

## SAMPLING OHIO'S CRAFT BREWERIES (AND BEERS)

That's what this book is—a generous sampler of Ohio craft brewing. Although the sample should provide a representative overview of Ohio's craft brewers, it describes in detail only some of those listed. As the title suggests, the emphasis is less on providing an inclusive record than on discovering the variety, appreciating the quality, and relishing the experience of Ohio craft beer. Each of the profiles reports on my visit to the brewery or brewpub that is described, the beers described in terms of tasting notes are ones I have tasted, and the photographs are ones I have taken. I was not able to visit those listed under "Consider Also," but they are not necessarily any less worthy of attention than those profiled.

Speaking of beer, my commitment to drinking "responsibly" dictated that I sample only a few of the available beers when visiting a brewery. Occasionally, when visiting two or three breweries in the course of a day, I had to pace myself carefully. But I have attempted to offer a perspective on a representative range, and, in addition to those I describe, I list many (though far from all) beers that I would have enjoyed if it had not been for dear prudence. Some brewers can point to a historical list of well more than fifty varieties, and there are new ones released virtually every day.

Of course, because a brewery will have in production at a given time only a small percentage of the beers in its book, you may want to call or consult its Web site concerning what's being poured before making a visit. Or you may simply trust to finder's luck. Any visit to a craft brewery can be an adventure.

## STAYING CURRENT—AND AVOIDING RANKINGS

Few industries are more dynamic than craft brewing. Breweries introduce new beers and discontinue others. Brewers move from one brewery to another—frequently. Brewing systems and packaging lines expand. Menus express new priorities in the kitchen. Hours change. Production breweries open taprooms, and craft breweries that have brewed only for their taprooms undertake production. Within twelve months, to take one example, Rivertown in Cincinnati expanded its brewing and bottling systems, made changes in personnel, introduced new beers, and revised the graphics on its cans. Dayton offers another example of dynamic change. The proposal for this book asked whether Dayton's few breweries should be included in the Columbus chapter or the Cincinnati chapter. A year later, the growth of craft brewing in Dayton demanded its own chapter.

Given such an exciting but volatile environment, I attempted in the final days of this project to contact the breweries profiled one final time so as to verify current information. I am grateful for all those that responded, but two did not. That is another reason for you to verify the crucial details, especially days and times of opening, before paying a visit. Most challenging of all have been the



start-ups with modest capitalization and uncertain timelines. Because any new brewery requires a leap of faith, I have taken several such leaps myself by including in the “Consider Also” listings projects that may not come to fruition. Again, a quick phone call or a check of the Web site would be a good idea prior to a visit.

As you will discover, while this book reflects the variety of craft brewing in Ohio and offers an appreciation for its quality, it provides no rankings—not in the profiles, not in the “Consider Also” listings, not in the “Ten Great” lists. The order is alphabetic within categories: profiled brewpubs, profiled breweries with tasting rooms, and “Consider Also.” Instead, I want to suggest the pleasures to be found in visits to breweries and brewpubs from Portsmouth to Toledo and from Willoughby to Cincinnati. Frank Peters, who won the 1972 Pulitzer Prize for music criticism, described one of his overriding goals. His 2007 obituary in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* recalled his response to the prize: “In writing about a good concert, I want to make them wish they’d been there.” Similarly, if I have enjoyed a brewery or brewpub, I want to make the readers of this book consider a visit.

Anyway, what would be the justification in ranking the rich, creamy pumpkin ale I enjoyed at the Smokehouse Brewing Company in Columbus in September 2013 relative to the dryer but no less delicious Pumpkin Ale available in 2014 from Thirsty Dog in Akron? Prefer a thick head that reminds you of the whipped cream atop a slice of pumpkin pie? Visit Smokehouse. Prefer a thinner head atop a brew that you can drink through an afternoon or before dinner? You might want to choose a Thirsty Dog. Make a few visits, drink a few beers, and form your own opinions. If we find ourselves on adjoining bar stools one day, perhaps you will give me your recommendations.

## MULTIFACETED VARIETY

In the meantime, you will have a lot to choose from! About three years ago, when work on this book got under way, there were fewer than fifty breweries in Ohio. But the Buckeye State was then on the threshold of an unprecedented growth in craft brewing. As Rick Armon reported in his December 2011 summary for the *Akron Beacon Journal*, “A Year in Beer,” at least twenty-five Ohio breweries began operations in 2014 alone! Now, there are more than one hundred breweries in the state, from large producers such as Great Lakes Brewing in Cleveland, which distributes its beers across a fourteen-state region, to Kelleys Island Brewing Company, which serves its beers on a lovely lawn overlooking Lake Erie. While the entire brewing system at Kelleys Island would fit comfortably at the base of one of the Great Lakes’ bright tanks, both breweries make memorable beers and can offer a wonderful experience.

