

# **A. Gettelman Brewing Company Timeline**

**Compiled by Leonard P. Jurgensen**

**Milwaukee Brewery Historian**

The A. Gettelman Brewery was first called the "Menomonee Brewery" because of its proximity to the Menomonee River. It was located on what's said to be the original "Watertown Plank Road" in a community that was first known as "Center City." The plank road was actually a "toll road" and, at one time, was operated by a "gate-man" named August Batke. The road was first called the "Madison, Watertown & Milwaukee Plank Road" and today is named State Street. The Gettelman Brewery is located at 4400 West State Street, on the north side, and is now part of the formal Miller Brewery complex. (Miller Brewery was originally established by Charles Best and Gustav Fine and was first called the Plank Road Brewery).

The location of the Gettelman Brewery is in the N. E. 1/4 of Section 26, Town 7, Range 21 East, in Milwaukee County, which was then part of Wauwatosa when the brewery was established. That area has long since been annexed and is now part of the City of Milwaukee.

The future site of the Gettelman Brewery, which was originally a 10-acre parcel, was first described "as part of the North East Quarter of Section Twenty Six, in Town Seven, Range Twenty One East, beginning on East line of said North East Quarter, four chains and sixty links South of said North East corner, thence South 53 degrees 40 minutes, West six & 14/100 chains, thence South 22 degrees, West three & 16/100 chains, thence South 27 degrees West two & 28/100 chains, thence South 2 & 1/4 East eleven & 47/100 chains to the center of Menomonee River, thence along the center line of said River to the East line of said North East Quarter Section 26, thence North along said line to place of beginning containing 10 acres more or less."

**Almost all previous written or recorded histories of this brewery claim that at it was first started in 1854 by Strohn & Reitzenstein (no first names were given). However, that is not true. This false information regarding the actual partners was published as early as 1881 and that misinformation has been repeatedly published ever since. According to legal records, deeded records and court documents, the brewery was actually started by Frederick W. Colditz and Charles W. Reitzenstein. No public documents state that anyone named Strohn was ever involved in this brewery.**

**1824** - George Schweickhart, who will later purchase the unfinished brewery, complete its construction, and then operate it as the Schweickhart Brewery, was born on July 25, 1824 in Muhlhausen, Alsace, France.

**1847** - Adam Gettelman, who will later take over the brewery and change its name to his, was born on April 27, 1847 in Washington County, Wisconsin.

**1854** - Charles W. Reitzenstein and Frederick W. Colditz acquire a three-acre parcel and begin to build the brewery. Having completed only one underground vaulted beer cellar, (also known as a lagering cellar) plus the brewery's foundation, both Colditz and Reitzenstein die of cholera in September 1854.

**1855** - George Schweickhart and his wife Margaret move to Milwaukee, begin to look for land to farm, but instead soon purchase the unfinished brewery.

**1856** - The unfinished brewery and brewery property, now comprising just three acres, is

acquired by George Schweickhart on September 8, 1856 for \$1,800, who acquires a mortgage and completes its construction. However, it is now built to a larger size than originally planned. An additional underground cellar is constructed and the two (still extant) cellars have a combined capacity of 800 barrels of beer. The brewery then had an annual capacity of brewing 1,500 barrels.

George Schweickhart then re-establishes the brewery under his name (Schweickhart Brewery) and also calls it the "Menomonee Brewery." When he finishes the brewery, he also builds a new brick two-story home, which appears to have been attached to the brewery. During construction, he and his family live in a small log cabin, also located on that property near the brewery.

The brewery is first called the "Menomonee Brewery" because of its proximity to the Menomonee River. Water for brewing comes from a spring located on the property. However, water and ice needed to operate the brewery comes from the nearby Menomonee River. The first year of production has a reported yield of about 13 barrels of beer per week.

**1863** - Adam Gettelman, who left his family's farm in Washington County, begins work at the State Street Brewery in Milwaukee. Adam is about 16 years old and is earning \$25 a month at that brewery.

**1866** - Adam Gettelman leaves the State Street Brewery and is employed at the Western Brewery in Milwaukee.

**1870** - Adam Gettelman, who is employed at the Menomonee Brewery, marries Magdalena Schweickhart, daughter of George Schweickhart.

