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REeCHO

PARK HISTORY TODAY

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Volume 24.2

/

Summer 2025

EDITOR'S NOTE: Dan Ullsperger, proprietor of the Park's second small craft brewery, recently claimed that the opening of a third - Haggard Barrel Brewing at the edge of Skunk Hollow - had vaulted our fair city into 2nd place, just behind Duluth and maybe tied with Rochester, for the largest number of breweries per capita in Minnesota.

We are unsure if a small, boundary-fixed suburb can be logically compared to a growing city like Rochester for any per capita measurement, but we'll take the glory while we can, and growl about it. Using 2020 US Census figures, plus Rochester's current beer festival data, we have calculated that city's Brewery per ten-thousand-residents ratio at 0.41, while here in the Park, our third brewery has hoisted us to a stunning ratio of 0.6 breweries per ten-thousand residents. Duluth's leading, well-soaked ratio of 1.27 breweries per ten-thousand residents is seemingly out of reach.

But consider that Sleepy Eye, MN's sole brewery earns it a whopping 2.82 ratio, and our game is up. Herein, we profile the Park's three, wildly different experiments in beer. But first, some U.S., and Minnesota, liquor history.

SOMETHING BREWING IN THE PARK

CRAFT BREWING BEER IN THE USA

Beer has long been of personal interest to me. As I wrote almost 25 years ago in the pages of *Architecture Minnesota* magazine:

Beer, like architecture, pervades human culture. Sumerian pottery 7,500 years old contains traces of fermented barley products; their Epic of Gilgamesh describes the importance of beer in transforming uncouth tribes into a cultivated people. About 1800 BC, Babylonian King Hammurabi's Code of Laws specified the death penalty for architects who built defective houses and for tavern keepers who overcharged for beer. The national epic of Finland, the Kalevala, devotes 200 verses to the creation of the world and 400 to the birth of beer...In 1516 the German Reinheitsgebot law decreed that beer be made using only barley, water and hops; yeast remained airborne and unseen until Pasteur came along 300 years later. American brewing thrived locally before Prohibition, but afterward national brands grew and quality and variety suffered. Our own national swill-gulping public still demands vast quantities of banal brewski, made principally with corn, rice and advertising.

Tom Acitelli's 2017 book, "The Audacity of Hops," meticulously and exhaustively tells the story of how small and local craft breweries, mostly supplanted by the Bud-Miller-Pabst Big Boy Beer vendors after Prohibition and WWII, managed to keep a small spark alive at Anchor Steam Brewery in San Francisco, starting in 1965.

That story flared into many stories over the next three decades as the craft beer bug was nurtured and transplanted from person to person and from California, Oregon and Washington to Colorado, New York, and Michigan. Home brewers were the engine that drove the growth and the development of new and revived beer styles and subtleties of flavor.

An experimental hop variety developed by the USDA with the Zip-code-like name 56013 (later to be named Cascade Hops) found its way into small brewers' beer vocabulary around 1968, changing the American flavor game from sweet to bitter. It >>continued on page 2>>



Ullsperger, Haggard Barrel, and Steel Toe breweries have vaulted the Park into (maybe) 2nd Place in the ranks of Minnesota beer brewing per capita.



Was introduced in the Yakima Valley of Washington, which today produces a dizzying array of new hops flavors and 77 percent of all hops grown in the U.S.

The craft beer craze reached Minnesota in the mid-1980s. Shell's, of New Ulm, the second oldest and continuously family-operated brewery in the nation, is credited with introducing the first small-batch, craft wheat-beer in Minnesota in 1984.

Summit Brewing of St. Paul was not far behind with its Extra Pale Ale, rolling its first two kegs across University Avenue to Johnny's Bar in 1986. (Full disclosure: I was a regular and once won Third Prize in its annual limerick contest, at Johnny's, a tiny, windowless neighborhood dive bar on the edge of the Midway District of St. Paul that sadly no longer exists.)

Minnesota's legal brewing landscape changed in 1987, allowing restaurants to *brew and sell* their own beer on site, while restricting their ability to *distribute* the beer. This resulted in the state's first "brewpubs."

Sherlock's Home brewpub opened in 1989 in normally buttoned-down Minnetonka. Owner Bill Burdick sought to bring the hand-pulled British beer vibe to Minnesota. In its spanking new, ersatz-half-timber suburban building, Sherlock's began hosting home-brewing competitions and beer tastings. It was a strong assist in goosing Minnesota's beer culture.