You can enjoy Ohio craft brewing as you sip an amber ale on the front porch of Mt. Carmel in suburban Cincinnati or make your way to the industrial chic and warm camaraderie of Warped Wire in Dayton. You would surely enjoy the historic ambience of Portsmouth, but you can also enjoy tasting exceptional beers in the more utilitarian settings of MadTree in Cincinnati, Actual in Columbus, or Hoppin’ Frog in Akron. Then there’s Willoughby, where the imaginative can return to the days of interurban travel while enjoying a full menu and creative brews.

Given such a dynamic industry, it is a sure thing that new breweries will have begun operations by the time this book is in your hands. For example, you might check on Fibonacci Brewing in Cincinnati’s Mount Healthy neighborhood or on Nine Giant Brewing in Pleasant Ridge. In early 2014, their planning was too tempting to ignore entirely but too tentative for inclusion. It is also possible, perhaps likely, that I may have failed to recognize an embryonic industry leader. Today’s nano brewery may well become tomorrow’s Great Lakes or Morlein. Any brewer who believes not enough attention has been paid to her (or his) operation is probably right and should demand a second edition that does!

Two other issues deserve mention. Both could represent important steps forward in making craft

beer more broadly accessible, but either might appear in retrospect as a step backwards threatening possible loss of focus.

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In addition to Debonne Vineyards in Madison, which now brews good beer as Cellar Rats Brewery, there are several Ohio wineries that either have started or plan to start their own brewing operation. Georgetown Vineyards (Cambridge), Lil Paws Winery (Lake Milton), Maize Valley Winery (Hartsville), Merry Family Winery (Bidwell), Shawnee Springs Winery (Jackson Township), and Valley Vineyards (Morrow). Rick Armon has tracked this phenomenon from a mostly positive perspective. But it might be observed that while there are some affinities between winemaking and brewing and some logistical advantages in operating both under one roof (either literally or figuratively), there are pronounced differences between the two crafts. The concern is that unreflective “expansion” of winemaking to include brewing could result in compromises that would serve neither. So, two cheers for wineries that make a serious commitment to brewing by investing in high-quality systems and by hiring experienced brewers. And a third cheer for those such as Cellar Rats that are proving their mettle.

The other issue is the likelihood over time of some consolidation in the industry. An analysis by business writer Ian Mount (*New York Times*, February 5, 2015) points to two possibilities. The first is that if exuberance fades and prospects for long-term profit margins are examined realistically, opportunities for mergers and buyouts will arise. We can hope that opportunities for growth will attract support that will not compromise creative control of the brewing. But the additional investment required for growth creates debt, and the necessity of paying back that debt may create challenges.

## TRYING TO BE CONSISTENT

A final word about the protocols behind this book: I visited as many breweries and brewpubs as I was able to schedule within a sixteen-month period, but my “day job” as a professor and a realistic time limit on research and writing meant that I could not visit as many as I would have wished. Before each visit, I wrote to alert owners and brewers—and to clarify the restrictions that I would observe. I would drink only small samples of a few beers (i.e., no free pints) and accept no free food, mementoes, etc. A couple of times, the generosity of my hosts overcame my resistance, but, by and large, I stuck to my rules.

As mentioned above, I list many beers but write in some detail only about those I was able to taste—those identified in **boldface**. And my glowing reports on menus are just that—a hungry appreciation for what menus promise with no claim that I have evaluated what they deliver. I have come away from this project with a growing list of breweries and brewpubs I look forward to visiting as a paying customer.

One issue that arose regularly during my discussions with brewers concerned International Bitterness Units. In an industry whose “hophead” fans believe that more is better, IBUs have become an effective marketing tool, and I have for the most part listed such information when it has been made available. The problem is that this measure often has very little to do with how a consumer experiences a beer. I heard brewers complain repeatedly about what brewmaster Andy Tveekrem of Market Garden Brewery terms “*Imaginary Bitterness Units*.” Yes, IBUs register the level of bitterness-producing acid in a beer. But, according to *The Oxford Companion to Beer*, the measure “is a laboratory construct that was never meant to leave the laboratory.” Frankly, anyone who takes beer seriously will tell you that posted IBUs may not come close to indicating how bitter a beer tastes. This depends on the balance between hops and malts and on many other factors as well. Because I badgered breweries for this information, I have decided to leave it where it appears—but without hounding anyone for “missing data.” If you find IBUs useful, fine. Otherwise, disregard.

