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# REeCHO

PARK HISTORY TODAY

Collect. Preserve. Share.

Volume 17.4 / WINTER 2018



This 1925 photo, courtesy of Phil Weber, can be found on our website.

## AN INTERVIEW WITH PHIL WEBER, OWNER OF PARK TAVERN

BY BILL BEYER, FAIA

*Phil Weber recently made a generous donation to the St. Louis Park Historical Society, helping to support our work in many areas. We sat down for a chat with him in October:*

Phil was only seven years old when his father Ben bought Park Tavern, then located at 7201 Minnetonka Boulevard.

Phil began working there full-time in 1970 and is now approaching half-a-century in the tavern business.

Asked how many seats were in the old place, Phil said, "I could close my eyes and count them for you." He also recalled, "The original Park Tavern was always a 3.2 bar.

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# ST. LOUIS PARK, WET AND DRY

BY BILL BEYER, FAIA

From its founding as a village in November of 1886, the Park went through a series of flips on the topic of alcohol consumption - from wet to dry to wet and back again, often by voting margins in the single digits.

Starting in 1942, the St. Louis Park *Dispatch* began featuring ads for beer collectively sponsored by eleven of Minnesota's breweries to support the war effort. Beer became the road to "keeping fit," and "the beverage of moderation," perhaps in response to the overindulgence in more powerfully intoxicating cocktails during Prohibition. "Beer belongs," "Always a pleasure," and "the American way" were among the taglines that endured into the 1950s.

The biggest brewers ran their own ads, with Jacob Schmidt offering up a new beer cartoon every week for its City Club brand, and Grain Belt choosing more conventional fare. Gluek's touted its big win in an international taste competition with almost weekly ads in 1952.

Adapted from our website and other sources, here is an overview of the history of beer in the nation and in the Park:

In the late 1800s, the railroad, telegraph and mechanical refrigeration allowed some brewers to build very large production volumes and wide distribution in national and international markets. Led by Pabst of Milwaukee and Anheuser-Busch of St. Louis, so-called "shipping brewers" expanded their markets. A saloonkeeper could keep bottles of competing spirits in inventory, but until shipping refrigeration, it was impractical to keep kegs of different beers on tap.

Saloons proliferated; it was not uncommon for towns to have one for every 150 or 200 persons, making it difficult for a keeper to earn a profit. Further, the typical saloon was an affront to "respectability." Saloon keepers enticed customers to drink more alcohol by providing free, salty bar-fare, and tossed-in sideline vices in order to make ends meet—gambling, cock-fighting, and prostitution.

A new organization formed in 1893 called itself the Anti-Saloon League, and brought business-like methods to political and reform work. The League used the widespread dislike of the saloon among respectable Americans to stoke their zeal.

Even poets took up the cause. Ella Wheeler Wilcox, who achieved minor fame for her poem "The Way of the World," ("Laugh and the world laughs with you; Weep, and you weep alone.") penned a poem excoriating Milwaukee brewer Philip Best, (daughter Nellie's marriage to Great Lakes skipper Frederick Pabst gave the brewery a new name), including this verse:

*And who was Philip Best, you ask?  
Oh! he was a man, whose noble task*

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## KEEPING FIT

Harder work, more responsibility than ever falls today on the men left to do the job on the "home front". Important tasks must be carried out under greater tension during this critical period.