**1871** - A new brew house is built, including a new ice house. The old brew house is converted to a malt house.

**1874** - George Schweickhart transfers the brewery to Adam Gettelman and Charles Shuckmann, who is also his son-in-law and married to his daughter Catherine Schweickhart. Although they are equal partners, Adam Gettelman, a brewer by trade, is actually operating the brewery.

**1877** - A fire on October 30, 1877 destroys much of the brewery, including the family home. However the brewery and the home are quickly rebuilt.

Per newspaper accounts: Adam Gettelman requests that the ice house be saved and also the residence of his father-in-law, George Schweickhart. He also requests that firefighters attend to the cellars below the burning brewery, with regard to potential overheating, which could result in spoiling the beer within them. Damage to the Schweickhart residence is only \$500 and the fire damage to the ice house is about \$50, for an estimated total loss of \$31,550, including \$30,000 in losses of other structures.

Both structures (at 4400 W. State) appear to predate the fire of 1877 and the front structure appears to have been the residence of Gettelman's father-in-law, George Schweickhart.

Charles Schuckmann agrees "in writing" to transfer his 1/2 interest in the brewery to Adam Gettelman on December 27, 1877. The actual deed is not transferred until 10 years later, after the death of Charles Schuckmann.

**1878** - To aid in refrigeration when delivering to Milwaukee locations, the brewery builds an ice houses at present-day North 14th & Highland and present-day South 15th & Walker.

**1882** -- A bottling works for Gettelman Brewery is established by Herman Scherff, a private bottler under contract. It is independent of the brewery and located some distance from the brewery, reached via a public road.

**1885** - Charles Shuckmann, the son-in-law of George Schweickhart and brother-in-law to Adam Gettelman and his former partner in the brewery, dies in Austria.

The brewery is now known as the "A. Gettelman's Menomonee Brewery."

**1887** - The brewery is incorporated on Tuesday, March 17, 1887 and officially becomes the Adam Gettelman Brewing Company.

**1891** - Gettelman introduces the "\$1,000 Natural Process Beer" campaign and uses the "hand holding the beer glass" and its trademark image and logo. Gettelman offers \$1,000 to anyone able to prove that Gettelman's premium beer was brewed with anything other than pure malt, hops and water.

The famous trademark image of a "hand holding the beer glass" was suggested by Adam Gettelman's cousin-in-law, Martin Schultz, a farmer who had lost his right hand in a farming accident. Schultz was used as the model--hence the left hand holds up the glass.

**1895** - A railroad "spur" is connected to the brewery property. Securing an extension of the railroad to that vicinity is a collaborative effort by both Gettelman and Miller.

**1898** - The Gettelman Brewery gets connected to the City of Milwaukee water supply via a 6-inch pipe and is no longer dependent on spring or well water. The new water line is one of the first extended outside of Milwaukee's city limits and is shared by both Miller and Gettelman breweries, the result of another collaborative effort.

**1906** - William Gettelman is listed as president, Adam P. Gettelman is listed "with the brewery," Louis Gettelman is chief engineer. All three are residing at the brewery property in the Gettelman family home (the front structure listed above).

**1920** - The brewery receives a permit to manufacture "non-alcoholic beverages" during Prohibition when brewing of beer is banned.

**1925** - Adam Gettelman dies on February 14, 1925, at the age of 77, and is buried in Section 1 in the Wauwatosa Cemetery in Milwaukee County. His son, William A. Gettelman, vice-president of the brewery, takes over as president.

**1933** - After Prohibition ends, Frederick Gettelman, the son of the deceased Adam Gettelman, reopens the beer-brewing operation at the brewery under the name the "A. Gettelman Brewing Co." Fred "Fritz" Gettelman is credited for coming up with the idea and of an all-steel beer keg. However, the steel beer keg was already in wide use in Germany and other parts of Europe for many years prior to this.

**1937** - The former Adam Gettelman Mansion on the northern hill behind the brewery is demolished and that area is excavated and leveled to make way for a parking lot. The brewery then builds an addition to the old bottle house. Cream City brick reclaimed from the old mansion is reused in its construction.

**1939** - The brewery constructs a new brick bottling plant at 4300 W. State Street, which is located just to the southeast of the brewery. A brick addition is built onto to the rear of this bottling plant in 1948.

