

Breweries and the Commercial Growth of St. Louis

Beer making in St. Louis begins almost at the founding of the city. There is documented evidence that John Coons was brewing here in 1809 when St. Louis was only a village of about a thousand people. The area's first newspaper advertised strong beer for ten dollars a barrel in 1810 from Jacques St. Vrain's Bellefontaine Brewery. Around 1840, the German style lager was introduced by Adam Lemp and quickly became the most popular type of beer in the country. German immigration to St. Louis during this time was tremendous and the brewing skills brought to the area accounts in some part for the large brewing industry in the city. By the 1850s around one-third of St. Louis residents were German immigrants.

As the city grew the brewing industry grew with it, witnessing the major expansion of Lemp's brewery as well as the addition of a number of other local brewers including Griesedieck, Finkelmeyer and the Bavarian Brewery of Eberhard Anheuser. By 1870 there were at least 50 different breweries in the city. These brewers took advantage of many new technologies such as refrigerated railcars and pasteurization. With their marketing strategies (beer gardens and Bavarian beauties to serve the beer) and use of new technologies, the St. Louis breweries were among the nations most prosperous.

Over the years the Lemp and Anheuser Busch Breweries continued to grow and expand while other smaller breweries faltered. By the time of the 1904 World's Fair Anheuser Busch was the largest brewery in the world. Due to personal tragedies and Prohibition, the Lemp brewery eventually closed and many other local breweries were in ruins. A few managed to stay open during Prohibition, marketing other types of products. Anheuser Busch survived by marketing yeast and a non-alcoholic beverage named Bevo. By the end of Prohibition, Anheuser-Busch was one of two remaining breweries still open in the city; the other was the Falstaff brewing company. Anheuser-Busch was able to capitalize on this and soon became the leading brewery in the country.

The brewery has been a major source of employment and business in the St. Louis area over the years and has contributed greatly to its economy. Today, while Anheuser-Busch is still the leading beer producer, many smaller, local breweries have again sprung up including Schlafly and the renewed Griesedieck Brothers.