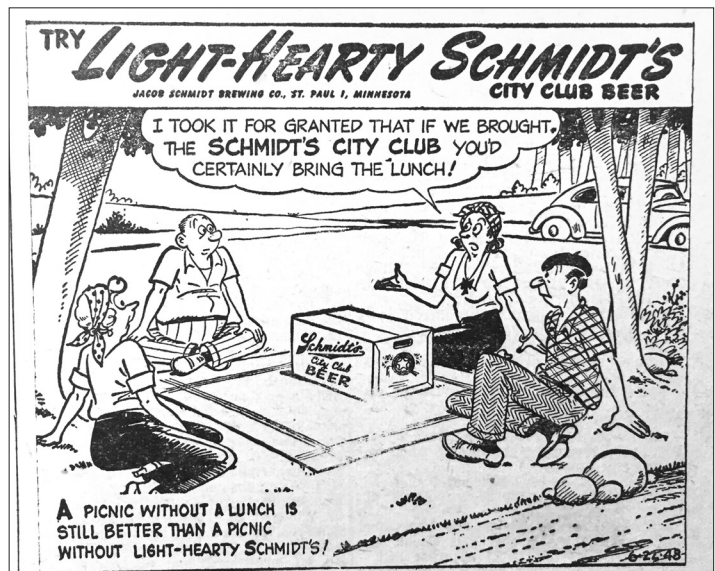
For physical fitness the wise man sticks to beer. Why? Because beer contains the healthful vitamins and nutritional value of barley, hops and yeast. Many physicians regard beer as a food, its pre-digested malt being an important source of energy to overcome physical fatigue.

For mental fitness, too, beer is today's ideal beverage. Being mildly stimulating and refreshing, it promotes the complete relaxation needed so much after the speed-up tempo of the day's work.

Yes, for keeping fit, stick to beer . . . the Beverage of Moderation.

Published in behalf of the following Minnesota Breweries:  
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**BEER . . . a beverage of moderation**



# LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Greetings,

We are getting ready to close out 2018 which, to be honest, has been a quiet one for our organization. We scaled back on public programming and a variety of administrative items as our available volunteer hours became limited. However, the Board recently reviewed our strategy and remain committed to our future.

Our biggest challenge has been to figure out a long term space to house our organization. We spent nearly two years interested in the Walker Building, which is the oldest commercial building in St. Louis Park. While we were disappointed those efforts did not prove fruitful, we are excited to see the new life Sota Clothing has put into the building including a full remodel of the main floor which highlights the historic character of the building. I encourage you to stop by their shop to see how great the building looks. Recently our Board decided that we should focus on finding a more manageable sized office, similar to the one we currently have, but ensure it has a more accessible entrance. We are hopeful that our new space needs will better align with what will be available in the market and will be financially attainable.

Aside from space, we remain committed to our three key pillars:

**Preserve & Highlight History:** Through our growing archives and extensive articles on the website and Re-Echo we will continue to be the keepers and story tellers of our city's history. We are prioritizing where to focus our efforts, but if anyone is interested in writing, please let us know so we can connect you with a new project.

**Community Engagement:** Office hours, neighborhood meetings, Depot open houses all ensure we are engaging with people on a regular basis to learn from and share our history. We are looking for new volunteers interested in learning more about their specific neighborhood and documenting its history for our website.

**Education & Programming:** This entails our larger programs, school visits, kids' activities at events, and research resources. These activities tend to take the most effort, so we will be selective in how we spend our time, but we would love to find volunteers interested in leading one key project for the year.

I am personally committed to work on some new and interesting projects for 2019, and I hope you will consider joining me and the rest of the Board in making next year a great one!

Happy New Year,

Ted



## CONNECT WITH US

**Stop by:** 3546 Dakota Ave. S., Suite C  
St. Louis Park  
Saturdays, 1-4 p.m.,  
and by appointment

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Founded in 1971, the St. Louis Park Historical Society collects, preserves and shares the history of St. Louis Park. The *ReEcho: Park History Today* is an official publication of the Society.

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We were the largest on-sale seller in the state of Minnesota. We only sold Grain Belt beer on tap." (From 32-gallon kegs, he noted.)

The structure at the southwest corner of Minnetonka Boulevard and Louisiana Avenue was a gas station, grocery store and confectionery, evolving after Prohibition into a tavern. It was Art & Esther's Tavern in 1938, The Corner Tavern in 1945, and became The Park Tavern around 1952 with a Grand Reopening scheduled for December 6, 1952.