With the completion of this book, it will be a pleasure to reclaim my “amateur” status and to find a seat at the bar without checking for my reporter’s notebook. But I would not have missed the opportunity to become acquainted with those responsible for craft brewing in Ohio. Principle strategic thinkers, they share important values described in [Chapter 1](#). What they have in common above all is an abiding love for what they do. Through their affinities with brewers of hundreds and thousands of years ago, they affirm both a sense of mission and a sense of purpose. They are not “of the entertainment industry.” They have reclaimed and are pursuing a sacred trust.

## THE COMMUNITY OF BEER

In his engaging book, *At Home: A Short History of Private Life*, Bill Bryson quotes Felipe Fernández Armesto (author of *Civilizations: Culture, Ambition, and the Transformation of Nature*) in attempting to understand “why people took to living in communities.” Climate change may be one reason, as may a wish to remain near the graves of loved ones who have passed on. But people may just as well have been motivated by “a powerful desire to brew and drink beer.” By this perspective, brewers require communities—and vice versa. That is still the case. Just drop by Warped Wing or Rhinegeist or Green Lakes or Hoppin’ Frog or Yellow Springs or Weasel Boy or any of the taprooms and brewpubs profiled or mentioned here. You will be welcome. You will probably learn something about brewing. You will enjoy the company. And you will enjoy the beer.

# CRAFT BREWING IN OHIO

## A PROUD LEGACY RECLAIMED—AND REDEFINED

Before the Eighteenth Amendment took effect in 1920, Ohio could boast one of the nation's greatest brewing traditions. Most cities of any size supported at least one local brewery—often more than one. Cleveland was home to twenty-six! Some of Ohio's brands were distributed throughout the Midwest.

One prominent nineteenth-century success was the Hoster Brewing Company of Columbus. Founded in 1836 by Louis Hoster, a native of Germany, the brewery on South Front Street grew from a rudimentary facility producing a few hundred barrels to a plant at the turn of the century capable of producing more than 300,000 barrels annually. Accounts of many Ohio breweries follow a similar trajectory: impressive growth in the nineteenth century, consolidation and expansion in the early twentieth century, and an abrupt, often fatal hiatus in 1920.

### OHIO BREWING AND PROHIBITION

During its brewing heyday Ohio—perhaps not coincidentally—was home also to the movement that led to Prohibition. The Anti-Saloon League, which would grow by the turn of the century into a powerful national lobby, was founded in 1893 in Oberlin and soon opened its first office in Columbus. Twenty years later, the League celebrated its anniversary with a national convention in Columbus. From the heart of Ohio came a message chilling to brewers and their customers: the League would launch a campaign for an amendment to the Constitution to prohibit the manufacture, transportation, and sale of alcohol.

The League was aptly named. Brewing—and the saloon culture it supported—prompted criticism that helped to make the Eighteenth Amendment possible. After 1890, when beer drinking became the most popular form of alcoholic consumption in the United States, the saloon became the most popular venue for such consumption. And saloons—often unkempt nuisances offering clients gambling and other illicit pleasures in addition to beer—provided those opposed to alcohol in any form with an easy target.

Following the end of the Great Experiment in 1933, there was a modest resurgence in Ohio brewing as some of the larger local breweries resumed operation, but the best days of the industry lay in the past—or so it seemed until recently.

### A CONTINUING DECLINE

Local and regional brewing suffered a further decline beginning in the 1950s, as mass marketing, television, and industry consolidation reduced market share and profits for smaller breweries. Between 1950 and 1980, most Ohio breweries either went out of business or agreed to consolidation with one of the large national breweries. By 1985, brewing in Ohio had become the exclusive province of a few corporations.

From an economic perspective, the story is regrettable in some respects. Local and regional breweries had employed local workers, bought local materials, and inspired a certain sense of place. The loss of many evocative brand names is itself cause for regret. But someone devoted to good lagers and ales in their remarkable range of styles might argue that there was no great loss. Nearly all the

beer brewed in Ohio's local breweries had been pilsner-style lager—thirst quenching on a warm day but hardly distinctive. Minor variations in taste and ingredients—a little more rice in one recipe, determined effort at “dryness” in another—could encourage partisan local debates and inspire some measure of loyalty. But the competition that existed was based primarily on marketing, price distribution, and package design, not on the taste of the beer.

