

To: Historic Preservation Commission
City of Milwaukee
<http://city.milwaukee.gov/hpc>
April 21, 2017

Cc: Alderman Michael Murphy (mmurph@milwaukee.gov).

Re: Temporary Historic Landmark Nomination for Gettelman Brewery Buildings

The remaining buildings of the Gettelman Brewing Company hold considerable significance in the history of that brewery. They were the heart of George Schweickhardt's early brewery, which Adam Gettelman made into one of the important members of the pre-Prohibition Milwaukee brewing industry. True, Gettelman's operated on a smaller scale than the "national" brewers (Pabst, Schlitz, and Blatz), but they also preserved these first buildings, where the bigger firms let theirs disappear as they grew ever larger and larger.

It is their modest scale that also gives great significance to these Gettelman buildings. They can tell us about all of these and other local breweries in their early days, and they make a telling contrast to the giant brewing plants that rose elsewhere in the city. Similarly, because they still stand, these small structures provide physical evidence of the ways in which brewing developed throughout the Midwestern region – growing from very little enterprises in pioneer days into much more complex organizations as the industry and the region themselves evolved and became more sophisticated. In some ways, we can't appreciate the giants without also knowing the nuggets from which they grew.

All of Milwaukee's breweries began in ways akin to what happened with George Schweickhardt's little brewery of 1856. It was one of a number of small breweries begun in Milwaukee in the 1840s and 1850s. Each of these produced limited quantities of beer in unpretentious, small-scale buildings that were only nominally shaped in any distinctive way to suggest their functions. All of the early brewers of German-style lager beer also built underground lagering vaults in which to chill their developing beers for the months it took for them to finish. Those early structures and the finely crafted cellars beneath them have disappeared at virtually all the other Milwaukee brewing sites except Gettelman's. And that fact makes these Gettelman buildings and cellars quite special.

Gettelman's growth, if more contained, nevertheless reflected its owner's awareness of and involvement in the same challenges of new technological, scientific, architectural, and engineering developments that came to all brewers in the 1870s, 80s, 90s and beyond (and technological invention characterized this brewery well into the post-Prohibition era as well). Adam Gettelman simply chose not to join in the burgeoning competition among his local counterparts to become (in some cases) the biggest breweries in the nation, even the world. He preferred, it seems, to control his brewery's growth and to focus on local and regional, not national markets. There was no harm in that, just a different outlook.

Like the others, however, he added buildings that expressed the growing production levels and sophistication of his brewery: above-ground ice houses to augment the underground cellars from 1871 on; a new and stylish brew house in 1880; and the artificial refrigeration equipment from 1883 that eventually led to a full-fledged refrigerated stock house. But as he kept up with the latest advances, he

retained his roots in Schweickhardt's first two buildings, and he avoided the more grandiose architectural and production inclinations of his peers.

If we still had the buildings Adam Gettelman developed over the many decades he controlled the brewery (1874-1925), we would have a fuller physical record of how a well-run, medium-sized Midwestern brewery evolved – something that rarely survives today. Sadly, those other buildings have been lost over the years, even very recently. Yet, we still have the first two buildings, which pre-date Gettelman's presence here. Given that they are the last, they should be respected and protected. This Commission has the opportunity to encourage their preservation, rather than facilitating their being added to the long list of lost Milwaukee and Midwestern breweries.

Gettelman's rare "first-stage" brewery buildings should have the chance to be seen as the touchstones they are – they define the beginning of a great industrial tradition, both locally and regionally. Most of the following stages of the Midwestern brewery's historic architectural and technological development can be seen right next door at Miller, the last remaining operating brewery in Milwaukee.

Miller and Gettelman began their breweries in the Menomonee Valley at much the same time, and they were historically collaborative and friendly neighbors. Both grew in a more limited way than Pabst, Schlitz or Blatz prior to Prohibition. Not until after Repeal did Miller's great expansion come, eventually leading to its friendly acquisition of Gettelman in 1961, in the midst of a tremendous period of consolidation in the American brewing industry.

Some years ago Miller attempted to touch base with its own architectural origins in the "façade reconstruction" of Frederick Miller's Plank Road Brewery. With a little vision, MillerCoors could make use of the Gettelman buildings to demonstrate, quite three-dimensionally now, the historic contrast between a mighty international brewery of contemporary times, and the tiny scale that characterized both breweries' initial structures. The legions of visitors to their valley would be impressed. So would those of us who value the ability of early buildings to speak to us of significant people, events, and processes and how they have helped take us from the past into our present.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

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