**1940** - Thomas R. Gettelman marries Nancy Moore in 1940. It is reported that she is 19 years old and he is 23.

**1945** - Annual capacity is now rated at 100,000 barrels. Brands produced now include Milwaukee's Best, Rathskeller Brew, \$1,000 Beer and Natural Process Beer. About 60% of production is kegged in barrels for draught beer and the remaining 40% is bottled.

**1950** - The brewery has now added a new canning line and 5% of production is canned, 30% is bottled and the remaining 65% is filled in barrels (kegged).

**1954** - The brewery is essentially a local//regional operation, with 85% of its sales in Wisconsin and 15% of sales in Northern Illinois.

**1956** -- Thomas R. Gettelman is now president and his brother Fred Gettelman Jr. is brewmaster.

**1959** - The various Gettelman Brewery Buildings are listed by numbers and are as follows: rear central Stock house as 1, adjoining Hop Storage as 2, Brew House as 4, Bottling plant as 5, Ice House adjoining south side of Brew House as 6, rear General Storage building as 8, small rear Storage Building as 9, far rear Stock House as 10, General Office Building close to road as 11. Several addition buildings shown on fire maps have not been given numbers or shown to be numbered.

**1960** - Gettelman sells 132,285 barrels of beer in 1960. The brewery now cans 11% of its production and 36% of its production is bottled. The remaining 53% is kegged in barrels. During its best years, the brewery produced around 160,000 barrels per year and, on average, about 120,000 per year.

**1961** - On January 14, 1961, the Gettelman Brewery is sold to the Miller Brewing Company in Milwaukee, which is located two blocks away. The purchase price is estimated to be in excess of one million dollars. Brewing of beer continues at the Gettelman plant for a short period of time but the main goal of Miller was to acquire the Gettelman brand name. Both Fred and Tom Gettelman manage the "Gettelman Division" of Miller Brewery but are soon relieved of their duties. They find other careers and become active in Milwaukee's malting industry.

**1970** - The Gettelman plant, which is known as the "Gettelman Division," closes in 1970 and is put into use as a Miller warehouse and shipping plant. Over the next several years many Gettelman Brewery structures, including its brew house, are demolished.

**1974** - Thomas Gettelman states in an interview published on Sunday December 8, 1974 in the "Insight" magazine of the *Milwaukee Journal* newspaper that when Miller bought out Gettelman in 1961, "Gettelman was selling about 132,000 barrels a year--more beer in Wisconsin than Miller."

**1992** - The former Gettelman office building becomes Miller's engineering building.

**1993** - The Plank Road Division of the Miller Brewing Company is created in 1993 and their brands are "Icehouse," introduced in 1993, and "Red Dog," introduced in 1994.

1995 - Nancy Moore Gettelman's book titled *The A. Gettelman Brewing Company: One hundred and seven years of a family brewery in Milwaukee* is published by Procrustes Press in Milwaukee.

In December of 1995, Miller Brewing Company renames the former Gettelman plant, which is then idle and used for storage, the "Plank Road Brewery" and relocates its Plank Road Brewery headquarters there. The Plank Road sign is painted on the outside of the Gettelman brewery, although no actual brewing takes place there.

Rob Olejniczak, who is then director of the Plank Road brands, reports that when they moved their offices into the former brick Gettelman plant, with its "narrow hallways, knocking radiators, knotty pine paneling, oak floors and complicated back stairwell, the only thing we did was throw some paint on the walls and scrub the floors."

Miller states that the Plank Road Brewery is a "small division" of Miller Brewing Company. It was then stated that, by the end of the year, the Plank Road Brewery operation hopes to have introduced Southpaw Light and Northstone Amber Ale.

At this time they also plan to open a "pilot brewery" within the building and open it for tours. However, those plans never become a reality. It is interesting to note that the name "Plank Road Brewery" is used by the Miller Brewery as a name for "their" brewery.

2007 - The former Gettelman bottling house at 4300 W. State Street, owned by Miller since 1961, is now the "Miller Employee Fitness Center and Clinic."

2012 - Plans are offered and a suggestion is presented (by a proposed nonprofit) to convert the vacant former Gettelman structures into a Beer & Brewing Museum.

