

For Preservation of the Gettelman Office Building

I appeal to you today to stop the destruction of the Gettelman Brewing Company office building along State Street in the Miller Valley Neighborhood and to declare it historic.

My reasons for preservation are several. Foremost is that we have lost a lot of tangible history on the Westside. So many old, historic, well-built, and/or would-be useful buildings on the Westside of Milwaukee have been torn down or moved away. We don't need to lose another to gain yet more parking lots or other buildings.

Others of my reasons include how Gettelman Brewing contributed to the creation and growth of Westside neighborhoods, how Gettelman and Miller Brewing owners cooperated with each other in the past, and what Gettelman has been in Milwaukee.

I believe that building has more value and potential than the space where it stands used for a parking lot.

Introduction

Let me introduce myself. I am Linda Hanig of 3512 W. Kilbourn Ave.

I have owned that house for over 40 years and lived there or near Miller Valley for that long.

I have been a newspaper reporter, and am now a writer and have done much research on the history of the Miller Valley Neighborhood, which includes the two breweries.

I am also block club captain for the neighborhood.

My interest in this matter is preserving history on the Westside of Milwaukee.

My Reasons and Facts to Support Them

1. Creation and growth of Westside neighborhoods.

By the late 1800s, both Gettelman and Miller Brewing Companies had grown so much that the springs and wells in the valley could not supply all the water that they required.

At that time the area west of 35th Street was part of the Town of Wauwatosa, not yet in the City of Milwaukee. Nonetheless, in 1898 both Adam Gettelman and Fred Miller (son of Frederick Miller) went to Milwaukee city officials and asked if they could have city water piped out into the valley and offered to pay to have the pipes laid. Their request was granted.

After city water came into the valley, more houses began to be built west of 35th Street, and more people lived there.

Additionally, many of the people who lived in that neighborhood worked at breweries.

We may think of the large houses or rich mansions, in which members of the Gettelman and Miller families lived in the Historic Concordia Neighborhood and along Highland Blvd.

However, 1910 census records show that the occupations listed for quite a number of the heads of households west of 35th Street in and near the valley – both east and west of the breweries – were brewers, barn bosses, laborers, beer peddlers, teamsters, a manager, and a painter at a brewery. (U.S. Census records do not list the name of the brewery.)

2. Spirit of cooperation and neighborliness between Gettelman and Miller Brewing Companies.

They might have been competitors in the Milwaukee brewing industry. Nonetheless, they operated right next door to each other and apparently had a friendly relationship. After all, together Adam Gettelman and Fred Miller asked Milwaukee officials for city water.

In later years when costs went up and Fred and Tom Gettelman decided to sell their brewery, they went right next door to their neighbor Miller Brewing. When the sale was completed in 1961, it was apparently a win-win for both. Miller became larger, and Gettleman beer was still brewed and its employees were retained and got a raise.

3. Gettelman Brewing Company in Milwaukee.

As I was growing up, my parents ran working-class taverns on the Milwaukee's Northside – one in the 1950s and another in the 1960s, and both across the street from A.O. Smith Corp. Though I was young, I well remember Gettelman beer in those taverns.

Who could forget Fritz, the Gettelman beer bottle man? His image was painted on walls throughout Milwaukee, and used in other marketing. And then there was the catchy slogan "Get...Get...Gettelman". And the long-standing \$1000 challenge.

Gettelman wasn't a large brewery. In 1960 Gettelman sold 13,285 barrels, while Miller sold 2,376,543, as stated in an article in the *Milwaukee Sentinel* of January 15, 1961.

The article also indicated that Gettelman beer was not distributed nationally and called it Milwaukee beer.

Our Losses on the Westside

~ Use it up. And throw it away ~

That seems to be the philosophy toward old buildings on the Westside, as well as other areas of Milwaukee. A building doesn't have to be worn down or damaged to be torn down and then taken to some kind of landfill. It just has to be deemed useless or worthless or in the way of supposed progress. Its meaning is not taken into consideration.

Once a building is torn down, it's gone forever.

And that's terribly tragic. We then lose our history and our sense of self and from where we came.

A much publicized example of this was the Plankinton Mansion. It was clandestinely torn down in 1980 to make room for a new Marquette University dorm.

In the Concordia and Miller Valley Neighborhoods and along Highland Blvd. well-built and stylized single family homes and mansions were torn down to build simple, multi-unit apartment buildings.

