

DESCRIPTION OF STRUCTURES

Two attached Cream City brick buildings are the oldest surviving original structures of the former A. Gettelman Brewing Company, located at 4400 W. State St. in Milwaukee. The buildings' foundations were laid in 1854 for a planned brewery, by two partners who both died in the cholera epidemic that year. The foundations appear to be locally quarried limestone blocks.

The smaller building has three sections, which are one and two stories with gabled roofs. It is believed to have been built circa 1856-57 as a residence for the George Schweickhart Family. It was used as such for many decades, before becoming brewery offices. There is an enclosed front porch, two entrances and many windows.

The larger structure is three stories high with a flat roof. It has at least three doorways. Some windows have been boarded up with wood or filled in with brick.

Beneath both buildings are intact underground lagering cellars, which are connected. Milwaukee brewing historian Leonard P. Jurgensen attests that they are the last viable brewing cellars in the city. They were standard in breweries built before mechanical refrigeration was introduced in 1880. These manufactured "caves" cooled beer naturally.

Some exterior brick shows typical darker coloration, while some brick appears to have been restored to its original cream color. Remnants of once-vigorous climbing vines cover much of both buildings. There are evergreen and deciduous plants in front of the smaller building. A walkway that formerly led to the street, which now abuts a retractable chain-link fence, connects to the front porch. The buildings are surrounded by a vast parking lot used for semi-trailers. To the southeast, a former brick bottling house is now an employee fitness center, with an adjacent parking lot.

SIGNIFICANCE

The goal of this Temporary Historic Designation Petition is to allow the pursuit of a mutually beneficial path to preservation of Gettelman Brewery's earliest buildings. They are exceptionally significant has used the buildings as offices and more recently for storage. The site's historic cellars, originally used for cooling vaults, were transformed into a "rathskeller" in the 1930s and became a longtime hub of Milwaukee civic life.

Beer literally made Milwaukee structures and among the oldest that served Milwaukee's brewing history. The property is currently scheduled for demolition unless the Historic Preservation Commission grants a stay. If razed, a major site of Milwaukee's 19th-century brewing history will disappear, along with the 100-plus-year heritage of the Schweickhart-Gettelman family business that operated there until it was sold to Miller Brewing in 1961. The property has had significance in Milwaukee in the following areas: commerce, industry, exploration/settlement, architecture, communications (advertising and promotion), economics, invention, science, social/humanitarian.

Miller has used the buildings as offices and more recently for storage. The site's historic cellars, originally used for cooling vaults, were transformed into a "rathskeller" in the 1930s and became a longtime hub of Milwaukee civic life.

Beer literally made Milwaukee famous. The brewing industry epitomizes Milwaukee, long called "The Beer Capital of the World." The earliest brewery dates to 1840, six years before the city was incorporated. Breweries continue to thrive here. This brewing history deserves to be celebrated and tangible--now and for future generations. While some of that heritage has been preserved, much more has been demolished, especially relating to breweries outside the "Big Four" (Blatz, Miller, Pabst and Schlitz). Only Miller still has a major operation in Milwaukee; its executives work elsewhere.

A. Gettelman Brewing Company was one of Milwaukee's most prominent breweries (often ranked among the top seven), a century-long economic and civic anchor, and an esteemed family-owned business. The brewery carved out a niche as a regional brewer and highlighted that focus through clever advertising and brand-identity efforts. In turn, the company's contributions helped define Milwaukee's character and identity. Members of the Gettelman Family still reside in Milwaukee County.

The following are aspects of the Gettelman property's historic significance:

- Work on the buildings' foundations began in 1854, eight years after Milwaukee was founded. The oldest structure was completed in 1856.
- What are believed to be Milwaukee's only surviving "underground lagering cellars" are beneath both buildings. Such naturally cool vaults were an industry standard prior to the introduction of refrigeration in 1880. The cellars, transformed into a "rathskeller" in the 1930s, were a longtime hub of civic life.
- The smaller building served variously as the Schweickarts' and Gettelmans' residence, Gettelman offices, and the brewery's public reception area.