Town Hall Brewing, with its integral restaurant at Seven Corners on the edge of the University of Minnesota's West Bank campus, has operated since 1997 on that model. (Full disclosure: with many University clients, I was also a bit of a regular there.) As explained to CBS News by Town Hall head brewer Aaron Herman in 2016:

We're licensed as a brew pub as opposed to, pretty much all [other] tap rooms, [which] are licensed as distribution breweries. As far as true brew pubs are concerned, we're not allowed to distribute. So, we can't bottle or can or sell kegs to a distributor for sale...The only way for a brew pub to increase their production is to open up other restaurants under the same ownership umbrella.

As beer recipes are tweaked with hops and yeast, continued legislative tweaking over the next two decades created the statutory legal framework that we occupy today, with three craft beer taprooms in St. Louis Park.

LOCAL LIQUOR FROM THE BEGINNING

Liquor in the Park was always fraught.

Thomas B. Walker dominated the fledgling village starting in 1890, and he was a staunch Methodist and a teetotaler. St Louis Park would have been dry in perpetuity if he had anything to say about it. Our website thoroughly documents the wet/dry battles fought in the Park across the decades.

The Volstead Act, authored by a Minnesota Congressman, officially took effect on January 1, 1920. Warren G. Harding's presidential administration, a wholly owned subsidiary of Mark Hanna Criminal Enterprises, took office in 1921. As told in 1967 by author Hank Messick in *The Silent Syndicate*:

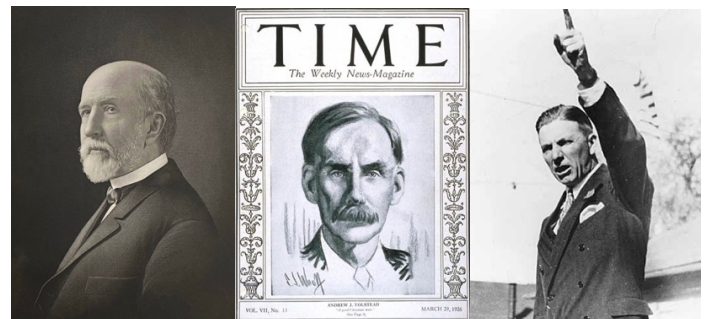
National Prohibition did not slip up on anyone. It followed a long, democratic trail...After the arrival in Washington early in 1921 of the Ohio Gang, Prohibition was doomed. The sight of the White House bootlegger, Elias H. Mortimer, personally catering to the wants of

President Harding was bad enough. But the activity just beneath the surface was worse. The very machinery of government was used to corrupt the laws instead of enforcing them...The unofficial headquarters of many high officials of government became "the Little Green House on K Street." As Frederick Lewis Allen in his "The Lords of Creation" put it: "Senators, Congressmen and Cabinet members dropped in to have a drink from supplies obligingly furnished by Government officials who diverted confiscated wet goods thither, and to play in the sky-limit poker game...The Ohio Gang traded in liquor withdrawal permits, protection to bootleggers, appointments to office, illegal concessions, immunity from prosecution, pardons, paroles, privileges and general graft...The Little Green House slumbered not nor slept. It was open for business by day and for pleasure mingled with business."

Isidore "Kid Cann" Blumenfeld was a Minneapolis bootlegger who fought his way to the table of the National Crime Syndicate alongside kingpin Meyer Lansky. His two kid brothers, Harry and Yiddy Bloom, built homes in the Park and lived here for a spell while "employed" at a couple of Minneapolis liquor stores. The Kid, his extended family, and his cronies continued to control liquor in Minneapolis during and after Prohibition and into the 1960s.

Enforcement of the Volstead Act in Hennepin County fell to Floyd B. Olson, who served as County Attorney for the first decade of "dry" America. The Yiddish speaking Floyd might have met the Yiddish speaking Kid Cann when Floyd prosecuted bank fraud cases resulting from the demise of the St. Louis Park State Bank and a dozen others in 1919. There are tantalizing clues to that effect, but no proof. In any case, Floyd was an alcoholic whose likely personal take on the Volstead Act was that it could be optional. Floyd was County Attorney for the first decade of Prohibition, when the Kid admitted to shooting a local cabbie dead on Nicollet Avenue in 1924 but was somehow never brought to trial for it.