2017 - The remaining two adjoining structures of the former Gettelman Brewery remain vacant. The area directly around those structures is used as a parking lot and staging area for semi-trucks of Miller Brewery, which is now known as MillerCoors. It is reported in March of 2017 that MillerCoors intends to demolish the two-building complex of the former Gettelman Brewery and convert and reuse that ground space to accommodate semi-trailer parking.

**It should be noted that with the pending inevitable demolition of the former structure of the Falk Brewery in Milwaukee, and the beer cellars below that structure, the Gettelman structures will be the only remaining location with underground brewery lagering cellars in a city that was, and still is, famous as the Brewing Capital of the World.**

**Should the demolition of the remaining Gettelman structure take place, all traces of underground beer lagering cellars in Milwaukee will be lost. Underground lagering cellars were in most Milwaukee breweries prior to 1880, when mechanical refrigeration was introduced. The only other exception is Miller's "historic caves," which are cellars excavated into a hillside, not below a building, as at the Gettelman Brewery. This will be a major loss to the brewing heritage of Milwaukee and could possibly "cast a cloud over" MillerCoors for destroying Milwaukee's last underground lagering cellars.**

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**Leonard P. Jurgensen**, who grew up in the shadow of Milwaukee's great breweries, has been researching the history of all 130-plus Milwaukee past and present breweries for nearly 40 years. His research encompasses the evolution of each brewery, its architecture, the chronological history of the site and the genealogy of the founders, brewers, employees and officers. He is considered by many as the foremost authority on the subject. Jurgensen is also major collector of artifacts and advertising from the Joseph Schlitz Brewing Company of Milwaukee. In January of 2016, he provided all historical brewery documentation and content, as well as many photos, for Milwaukee County Historical Society's exhibition about Milwaukee's brewing industry titled "Brew City MKE." His book *Milwaukee Beer Barons, Brewers, Bottlers and others Buried at Forest Home Cemetery* was published in 2011.

#### **Sources of Mr. Jurgensen's research**

- Deeded property and mortgage records at the Register of Deeds Office at the Milwaukee County Court House
- Milwaukee Circuit Court Records, Milwaukee County Probate records and obituaries
- Intent and immigration records including birth, death and marriage records
- Actual visits to and inspections of present and former brewery locations
- Fire insurance maps beginning in 1876 at the Humanities Room Milwaukee Central Library
- R. G. Dunn Credit Report Records on file at the Harvard Research Library in Boston
- Federal tax records (IRS) located at the Federal Building in Chicago
- Newspaper accounts and reports on file at Milwaukee Central Library
- Building permits located at the Milwaukee's Department of City Development
- Brewery blueprints within the City of Milwaukee files
- Documents and burial listings from the files of Forest Home Cemetery
- Burial listings from the files of Union Cemetery and Calvary Cemetery
- Milwaukee City Directories, telephone books, local tax records and other listings
- Records and material on file within the Wisconsin State Historical Society
- Records and material on file at Milwaukee County Historical Society's Research Library
- Trade publications: *Brewers Digest*, *Midwestern Brewer*, *Western Brewer*, and others
- Documents, log books, and other information including collected photos
- Articles published in various newsletters and other industry-related trade journals.
- Brewing family genealogy records and other personal family correspondence
- Brewery corporate ledgers, stockholder reports and other related documents
- Historic documents, photos, maps and blueprints from various local collectors
- Brewery related books, reports and other documents in my personal collection
- Original blueprints on file and located within the Milwaukee Central Library
- Articles published in breweriana collector newsletters and journals
- Interviews with former and current brewery employees, executives and family members
- Books published by local historians and brewing family members
- "United States Biographical Directory" published 1877 by "The American Biographical Publishing Company"
- "Milwaukee Great Industries," published 1892 by the Association for Advancement
- "Badger Breweries Past & Present" by Wayne L. Kroll
- "100 Years of Brewing" by H. S. Rich & Company
- "The History of Milwaukee" by John G. Gregory
- "History of Milwaukee Illustrated," Volumes I –III
- "The Pabst Brewing Company" by Thomas Cochran
- "Milwaukee under the Charter" by J. S. Buck

## A. Gettelman Brewing Company

By Joseph B. Walzer, *Encyclopedia of Milwaukee*

The A. Gettelman Brewing Company (1856-1961) was one of Milwaukee's major industrial brewers. Although remaining a mid-sized brewer among the city's giants, Gettelman was an important innovator of beer packaging and advertising and a significant acquisition in the expansion of the Miller Brewing Company.