On Highland Blvd., the Miller family home was torn down and the Aurora Family Service building was built in its place.

Right here in Miller Valley, we lost the Frederick Miller family home that was at the top of the bluff. Not the one that is still on Miller Lane, but the one that was past the end of the lane.

Houses were torn down in the valley, as Miller Brewing expanded.

One example is the area where the Miller Visitors Center and parking lot are. Once there was the rooming house where Adam Gettelman lived when he worked across the street at the Menominee Brewery. There he met Magdalena Schweickhart, his boss' daughter and his future wife. When his father-in-law George Schweickhart decided to go into other businesses, Adam took over the brewery.

Blocks of houses and a public park were taken away on the south side of Highland Blvd. when Miller Brewing built its corporate headquarters plus parking lots and a parking structure. I am glad they were not torn down and dumped in a landfill, but moved to a different location. Nonetheless, they and their people are gone from here.

Among the houses lost at this time was the William Davidson house at 38th and Highland. There in the basement and backyard shed, his two sons Arthur and Walter and Arthur's friend Bill Harley developed a motorized bicycle.

And even the Gettelman family house in the valley – which was just west of the office building - is gone, in part. It was dismantled and the bricks used to build the bottling plant, which is still there and MillerCoors uses.

Future and Reuse Possibilities

First of all, I want to make clear that I do not criticize MillerCoors. I recognize its side and need to expand trucking space by tearing down the Gettelman office building. I am glad that the brewery is doing so well.

However, I do not agree with or condone this decision.

I emphatically oppose tearing down the Gettelman Brewing office building.

I do strongly urge that owners and executives of MillerCoors takes a serious second look at the lasting implications of tearing down the Gettelman office building, and that they begin to better understand Miller and Gettelman Brewing's history and place on the Westside and in Milwaukee. I hope for a rekindling of the spirit of cooperation and neighborliness between the two breweries.

A few years after I moved here in 1976, the scuttlebutt in the neighborhood was that Miller Brewing would close its old Milwaukee plant and move all operations to its newer facilities in other cities. However, this decision was reversed and it was decided to stay here where it had all started. And thus the corporate headquarters was built here.

I applaud that Miller, now MillerCoors, is still brewing right here where it all began and consistently in operation for over 160 years.

I have taken the Miller tour several times and heard the talk about the German tradition and the quality of Frederick Miller's beer. However, I haven't seen Miller Brewing and MillerCoors reflecting much of this attitude toward the neighborhood.

Secondly, I see a marketing opportunity for MillerCoors in the Gettelman office building.

During recent years the interest in and popularity of craft beers and traditional German beers has escalated. And MillerCoors could join in. In fact in 2007, Miller once again brewed Gettelman's \$1000 beer.

Reuse of the office building is a possibility.

A fine example of reuse is what is developing and growing at the old Pabst Brewery complex in Milwaukee. Specifically I point to the Pabst Brewery taproom, opened April 14. Back here where it all started, are brewed and served German style lagers and old Pabst standards, such as Old Tankard and Andeker.

The original Gettelman complex was not nearly as large as the Pabst, so possibilities are limited.

Yet I could see a taproom, or a museum, in that office building. The museum could hold beer artifacts of Gettelman and Miller Brewing, or pieces from the Miller art collection (which have been in storage).

The presence of a taproom or museum in an historic building right across the street from the MillerCoors visitors center, I can easily see as a win-win.

MillerCoors attracts more visitors, gets some good PR, and shows good faith.

And we in the Westside neighborhoods retain our tangible history and sense of worth.

Sources

Nancy Moore Gettelman, The A. Gettelman Brewing Company. Procrustes Press, Milwaukee, 1995.

John Gurda, Miller Time: A History of Miller Brewing Company 1855-2005. Miller Brewing Company, 2005.

Willie G. Davidson, 100 Years of Harley-Davidson. New York, Melcher Media, Inc., 2002.

U.S. Census records from various years.

Various City of Milwaukee public records.

Various Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps.

"Gettelman \$1000 Beer (RETIRED)"

"Pabst's new Milwaukee brewery to tap legacy, 'funky' beers when it opens Friday"

And from my own experiences, observations, and recollections during over 40 years of living on the Westside of Milwaukee.