Prohibition would last 14 years, making it possible for bootleggers across the nation, Kid Cann included, to become filthy rich. When the "Great Experiment" ended during the Great Depression, few, if any, could spare a dime, but the criminal element was so flush with cash that it proceeded to buy American business wholesale. According to author Paul Maccabee, by the beginning of the Great Depression, FBI records alleged that the Kid was parking over \$2 million in a dozen New Jersey banks.



T.B. Walker, Andrew Volstead, and Floyd B. Olson - Two teetotalers and one totally-liked-his-liquor.

The end of Prohibition ushered in regulation of intoxicating liquor by the states and quickly evolved into a generally followed three-tier system of state "control." Complexity

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Summer is off to a great start in the Park! June has brought warm weather which also means construction season is in full swing with a major project on Cedar Lake and Louisiana which is in year two of a three-year reconstruction. If you are inspired to visit our local breweries after reading this newsletter, you will find more road reconstruction in front of Steel Toe Brewery. And street rehabilitation is scheduled for several neighborhoods across the city.

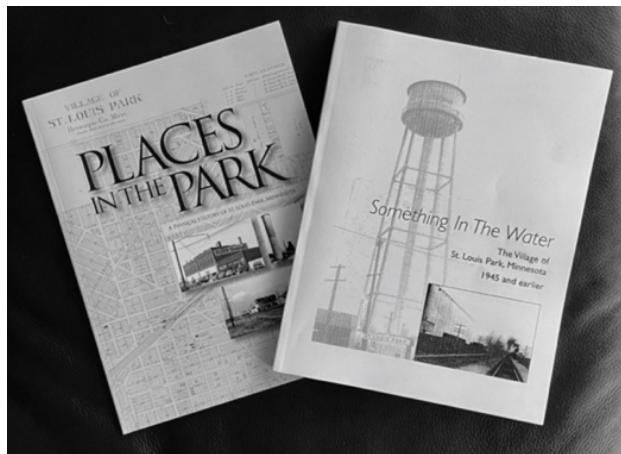
We will have some events this summer and hope you will visit us. As details are confirmed we will share on our website and send out emails, but come see us at Parktacular on June 14th where we will share trivia and answer your questions. This is always a fun event to introduce the history of our city to residents who aren't aware of the rich historical stories and developments that shape where and how they live today.

We continue to receive interesting things for our collection, such as a trove of materials from the Fire Department related to cold war era citizen safety and preparedness programs. And we continue to add records to *Collective Access* to provide online access to records across Minnesota historical societies. Go to our website homepage to find a link to the online collection.

If you want to learn more about serving on our Board of Trustees, we are looking to fill a seat this September. Our Trustees attend our monthly Board meeting, provide input on ongoing Society activities, and choose how and when to volunteer time. We have no financial or volunteer requirements; we only look for interest in our city's history and a desire to positively collaborate with the other members of the Board.

With Park Pride,

Ted



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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* is an official publication of the Society.

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ensued. Minnesota's Department of Public Safety currently lists over a hundred distinct liquor license types on its website.

Of course, in America any new law purporting to exercise control of almost anything is immediately met with entrepreneurial efforts to evade, or to openly violate in hopes of changing the law before getting caught.

The model three-tier liquor regulatory systems were designed to separate manufacturers and suppliers from wholesalers and distributors, and both of those from retail sellers. In Minnesota it was the wholesalers/distributors who managed to accrue the most power from the arrangement. Battles over the application of that power have been fought ever since.

As soon as the Minnesota Legislature rolled out its version of the three-tier regulatory regime, mainly intended to keep organized crime out of the middleman role in 1934, Kid Cann's cabal had already installed its own lawyer, Fred Ossanna, to represent the new Minnesota Liquor Dealers Association.

That year, just back from an all-expense-paid Caribbean cruise with his wife, several Minneapolis aldermen, and a few state legislators, Ossanna denied that the freebie had been paid for by liquor interests and that his organization was raising campaign cash for Floyd's re-election.

While the cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul were both corrupt to their cores from 1890 to 1940, the state administration under Floyd Olson and his successor, Elmer Benson also had its share of scandals around kickbacks and favoritism. Jim Markham, editor and publisher of the *St. Louis Park Dispatch*, editorialized against Floyd's alleged ties to organized crime in 1934, comparing him to Louisiana's Huey "the Kingfish" Long.

The Minnesota Craft Brewers Guild was created in 2000 and in 2003, Minnesota law allowed breweries with annual production under 3,500 barrels to sell growlers to the public for off-premise consumption.