## THE RESURGENCE

If the story of Ohio brewing became at one point one of decline, so far as local pilsner brewers are concerned, it is more recently one of a remarkable resurgence. Beginning in 1988, with the founding of the Great Lakes Brewing Company in Cleveland, the most interesting development in the industry has been craft brewing, from small operations serving fresh beers and ales to patrons who drop by, to multifaceted operations distributing a broad range of canned and bottled lagers and ales throughout the Midwest, to the many breweries that serve food through a category that did not exist in 1980—the brewery-restaurant and the “brewpub.”

As a result of this resurgence, Ohio has regained its place on the map of American brewing. Once again, local breweries, from Athens to Cincinnati to Toledo, are employing local people, buying local products, and giving their products local names. What's the difference between the present and the past? Much less quantity, so far as the craft brewers are concerned. Much more quality. In short, much better beer. Even the mass producers—and Ohio is home to three of their large plants—have attempted to follow suit by offering beers in a wider range of styles with names that are calculated to be whimsical.

Yes, it is a pity that Prohibition led to closings of many local brewers and that afterwards the brewing giants eventually forced most of the survivors out of business. But few beer lovers would sacrifice the range of craft styles available now in order to bring back hundreds of local brewers all brewing more or less the same beer. From the selection of ingredients, through the refinement of the brewing process, to the design of labels, the creation of advertising strategies, and the monitoring of financial health, the story of craft brewing in Ohio offers reason for optimism—not to mention an excellent justification for a road trip.

## A NEW KIND OF BREW

As a college student, I enjoyed drinking beer as much as anyone—perhaps more than some. I had a few favorites. For instance, I preferred Schlitz to Falstaff, Budweiser to Miller High Life. But the differences between American mass-produced beers were, to make the point as positively as possible, exceedingly subtle. As they are today. Before Coors expanded to nationwide distribution, self-appointed connoisseurs would drive west to Texas, then the brand's boundary, in order to fill the trunk with “Banquet” beer. You might hear dormitory debates comparing regional favorites, such as Dixie (New Orleans), Stroh's (Detroit), or Schmidt's (Philadelphia). But there wasn't that much to say about the beer itself. They were mostly variations on German pilsner, lagers light in color and, even before the “light” beer, light in taste. The variables resulted largely from ways in which American brewers were violating the German purity law, the *Rheinheitsgebot*, which restricts ingredients to barley, yeast, hops, and water. By brewing with corn, rice, and other adjuncts, many American brewers—I'm not naming names—saved money and found at least some sense of identity. But bars promoting such beers often emphasized not their taste but their temperature—how cold the beer is when served in frosty mugs.

I discovered authentic beer when a grant from the English Speaking Union enabled me to conduct my dissertation research in England. There I found beer pleasantly cool, comparatively light

carbonation, and rich in flavor. There were many different styles. The Pale Ale uniformly referred to as “bitter” was ubiquitous. Stouts, by no means limited to Guinness, differed in dryness, in their dark opacity, and in the smokiness they had absorbed from the dark roast of the barley. A “mild” might be ordered in half-pint servings. There were porters, brown ales, Scottish ales. And there were lagers, and all British beers, the most similar to the American standby.

I returned to the United States as a disaffected beer drinker. When possible, I would order a BA Pale Ale, a Newcastle Brown Ale, or a Guinness, but these lacked the appeal of a pint pulled in a neighborhood British pub. Many of the imported beers had been carbonated more highly than the British counterparts so as to appeal to U.S. preferences. Also, by the time bottled beers reached the shelves in the corner grocery, many were well past their prime. Other beers were available occasionally as well—Heineken from Holland, St. Pauli Girl and Beck’s from Germany, Ichiro from Japan, Red Stripe from Jamaica, and Corona from Mexico—to name just a few. But most of them might as well have been brewed in Milwaukee or St. Louis. They were (and are) most straightforward lagers, notable more for their packaging and their advertising than for their taste.

A glimmer of a possible new direction for U.S. brewing broke through the fog of San Francisco in 1965, when Fritz Maytag, a scion of the Iowa appliance manufacturers, invested “a few thousand dollars” to save the foundering Anchor Steam brewery from bankruptcy. Six years later, a century after the founding of the brewery, the bottling of Anchor Steam (a lager brewed with yeast that prefers temperatures warmer than most lager yeasts require) began in earnest. The result was a revelation. Instead of the crisp transparency of mass-produced American lagers, Anchor Steam offered the appearance and taste of craftsmanship. A rich, deep amber when poured from the bottle, Anchor Steam promised a complex acquaintance with malt. Then there was a hint of fruit. Finally, there was a bracing bitterness to encourage the next sip. But I should not be using the past tense. Anchor Steam still satisfies.