The Gettelman Brewing Company originated as George Schweickhart's Menomonee Brewery, established near what is now 44th and State Streets in 1856. Coming from an established brewing family in Mühlhausen, Alsace, Schweickhart purchased a half-built brewery started by Strohn and Reitzenstein, who had both died in a cholera epidemic two years earlier. The brewery's location in the Menomonee River Valley west of Milwaukee provided ideal access to clean water from nearby Wauwatosa wells, ice from the river, natural caves for storage cellars, and hops and barley from surrounding farms, while still maintaining easy access to Milwaukee and surrounding towns via the old Watertown Plank Road and later railroad connections.

In 1871, Schweickhart brought Adam Gettelman on as a partner in his brewery. Gettelman was an apprentice at the brewery who had married Schweickhart's daughter in 1870. In 1874, Schweickhart sold off his portion to his son-in-law, Charles Schuckmann, whom Gettelman later bought out to become sole owner of the brewery in 1876. Officially named the A. Gettelman Brewing Company in 1887, the Gettelman family remained in control of the brewery for three generations, until it was sold in 1961.

Fire destroyed a significant portion of the original brewery in 1877, and Gettelman rebuilt and updated their facilities. Gettelman kept the brewery relatively small—just big enough for the family to manage and maintain a high quality product. In 1891, Gettelman introduced its flagship "\$1,000 Beer" brand, offering a \$1,000 reward to anyone who could prove that it was made with anything other than pure barley malt and hops. Gettelman also introduced its popular "Milwaukee's Best" brand in 1895.

Gettelman survived Prohibition making "near beer" and through several different investments outside of brewing, like the West Side Savings Bank, the development and manufacturing of snow plows, gold-mining in the American Southwest, and a sugar beet processing plant in Menomonee Falls. Gettelman returned to brewing in 1933, with Frederick "Fritz" Gettelman as president.

In order to counteract barrel shortages as brewing resumed, Frederick Gettelman personally designed the first practical steel keg in 1933, manufactured by the A.O. Smith Company of Milwaukee. Shortly after, he also consulted with the American and Continental Can Companies

on how to apply his design to the development of what became known as the “keg-lined” beer can. In the late 1930s, he developed new glass-lined storage tanks, also manufactured by A.O. Smith, and a more efficient bottle-washing machine.

The company introduced a new eight-ounce beer bottle labeled “Fritzie” in 1946, inspired by heinzelmännchen, the house gnomes of German folklore. By 1952, Fritzie had evolved into a cartoon beer bottle with a rotund face and Tyrolean hat that was famously featured in different humorous scenes painted on the exterior walls of several Milwaukee taverns. Moreover, the company became an important pioneer in television advertising in Milwaukee, sponsoring televised wrestling matches in 1947, and World Series pre-game shows in 1949.

Gettelman Brewing also made major investments in modernizing and expanding their operations in the 1950s. They entered the Chicago, Boston, California, and other regional and national markets as they briefly opened in the wake of industry consolidation. Gettelman released a new, lighter “Milwaukee” brand beer in 1956, and began importing and distributing Tucher beer from Nuremburg, Germany in 1959—the first American brewer to establish such a relationship.

Nevertheless, the company was unable to continue competing with the national giants, and the Gettelman family sold the brewery to the neighboring Miller Brewing Company in 1961. The Gettelman plant and brand continued on with brothers Tom Gettelman and Frederick Gettelman, Jr. as plant managers until Miller formally merged the two operations in 1971.

Elements of the Gettelman brewery remain part of the Miller Brewing Company complex, and its Milwaukee’s Best brand lives on in Miller’s portfolio.

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Footnotes provided online at <https://emke.uwm.edu/entry/a-gettelman-brewing-company/>

## **Sources**

Apps, Jerry. *Breweries of Wisconsin*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992.

Gettelman, Nancy Moore. *The A. Gettelman Brewing Company: One Hundred and Seven Years of a Family Brewery in Milwaukee*. Milwaukee: Procrustes Press, 1995.