The Guild began promoting and producing the state's first beer festivals. The first Autumn Brew Review was staged in 2000 at Peavey Plaza in downtown Minneapolis, with twenty-two participating breweries. Surly Brewing Co. delivered kegs of Furious to bars in the Twin Cities starting in 2006.

In 2011, with a huge assist from the internet-boosted "Surly Nation," the Minnesota legislature was convinced to enact the Surly law, allowing breweries to have taprooms, without selling food. Business-model-wise, it changed everything.

As of 2019, the number of breweries in the state had grown to about 180, many supported primarily or entirely by taproom sales. Surly's Omar Ansari noted back then that, "It lowers the bar to entry and that's really the name of the game."

We are reminded of the Park's thirst for beer by our interview with Phil Weber of Park Tavern from seven years ago. The Tavern was only licensed to sell 3.2 beer, and Phil told us, "We were the largest on-sale seller in the state of Minnesota. We only sold Grain Belt beer on tap."

On our tour of Park breweries and taprooms, we start small with the truly tiny brewery that reminded us that the Park may have bragging rights.

ULLSPERGER BREWING



DAN ULLSPERGER hails from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, but didn't grow up with beer in his blood, and never even had a beer in high school. He went to college at the University of North Dakota to study manufacturing and play football, while still not especially caring for beer.

On a trip home from college, he tried a Samuel Smith's Nut Brown Ale and a Newcastle, then sampled an India Pale Ale from Milwaukee's Lakefront Brewing, founded there in 1987 about the same time as Summit rolled out its first kegs here. He graduated in 2007 and moved to the Park in 2009, just as Summit and Surly were making craft beer happen.

After acquiring a taste for beer styles, he began to teach himself everything he could, admitting to lots of help along the way. He visited a couple of hundred Midwest craft breweries, sampled wares, knew what he liked, studied flavors, and researched recipes. He began to reverse-engineer those he liked at home until he satisfied his own taste.

He took advantage of the Hennepin County "Open to Business" program for free advice and looked to the city for support; Brewery business plan always had to be SLP. He got big help from other small brewers, lots of sharing; currently looking to share keg-washer with other brewery in off-hours

Dan was not formally trained as some craft brew founders were but relies heavily on the BJCP [Beer Judge Certification Program] style guidelines. Ullsperger Brewing opened in late September 2023 at Westwood Shopping Center, Cedar Lake Road and Louisiana, in the Park.

Ullsperger is the smallest of Park's three breweries with a maximum capacity goal of around 150 barrels this year – 4,650 gallons, roughly 2,000 cases of 12-ounce bottles. Compare to Summit at 115,000 barrels per year. That comparison is the dictionary definition of "micro." [For another comparison, the University of Minnesota Aquatic Center's Olympic pool holds 713,000 gallons, exactly 23,000 barrels. Summit could fill it with beer five times a year.]

And because of Dan's education in manufacturing, he aimed to be a "just-in-time" brewer, turning over his product frequently on the concept that, "inventory is a waste." Dan also notes that

he's not in it for the money or the glory, (he holds another full-time job), but for the spirit of the taproom, a place where "you don't meet better people."

Dan is a single father, and says parenting his son is Job No. 1, but has plans to be married this summer. He cites the Japanese concept of "Ikigai" as a major driver:

Ikigai...means "a reason for being" and refers to the intersection of what you love, what you are good at, what the world needs, and what you can be paid for. It represents a sense of purpose and fulfillment in life, contributing to overall happiness and well-being.

His cobbled-together, used, American brewing equipment has one barrel capacity, making it easier to tweak as you go. Ullsperger brews his beers according to *Reinheitsgebot*, the 1516 German Purity Law, using untreated SLP water which is very hard but works well for some brews – results are "clean."

He sells no cans or growlers; both are pricey, hard to store, and reduce his profits. Dan's smart choice of location obviates the need for food trucks, partnering with three restaurants within a hundred yards of his taproom for Pizza, Asian, and Greek offerings.

Ullsperger's taproom is the beating heart of his brewery, a place where all are welcome and where Dan works constantly to make the process smoother and more personal for every customer.



Dan displays coasters from every taproom he's personally visited, constantly expanding the wall art. His three-two-top patio matches the brewery's small size.