- In 1895, a railroad spur was connected to the brewery property. Securing an extension of the railroad to that vicinity is a collaborative effort by both Gettelman and Miller breweries.
- In 1898, the Gettelman Brewery got connected to the City of Milwaukee water supply via a 6-inch pipe and was 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.
- The larger building served varied brewing functions, including as a malt house, and was converted to offices in 1948.
- Starting in the post-Prohibition period, the cellars were used as a *Sternwirth*/reception room. It was full of antiques, many from the brewery's early days. Gettelman family members "whitewashed" the curved walls of the vault to create a rathskeller (German for "council's cellar").
- Gustave Pabst, Jr., paid tribute to Fritz Gettelman in an undated article for an "early" *Brewery Journal*. He wrote: "The rathskeller is like Fritz, like the whole works. *Gemuethlich* it is, like the old back bars of 40 years ago..."
- The rathskeller was a gathering place for the Gettelmans' associates, including the Harleys and Davidsons, and weekly conclaves of members of the "Five O'Clock Club," which also became a Gettelman beer brand.
- Gettelman Brewery gained renown for more than beer. Ben Barbera, curator of the Milwaukee County Historical Society, recently told the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* that Frederick "Fritz" Gettelman, Jr. designed an efficient all-steel beer keg and sold the manufacturing/distribution rights to A.O. Smith in 1933. Its wide center ring afforded easy rolling.
- Fritz, a gifted engineer and inventor, also designed the "Gettelman snowplow," bottling and pasteurizing innovations including a "disposable beer bottle" in 1949, the first in the nation, and other brewing advancements.
- Gettelman was the first American brewery to import and distribute a foreign beer--the premium German Tucher brand--in 1959.
- The brewery used innovative advertising and won many awards for its labels and promotions. It was reportedly first to advertise in Milwaukee on commercial television--in 1947--and on city bus exteriors in 1958.
- One promotion, started in 1891, offered \$1000 to anyone who could prove that Gettelman used anything beyond water, hops and barley malt to produce their pure beer--at a time when beer additives were becoming common. No one ever succeeded in doing so and Gettelman drew attention to the campaign with their popular "\$1000 Beer."
- Gettelman employed a "cute advertising stunt," according to a 1952 article in *Pageant Magazine*. They had "found that all choice ad space was taken--leaving only walls that were broken up by windows, drainpipes and cluttered yards. So it commissioned artist Elton Grafft to make its uninhibited trademark 'Fritzie' at home in cramped quarters." One popular and memorable 1950s' advertising slogan was "Get...Get...Gettelman." Other light-hearted Fritzie scenes suggested "Let's have a Beer!" Fritzie also graced a "Welcome Home General MacArthur" billboard.
- Gettelman's also used labels and ads for public-service advertising to encourage voter registration and to promote local events, which they could do as regional, rather than national, brewers.

Summary of Schweickhart-Gettelman History

Separate unpublished research by Milwaukee brewing historian Leonard J. Jurgensen, and architectural historian Susan K. Appel of Champaign, Illinois, has chronicled the brewery's history in great detail. Gettelman's first building originated on the site two years prior before Frederick Miller purchased the nearby Plank Road Brewery. In 1856, the unfinished buildings, which had stood idle for about two years, were acquired by George Schweickhart (originally "Schweickhardt") who completed construction and began brewing operations the same year. After he finished the main brewery building, he built the brick two-story attached residence. During construction, he and his family lived in a small log cabin on the three-acre property. George Schweickhart used the name Schweickhart Brewery and also "Menomonee Brewery."

After Schweickhart plant foreman Adam Gettelman married Schweickhart's daughter Magdalena in 1870, he bought an interest in the brewery within a year. (Gettelman was born in 1847 in Washington County, and began working at another Milwaukee brewery at age 16. His father, Peter Gettelmann, an early pioneer in Wisconsin, came from Hesse-Darmstadt, Germany in 1837 to Washington County.) Another Schweickhart son-in-law briefly owned an interest in the brewery, starting in 1874, but was bought out by Gettelman in 1876, according to *A History of the A. Gettelman Brewing Company* by Nancy Moore Gettelman (1995). It was renamed A. Gettelman Brewing Company around 1876 after Adam fully took over operations.

The residence survived a disastrous fire in 1877. George Schweickhart was reportedly still living there. The brewery gradually expanded. The federal survey in 1888-89 reports that the Gettelman Brewery was comprised of ten buildings, many of which were connected. The brewery was then powered by 2 boilers and 2 engines and was reported to have 23 male employees.

All except these two extant buildings and a circa-1939 bottling house have been demolished since the brewery was acquired by Miller Brewery in 1961.

The two lagering cellars could jointly hold 800 barrels of beer. The brewery had an annual capacity of brewing about 1,500 barrels. Jurgensen, who has researched every brewing operation in Metro Milwaukee, believes the Gettelman cellars are among the last in the city. The only other known lagering cellars are beneath the Falk Brewery, which has been deemed beyond repair and is scheduled for demolition. (Miller Brewery's "historic caves" are built into the side of a huge hill, with no structure above them.)