On June 6, 1957, the St. Louis Park *Dispatch* reported that the tavern's liquor license had been transferred to Jim Enger, former proprietor of Jimmy's Lounge on 10th and Portland in Minneapolis, who was leasing with an option to buy. Enger ran an ad on June 13th touting the tavern's new management and tap beer specialty. Enger likely sold his option, because less than a month later, on September 9th, 1957, Ben Weber and George Harrison actually bought the 80-seat food and beverage establishment.

The city's proposal to widen Louisiana Avenue in 1979 caused the business to move south a few blocks to its current location at 3401 Louisiana. Site of the former Reilly Tar & Chemical offices, the new property required much lawyering to resolve clean-up of what was then the largest Superfund site in U.S. One provision would have allowed the government to evict the tavern without recourse if groundwater contamination was discovered to be more extensive.

The tavern added a 20-lane bowling alley shortly after move, along with a full liquor license, and the improvements continued after the death of Ben Weber in 1990 when Phil and his sister Diane assumed ownership.

Phil was a leader in changing the emphasis from sanctioned leagues to recreational-fun bowling, installing gutter bumpers for kids plus dozens of large flat-screens. Five of the screens feature the Midwest's only Video JukeBox with over 7,000 videos at your

*Dispatch* ads tell the story of Park Tavern's new ownership in 1952, right, top and 1957, left, top.

fingertips. Today, unsanctioned beer & pizza leagues use the lanes two nights a week for 17-week seasons; open bowling, bowling fundraisers, and group bowling functions for up to 400 people fill the rest.

Older patrons insisted that one 3.2 beer tap be kept running after the move, but, ultimately, nobody wanted it. Phil became an early supporter of local craft beers as they developed, telling of visits by beer entrepreneurs Omar Ansari of Surly and Jason Schoneman of SLP's family-owned Steeltoe requesting tap space for their new creations.

Currently Park Tavern offers 50 beers on tap, with rotating seasonal choices. Food has changed along with the times and the beer offerings, but Phil noted three main food groups – pizza, burgers and wings – as core staples that are unlikely to change.

A relatively small place that could once claim to be the state's largest seller of draft beer had to be popular.

Phil describes Park Tavern clientele as large, diverse, generational, and loyal. Children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of original patrons still show up.

That popularity clearly springs from Weber's giving back to his community; he says some days he gives away as much as he sells, providing spaces for organizational gatherings, supporting local causes and serving as an informal community center, much as neighborhood taverns did pre-Prohibition. He even provides separate spaces for both Vikings' and Green Bay Packers' fans to loudly support their teams.

Phil's children have shown little interest in continuing the family ownership. One can only hope that when the day comes, a new owner recognizes the value of the incomparable St. Louis Park community asset built by the Weber family.

*Was the brewing of beer-good beer, first-class-  
That should sparkle, and bubble, and boil in the glass:  
Should sparkle and flow till drank, and then  
Feast like a vampire on brains of men.*

Prohibition finally arrived everywhere in 1920 and drove the drinking industry underground, possibly to escape insipid poetry.

Bootleggers flourished, and Minnesota's biggest was Isadore "Kid Cann" Blumenfeld who led the "Minneapolis Combination." That city's speakeasies were concentrated in the Gateway District, known for its wall-to-wall bars, liquor stores, and flop houses. In St. Louis Park, bootleggers were everywhere, selling "Old Popskull" at chicken shacks along Excelsior Blvd; where 5 cents bought a regular Coke, and 25 cents bought you a little something extra.

After 13 years, five months, and nine days of dryness, the 21st Amendment was ratified by the states on December 5, 1933. On April 4, 1933, Congress passed the Cullen-Harrison Act declaring that 3.2 percent beer was "non intoxicating." Previously, the limit had been 0.5 percent. Upon signing the legislation on April 7th, Roosevelt reportedly remarked, "I think this would be a good time for a beer." Not coincidentally, National Beer Day is April 7 in the U.S.