Ullsperger thinks he could expand and add coffee and snacks for morning hours; his business training abhors letting leased space sit unused for most of the day. By expanding he'd have space for events and live music. Dan has lived in several locations in the Park, all within a mile of his brewery, a sign that giving back to his community is high on his list of operating principles.

HAGGARD BARREL BREWING



KARL EICHER is a thirty-something who grew up in Shoreview, MN, attended the University of St. Thomas, and graduated with a degree in finance just as he turned 21 and the Surly Law changed the local brewing landscape.

He was one of those guys who brought ever more exotic craft brews to college keggers and decided upon graduation that a career in finance was simply not going to do it for him.

Instead, Karl embarked on a beer education that included courses at the American Brewers Guild and a five-week internship at the Lost Abbey Brewery in San Diego. He counts many mentors on his beer education journey. His last gig was as head brewer for Blackstack, a brewery in the Midway District of St. Paul.

In fact, Karl claims no international beer experience as influencing his beer-making, finding more than enough in our own 50 states as tasty precedent. His favorite beers are lagers and stouts, plus a hard study of India Pale Ales.

Haggard Barrel Brewing opened its taproom in March 2025, but had been brewing and distributing beers for a year by then. He landed in St. Louis Park because the warehouse space he leased on the east edge of Skunk Hollow had seltzer-making equipment left behind that could be adapted to brewing beer. The Haggard name reflects the mix and match equipment assembled from everywhere.

Haggard is now part of a thriving "sin city" enclave in a cluster of leased 1950s warehouses, comprising two micro distilleries, Dampferks and Copperwing, a winery/event center, and a cannabis dispensary. T.B. Walker would be having a cow.

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Haggard's yearly capacity is between 350 and 500 barrels, making 16-ounce cans-to-go more economical. Currently, growlers are not provided, but Karl sees them as on the way out, as much as for their awkward storage and handling as for their inferior beer freshness, compared to cans.

Speaking of freshness, brewing craft beer has evolved into a highly technical process since the earliest days of small brewery revivals in the mid-1960s, and Karl has studied every aspect of it with intensity.

Karl wouldn't think of using SLP water straight from the tap for his brews and treats the water in various ways including reverse osmosis and chemical adjustments, depending on beer style. He speaks with confidence on how "sulfate-to-chloride ratios" affect the products – higher sulfates for crisper, more bitter brews, and more chloride for that "fuller mouthfeel."

As for future growth, Karl is open to it but is still looking to find the "happy size" for his operation. And, as with Ullsperger, the taproom is the place for the real action, face-to-face consumption of the latest brews in a friendly, and maximally profitable, atmosphere.



Haggard is still working to get a signage permit and has a nice south-facing and patio-positive front yard, but that will need a permit too.

STEEL TOE BREWING



JASON AND HANNAH SCHONEMAN hail from Cedar Falls, Iowa. Jason started out as a machinist/toolmaker where he learned the art of crafting with precision. Hannah, an Army brat, lived everywhere and worked in retail management. Jason's beer

odyssey began with trips to Colorado in the late 1990s when craft brewing was beginning to escape its far west roots and expanding eastward. In the early 2000's, Hannah joined Jason's journey into the incredible world of Craft Beer.

The largest and most esteemed elder of Park breweries at almost fourteen years old, Steel Toe has told a lot of its own back story on its website:

Here at STB we believe in working our ass off for what we believe in, following our passion, giving back to and working with the community that supports us, being conscious of the world around us, producing the best quality product we can, and kicking back with great beer at the end of the day. We are a small MN craft brewery with big dreams of staying small.

Steel Toe started like a lot of other craft breweries, with an avid home brewer and a wife tired of listening to the carboy 'plunk, plunk, plunking' all night long, because the bedroom was the only spot in the house with the most constant temperature for the fermentation of the latest creation. So, after many sleepless nights, many many home brews, and countless talks about the dream of someday doing it as a career, the day finally came that they decided to get serious and create the blueprint...The plan involved Hannah putting on her 'chief enabler and support crew' gear and Jason getting an education and working in the field before the attempt was made at starting a brewery.

Jason tasted the long, long hours required to brew small batch beer as an Assistant-Brewer in Montana, got an International Diploma in Brewing Technology from the World Brewing Academy, studying in Chicago and Gräfenberg Germany, sampling brews along the way. He landed in Oregon's exploding craft brew culture where he paid his dues advancing in four years from Cellarman to Head Brewer at the Pelican Pub and Brewery. He took away a strong taste of community give-back there as well.