Within a few more years, Anchor would be bottling a porter, an ale, a barley wine, and a Christmas Ale. As the Anchor Web site notes, while “the terms ‘microbrewing’ and ‘craft brewing’ had yet to be coined ... it was clear that Anchor was leading a brewing revolution.” Indeed, many of the values we now associate with craft brewing appear in the early years of the resuscitated Anchor Steam. There was (and is) a commitment to traditional ingredients—malt, yeast, hops, water—and a refusal to use cost-cutting adjuncts such as rice or corn. To flavor its various styles, Anchor Steam uses a variety of whole-cone hops rather than processed pellets or extracts. And for some styles Anchor revived what was then a neglected tradition, dry hopping, in which bagged hops (think tea bags) are added to beer in the process to enhance aroma (mostly) and taste (somewhat). This is not a book about Anchor Steam, but credit should be paid. Contemporary craft brewing, both the revival of an industry and a journey into a new industry with a distinctive culture, widely shared values, and unprecedented product variety, began in San Francisco in 1965.

The next chapter opened in 1977 in Sonoma, California, with the launch of the New Albion Brewery, now regarded as the first “microbrewery” in the United States. While this particular experiment proved unsuccessful, the precedent set there would prove broadly influential. (A side note: the daughter of New Albion’s founder, Jack McAuliffe, now lives in the Cleveland area and has worked with Platform Brewing to brew according to her father’s recipes.) The following year, on the other side of the bar, there was even more important news, the legalization of home brewing. Which was more important? In my sixteen-month tour of Ohio’s breweries and brewpubs, I asked many brewers the same question: What inspired you to become a professional brewer? And I heard for the most part the same answer: home brewing.

The train was out of the station. In 1981, what was to become the largest and most highly respected

craft brewing competition in the United States opened in Denver, the Great American Beer Festival. In 1982, the first brewpub opened in Yakima, Washington, thanks to new legislation allowing a brewer to serve food on its premises. By 1995, the number of craft brewers in the United States had climbed to nearly five hundred. Today, the number is roughly six times that. By the end of the twentieth century, the United States could claim more breweries than any other country. Now, there's no other country that is comparable. Notwithstanding a couple of "market corrections," the total continues to rise. Perhaps even more to the point, craft beer accounts for an increasing percentage of the volume of beer consumed. That is, more and more people who drink beer are choosing craft beer. In 2011, according to the Brewers Association, there were in the United States more than 4,000 breweries for the first time since the 1870s.

As suggested earlier, to speak of the "restoration" of American brewing is really to miss the point. When every city worth the name could boast several breweries prior to Prohibition, there was on the whole a sameness about the beers, most falling within the fairly narrow spectrum we still enjoy in our major national brands: bottom-fermented lagers brewed more or less in the style of Pilsen, German-style ales. By contrast, craft brewers have introduced to the American palate an unprecedented spectrum. I have a T-shirt that displays a "beeriodic table" of fifty-seven "ale-e-ments," from lagers such as Maibock and Rauchbier to ales such as lambics, extra-special bitters, oatmeal stouts, and bitters. Given the choice, I doubt that many beer drinkers would trade the current craft brewing scene for the industrial brewing of the nineteenth century.

## THE CULTURE(S) OF CRAFT BREWING

I hope one day before long to write a book with the above subhead as its title. It would consider every element of craft brewing other than beer. While that might prove a hard sell, beer being the point of craft brewing, such a book could draw attention to a remarkable social, commercial, ethical, and moral phenomenon. In the meantime, the following paragraphs will have to do.

The more you learn about craft brewing in Ohio, the more you will begin to appreciate its diversity. You scan a brewery's list of beers, some familiar, some not. Some lists, such as those at Fat Head's and Moerlein's Lager House, are impressive in their length and complexity. Others reveal a more limited focus. If you are at a brewpub, such as Maumee Bay in Toledo or a brewery-restaurant such as Wolf Ridge in Columbus, you may find on the menu some creative and locally sourced dishes that you would not have expected.