In contrast to the Falk Brewery, the much-smaller Gettelman surviving buildings remain "sound and sturdy," according to Jurgensen and others who have toured the property. Even after 20 years of serving only as storage, they are intact. Thus, they could be constructively re-purposed in numerous ways to benefit the current owner, or a tenant, while preserving unique aspects of Milwaukee's brewing legacy.

The Gettelman brewery remained focused on serving the local and statewide community, not a national market. The Schweickhart-Gettelman Family executives were also active in Milwaukee's civic life, in addition to conducting diversified economic ventures. Founder Schweickhart started a stone quarry on Hawley Road after he turned over brewery operations to his son-in-law and family members were involved in the West Bank.

Frederick “Fritz” Gettelman Jr. contributed to the local economy and to the advancement of brewing and other fields through his many inventions and scientific explorations, including in pasteurization of beer and milk. The Schweickharts and Gettelmans were “long-time friendly neighbors,” including of the Miller Family down the road. They helped to found early bank and fire department. In collaboration with the Millers, they enlisted the first city-water hook-up and railroad spur to serve the area.

In 1948, the need for larger offices led to renovating the old malt house into offices, including the part that was originally the first Gettelman homestead. Its living room became the office reception room, with walls paneled with cypress from old beer storage tanks. Nancy Moore Gettelman wrote in 1954 that “Fritz inaugurated this, but insisted on keeping his office in the second story room in which he had been born and from which had come many of his ideas on the humble brown butcher paper be left inviolate-- and so it has been, to this day.”

Note from Petitioner David Boucher:

Although I have never been inside of the Gettelman building, I have heard about it from my neighbors, customers and others who fondly remember visits there, Gettelman beer products (including “Milwaukee’s Best” beer, still produced by Miller) and their memorable ads. Gettelman’s was clearly a long-time positive force within my West Side neighborhood and Greater Milwaukee.

It’s my hope that a temporary and subsequent long-term historic designation will enable creative thinking and discussions about potential ways to preserve, celebrate and capitalize on this irreplaceable heritage-- while also meeting Miller/Coors’ business goals. I am among numerous community members who will gladly assist in such solution-seeking discussions.

During the past 10 years Milwaukee has lost the historic Gipfel Brewery, the Ogden Avenue Brewery, the Obermann/Jung Brewery (the three oldest then-standing brewery structures in the city) and the spectacular Schlitz 1890 Brew House. We must make a valiant effort to save what little is left of Gettelman’s priceless brewing structures. They have been the site of so many significant events and contributions to Milwaukee’s life and economy—and are well poised to do so again. I urge the Historic Preservation Commission to approve a Temporary Historic Designation for the A. Gettelman Brewery.

Notes:

An attached detailed timeline of the history of the A. Gettelman Brewery Company was excerpted by Milwaukee brewing historian Leonard P. Jurgensen from a book-length work in progress. It was provided by the author to support this nomination.

Susan K. Appel, Professor Emerita, Department of Architectural & Art History at Illinois State University, granted access to her extensive unpublished research about the A. Gettelman Brewing Company and its buildings. It is referenced in this nomination with her permission.

REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

Milwaukee Industrial Properties Intensive Survey, Prepared for Wisconsin Historical Society by Mead & Hunt (www.meadhunt.com) <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/pdfs/hp/Milwaukee-Industrial-Intensive-Survey.pdf>

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

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http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1985-04-01/business/8501180549_1_milwaukee-brewing-beer-capital-beer-barons

The Distant Mirror (website), *Chronicling Milwaukee's Historic Breweries* (posted May 6, 2011)

"Legacies of Milwaukee Brewing Westside Tour"

<https://distantmirror.wordpress.com/2011/05/06/chronicling-milwaukees-historic-breweries/>

Legal Description of the Property

<http://assessments.milwaukee.gov/>

Account Nr	Premise Address	Doing Business As (DBA)	Business Codes
94258001	4400 W STATE ST	MILLER BREWING CO.	D 3 BW

Owner Names Mailing (Billing) Address

MILLER BREWING CO. 3939 W HIGHLAND BL

MILWAUKEE, WI 53201

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.

Gottelman 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. Gottelman 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 Gottelman family sold the brewery to the neighboring Miller Brewing Company in 1961. The Gottelman plant and brand continued on with brothers Tom Gottelman and Frederick Gottelman, Jr. as plant managers until Miller formally merged the two operations in 1971.

Elements of the Gottelman 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-gottelman-brewing-company/>

Sources

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

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