Family ties lured the Schonemans to St. Louis Park in 2009; Hannah's sister lived here and could help with their infant daughter, plus the population density of the Twin Cities argued for a better business climate.

Jason, after an assist from the Saint Louis Park SCORE group to finalize a business plan, then found used equipment, leased a space and tied up loose ends over the next two years.

They intended to start a production-only brewery, but after getting their brewing license from the state in February 2011, the unexpected Surly Law enacted later that year lit the fire for taprooms across the state. Steel Toe joined the big wave of new Twin Cities taprooms in 2012. It had taken them a decade from the start of their beer-dream to doors-open.

The Steel Toe Brewery has an output capacity of around 3,500 barrels a year, the legal limit under the 2003 iteration of Minnesota law. Five times the size of Haggard and thirty-five times Ullsperger. Their business model is to stay small, but that's a moving target.

Jason is a big fan of treating the extremely hard SLP city water in multiple ways to achieve top quality beers. (According to one of our books, there may be "something" in it.) He admits to occasionally adding back some straight-SLP-hardness to tweak a recipe.

They buy their malted barley directly from Rahr's, a Minnesota institution that is approaching one-hundred-eighty years in the

business. The new “Big Green Tank” installed alongside the brewery is a 50,000 lb. malted barley silo, replacing the arduous and dusty task of filling mash tuns from 50 lb. sacks.

Since 2011, the taproom has expanded twice, the brewhouse once, and outdoor seating has been added. Outdoor beer drinking provided some respite from the Covid-induced fear of getting together in groups for four years. It was the worst time for the industry, putting several craft brewers out of business and resulting in a 75 percent drop in sales for Steel Toe.



Supporting its community, Steel Toe has hosted fundraisers for STEP (the St. Louis Park Emergency Program) for the past several years.

Oddly, the addition of five-hundred new, upscale apartments just crawling distance from the taproom’s front door has not appreciably goosed sales. But the new Adam Turman mural on the back side of the parking ramp has brightened the environment greatly according to Hannah, who served on the city’s art committee for the project.

Hannah and Jason are looking forward to finding more ways to “dig in” and support the SLP community. Steel Toe has been a strong supporter of STEP for several years and just adopted a segment of the Cedar Lake Regional LRT/Bike Trail next door to keep it looking fresh and clean.



In January 2021, Covid-19 stretched conviviality to its Minnesota limits, bringing out Steel Toe’s most dedicated and determined patio-dwellers.

CONVIVIALITY

Dan Ullsperger, Karl Eicher, and Jason Schoneman appear to share unusually keen senses of taste and smell, perhaps genetic, (Hannah claims she doesn’t have the magic). They have studied the texts and have trained to identify the most arcane hop blends and yeast strains and their seemingly infinite combinations – the main variables of today’s craft beer.

But the ingredient that is shared by the entire craft beer movement and all Park brewers has been the advent of the on-premises taproom and its core value of conviviality, defined as “the good humor, mirth, and good fellowship indulged in at an entertainment.” At every brewery in Minnesota, or in the beer halls of the old world that I have personally visited, it is that family-friendly-bring-the-dog-too zeitgeist that pervades.



Top, During WWII, the *St. Louis Park Dispatch* carried beer industry ads touting “the beverage of moderation.” Above, Werner’s Saloon was probably housed in a hotel on Brownlow Avenue, and the Hinkel Hotel featured its own wet delights pre-Prohibition, both mainly entertaining men. Below, Al’s Bar was built during Prohibition, the first stop for thirsty souls on Excelsior Blvd west of the Minneapolis city limit. El Patio, now Bunny’s, was built in 1920 near the west village limits just past the Dan Patch tracks. Both allegedly housed speakeasys until 1934.



The responsibility of any city today is to encourage its citizens to gather now and again to celebrate the social cohesion that comes from human proximities. The Park’s taprooms have come to serve that role admirably, albeit with slightly more moderation than the muscular Munich barmmaids.





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An official publication of the St. Louis Park Historical Society

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LOOKING FORWARD TO SUMMER CONVIVIALITY



From Sleepy Eye to New Ulm, (at Schells' old world beer garden), to the disgruntled brewers of Perham, Minnesotans have embraced beery conviviality. At the Park's own Steel Toe, the Big Green Malt Silo adds color to the west side of the brewery, while on the east side, the bright mural by Adam Turman redeems the barren parking ramp backside of the new Corsa apartments.