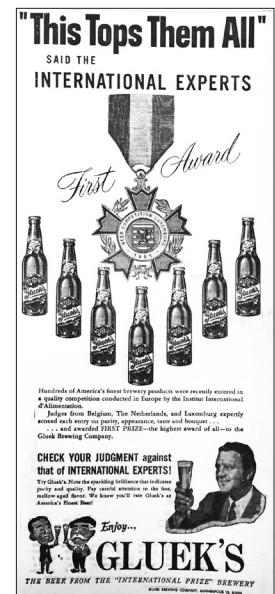
In early 1934 Minnesota passed a bill giving localities the option of allowing the sale of liquor, but also instituting certain statewide restrictions such as dry Sundays. St. Louis Park's new liquor ordinance "relating to the sale of non-intoxicating malt liquor or beverage" was passed on March 31, 1934. The Village Council approved nine licenses right away. "Hard liquor" licenses had to wait until a Village general election in December 1934... the electorate voted in favor by 1,165 to 473.

The first license approved was to Harriet W. Jennings, wife of former bootlegger Mike. Liquor licenses were approved for James A. Roach, Al Lovass, Walter G. Poirer, Bunny's, El Patio, and the Belmont Tavern, among others. On August 12, 1935, Emily Knoss was fined \$25 for selling intoxicating liquor at 8550 Minnetonka Blvd, (then, the Belmont Tavern and still the oldest remaining house in SLP, as featured in the Fall, 2018 Re-Echo). The fine was suspended.

Edina endured its own brouhaha on the issue. On January 9, 1948, the *Dispatch* reported:

*"Our neighboring village of Edina, ordinarily a peaceful settlement where city executives and dirt farmers conduct their municipal affairs in a spirit of notable tolerance, came onto the front pages with a thud Tuesday morning."*

The new Mayor, Eugene Cooper, had called a special Council meeting to discuss a municipal liquor store. When the meeting did not go his way, they adjourned without further action. The next morning, Mayor Cooper called City Recorder Bower Hawthorne and ordered him to fire all village employees; Hawthorne refused. The Mayor backed off,



Jennings off-sale liquor store cleverly appropriated the "'Wet Brew" phone number and used it in their ads for many years.





## DISPATCH LOOK-BACK

On Feb. 12, 1959, the editors of the St. Louis Park *Dispatch* let loose a rant at their readers with the headline: "Doesn't Anyone Really Give a Hoot?"

"We're about convinced that no one really gives a damn about public affairs any more. Whether it's from a sense of futility (I can't do anything anyhow), or indifference (to hell with it), or sheer mental and emotional exhaustion (let's watch TV), we don't know. But it's obvious that no one really cares what course the country takes..."

The editorial complained about an article they'd run two weeks earlier, describing what they claimed were exorbitant salary demands by St. Louis Park teachers, and wondered why there had been no response: "Not one telephone call. Not one letter. Not one postcard."

Two weeks later, a reader from Hopkins gave the following, resounding hoot:

Visit the  
St. Louis Park  
Historical  
Society  
online at  
[slphistory.org](http://slphistory.org).

### Hopkins Teacher Has This To Say About Editorial:

That was a masterpiece of propaganda you printed last week about teacher's salaries. You used as many negative symbols from the national reservoir of ill-will as possible: labor union dictation, public apathy, inflation, and the "fresh" young college graduate "stepping" into a job.

I would like to understand more fully how there can be "stable living costs" and "galloping inflation" at the same time or, better yet, how the public servant, who is considered by every economist I've ever read to be a victim of inflation, can be the "cause" of inflation at the same time. This is patently ridiculous and you know it.

The part of your editorial that was tragic, and typical I might add, was where you charged readers with public apathy because they weren't out hanging some teacher in effigy for requesting a pay raise. Your burning interest in public affairs, fanned by an occasional "damn and hell," has to do only with public finance. If and how the children of the community are educated didn't enter your mind, or at least it didn't enter your typewriter. I maintain that there are public spirited citizens, the majority of whom still have children in school, who would rather manifest that public spirit by providing excellence in public education than by public dem-

onstration against it.