Visiting several breweries and brewpubs, however, may begin to teach another lesson—that within this remarkable diversity there are important values represented with remarkable consistency throughout the profession. Perhaps over time craft brewing will suffer a hardening of its still-supplying arteries. It may begin to focus more directly on the bottom line as competition prompts acquisition and mergers and closures. Craft brewing may become less of a calling, more of a pure enterprise. Maybe. But that possibility means above all that we should not take for granted how fortunate we are in this second decade of the twenty-first century to have access to breweries and brewpubs that really do represent a different standard of doing business. So while there are many reasons to celebrate the values that help to define a golden age in craft brewing, let's do so.

First, there's *collaboration within competition*. Like any business, craft brewing must turn a profit through competing successfully. If there is a taproom, it must attract enough customers to drink and pay for the beer that has been brewed. The brewer that bottles or cans must obtain sufficient space for the product in grocery store coolers. Good locations for breweries and brewpubs are not available on every block or in every part of town. So there is no lack of competition.

But there is also a strong collaborative spirit. The Ohio Craft Brewers Association, which might

have become just another trade association, is animated by a strong sense of common purpose. In business meetings turn into collegial gatherings of brewers eager to share observations and advice while drinking beer. Indeed, Ohio's professional brewers are often once novice brewers who have been resourceful enough to seek good advice from more experienced peers. For instance, Jay Wine (Weasel Boy, Zanesville) recounts appreciatively the counsel he received from Eric Bean (Columbus Brewing) and Scott Francis (then at Barley's) prior to his opening. And brewer Jim Lieb (Rocky River Brewing Company, Cleveland) is one of several highly capable brewers who express appreciation for the tutelage of Andy Tveekrem, now at Market Garden.

This spirit appears vividly in Ohio's many collaborative beers, ales, and lagers crafted through ad hoc partnerships of two or more craft brewers. Yet another interesting kind of collaboration appears in the Brewers' Brunches mounted by Fifty West in eastern Cincinnati. The brewpub works with another brewery and another local restaurant to offer a three-course meal on Sunday mornings. And in late October, Fifty West partners with Cleveland's Great Lakes Brewing to serve beer and barbecue on their ample grounds. But even on the most basic level, there's cooperation. Reporting in the March 2015 issue of *Columbus CEO*, T. C. Brown quotes Sideswipe Brewing's Craig O'Herron: "I've loaned equipment to Land-Grant Brewery and I use their key washer."

The Samuel Adams Brewing the American Dream program offers an especially notable example of this value. Initiated by Sam Adams founder and Cincinnati native Jim Koch (see more in [Chapter 4](#)), brewers can consult with Sam Adams professionals about any facet of the brewing industry and receive advice and perhaps even consideration for small loans. A July 2015 "speed coaching event" at Findlay Market covered topics such as e-commerce, packaging, and distribution.

Then there's *architectural restoration and preservation*. From one corner of Ohio to the other—literally, from Bryan to Portsmouth and from Willoughby to Cincinnati, many brewers have invested in the architectural distinction and commercial potential of structurally sound older buildings. Beer drinkers have benefited, but so have neighborhoods and cities. The list is extraordinary—and continues to grow longer. Check out the sidebar, but also consider this five-point flyover. In Toledo there's Maumee Bay, which manages no fewer than four distinct attractions in the massive Oliver House, said to be the city's oldest commercial building. But in the far northwest, in Bryan, you'll find one of at least three former churches repurposed as a brewpub. In northeast Ohio, there are Great Lakes Brewing and Market Garden. Their continuing restoration and repurposing of venerable brick buildings has helped to trigger the rebound of the dynamic Ohio City neighborhood, and Willoughby Brewing Company, whose restored interurban repair facility recalls the days of proud regional transit systems. In the Southeast, you can visit Portsmouth Brewing—again. The charming riverside building that once housed a local brewery does so now. In Cincinnati, there's an embarrassment of architectural riches, from the terrific brewery projects in Over-the-Rhine (Moerlein, Rhinegeist, Taft) to the conversion of the former St. Pius X Church by Urban Artifact to the revival by Fifty West of a noble inn that was once a destination restaurant. Complete the tour in Dayton with Toxic Brew, Warped Wing, Dayton Beer, and Star City or in Columbus with Wolf's Ridge or Elevator or North High or . . . This is a very selective list.

## FIFTEEN GREAT ARCHITECTURAL EXPERIENCES

**M**uch good beer in Ohio is being brewed in industrial parks. Indeed, the sight of an industrial park may make you thirsty—just in case. But there is a special pleasure in visiting breweries that have brought timeless buildings back to life. Ohio



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sample content of Ohio's Craft Beers: Discovering the Variety, Enjoying the Quality, Relishing the Experience

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