Seventy percent of our federal tax gluts a monstrous war machine, the ultimate implementation of which portends the destruction of mankind. A portion of the local tax, on the other hand, goes to a school system which is waging a more important battle for the survival of humanity. It is this effort toward which I charge you of being apathetic. Because a duly elected, dedicated school board decides in all good conscience that one good way to sustain this effort is through higher teacher salaries, you charge them with "taking the easy way out."

As an educated man yourself, what do you want from your schools? I get the impression that even if the entire staff of your school district had an all-consuming desire to acquire knowledge and a prodigious ability to impart it you would still consider \$4200 per year per teacher a bad bargain. In the interest of REAL public interest, please correct me if I am wrong.

Hubert A. Anderson  
Hopkins

## WHAT'S YOUR PARK STORY?



Do you have a St. Louis Park story to share with our readers? We would love to hear from you! We're looking for articles, stories, reminiscences and photos.

### Submission Guidelines

- Articles are relevant to the St. Louis Park Historical Society audience
- 1,000 words maximum
- Articles are published at the discretion of newsletter staff and may be gently edited to accommodate space limitations
- Submit your article to [slphs.newsletter@gmail.com](mailto:slphs.newsletter@gmail.com) — include your name, email address and phone number



## FALL MYSTERY PHOTO REVEALED

The answer to our Mystery Photo is, of course, the Roller Garden building, which has entertained residents of the Park and beyond since 1929. The rich history of this building and the people behind it is lovingly and extensively detailed on our website. Thanks to those who wrote or called in with the correct answer! The Mystery Photo section will be retired for the time being, but we hope you enjoy the new DISPATCH LOOK-BACK column instead.



## St. Louis Park Historical Society

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Questions? Contact us at 952.583.9893 or [history@slphis.org](mailto:history@slphis.org).



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eventually trying to fire only five employees while refusing to sign their paychecks. The *Dispatch* hinted at a hidden agenda:

"Mr. Cooper and Mr. Palen were elected in December on a strictly municipal liquor store basis. Only one liquor store license, an off-sale license, has ever been granted in Edina since repeal. This is held, and has always been held, by the firm of Hay and Stenson."

When St. Louis Park became a charter city in 1955, the State allowed it to issue up to 15 on-sale liquor licenses. The previous maximum had been ten, although thanks to the efforts of stalwart teetotaling councilmen Torval Jorvig, Joseph Justad, and H.J. Bolmgren, only six had been issued, including to Bunny's and Al's.

In 1960 an article appeared in a Minneapolis paper that said St. Louis Park's "strict beer ordinance, passed just after prohibition ended" was up for discussion. The problem was that bowling leagues were refusing to play at beer-less Texa-Tonka Lanes.

And, as recently as January 20, 2015, the City of St. Louis Park placed a moratorium on future liquor stores until the end of the year. The number of liquor stores per capita in the Park had become alarming and many were close together.

As eventually proven by Park Tavern's astounding 3.2 beer sales, the way of the world has become a poetic variation on Ella Wheeler Wilcox's dictum:

*Quaff, and the world quaffs with you,  
Dry, you cry alone.*



*Always a pleasure...*

...on arriving home after the show to enjoy a snack and a glass of refreshing beer.

For beer is the kind of beverage Americans like. It belongs to pleasant living, to good fellowship, to sensible moderation. And our right to enjoy it, this too, belongs to our own American heritage of personal freedom.

*Beer belongs...enjoy it*

Published in behalf of the following Minnesota Breweries:

<b>FITGER</b> DULUTH	<b>FLECKENSTEIN</b> FAIRBULT	<b>GLUEK</b> MINNEAPOLIS	<b>GRAIN BELT</b> MINNEAPOLIS
<b>HAMM</b> ST. PAUL	<b>HAUENSTEIN</b> NEW ULM	<b>KATO</b> HANKATO	<b>KIEWEL</b> LITTLE FALLS
<b>ROYAL</b>	<b>BOHEMIAN</b> DULUTH	<b>SCHELL</b> NEW ULM	<b>SCHMIDT</b> ST. PAUL

**BEER - America's beverage of moderation**