

To: Historic Preservation Commission  
City of Milwaukee  
<http://city.milwaukee.gov/hpc>  
May 11, 2017

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

Re: Permanent Historic Landmark Nomination for Gettelman Brewery Buildings

Back in April I submitted written comments supporting the temporary historic designation of the Gettelman Brewery buildings. I also traveled to Milwaukee to testify to that same end in your special meeting of April 24. I regret that I cannot attend your May 15 meeting where you will consider permanent historic designation for the Gettelman buildings. I hope the comments conveyed here will help convince you to approve this nomination.

As I noted earlier, I am an architectural and art historian by profession, and a student of pre-Prohibition brewery architecture by way of a specialty. My decades of comparative study of major brewing centers in the Midwest prepares me to argue that the remaining buildings of the Gettelman brewery are far more significant than their modest size and relative lack of care may suggest. They represent the initial structures built by George Schweickhart in the later 1850s, which makes them about the oldest remnants of the early group of breweries that in the 1840s and 50s laid the groundwork of the great brewing industry that would mark the city of Milwaukee later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and beyond.

This brewery, passed on to Schweickhart's son-in-law Adam Gettelman in the 1870s, became an important, if mid-sized member of the Milwaukee brewing community. It purposely was not allowed to grow in the extensive fashion of some of its contemporaries (Best/Pabst, Schlitz, Blatz, and later, Miller). Limiting its scale was an intentional means to keep it manageable within the Gettelman family's hands and to provide a reliable, excellent product. Its smaller size does not mean that Gettelman's was not on top of the various technologies that drove many architectural changes in brewery design over the later 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Those would be readily visible at Gettelman had the brewery's later buildings not already have been destroyed.

Still, what remains there is important and very special. These buildings are absolutely characteristic of the initial stage of development in Milwaukee's breweries and most breweries throughout the Midwest. They are small, vernacular buildings (i.e., built by local craftsman in traditional ways, not by professional architects). More meaningful yet, they also incorporate the very direct, even intimate relationship of the brewing family and its business. That relationship, if once present, is something now lost in every other Milwaukee brewery begun in this vernacular period (and most of similar age across the Midwest). The front building (to the south) was the original home of the Schweickhart family, lived in by several generations of the Schweickhart-Gettelman family, and the building behind it (to the north) was, at its core, the original brewery itself. Beneath these are the two original stone and brick lagering cellars that made the family's products possible. Nothing speaks to the literal and figurative closeness of family and business than the fact that these first buildings and cellars persist, when nearly all else has disappeared.

The underground cellars are important examples – again, virtually the only ones that still exist in Milwaukee from the 1850s – of the small-scale production of early breweries. They allowed the brewers to keep their products cool naturally, during the months of aging that distinguished German-style lager

beer. Lager was initially supported by the vast numbers of Germans who immigrated to this country from the 1840s on, but the simple technology seen here kept production levels limited. By the period of the Civil War and after, lager's popularity had spread widely, and beyond the German-American community, which exerted pressure on brewers to produce more, challenging the limitations of the cellars. As demand increased, lagering processes changed, passing through a series of new kinds of spaces that allowed production to expand.

The next step was to build above-ground, multi-level ice houses, which provided cool interiors by housing huge expanses of ice at their tops. These worked, but were messy and required vast quantities of ice. By the later 1870s and 80s, a wide variety of steam-powered machines began to make it possible to pump chilled liquids (brine, for instance) through extensive arrays of piping that cooled underground, as well as aboveground "cellars." Ultimately, these gave way to large-scale, artificially refrigerated stock houses where more and more beer could be lagered. The increasing complexities brought into existence a whole class of architect-engineers who could effectively manage the new equipment and design more efficient (and impressive) architectural forms. All of these stages were once in use at Gettelman's, if still on a fairly modest scale. The original brewery building here, at one point in its history, expanded to several stories and functioned as a stock house.

Gettelman's underground lagering cellars, or vaults, like the buildings above them, express very directly the first phase in the evolution of refrigeration in lager breweries. As technology changed, those underground vaults often disappeared, filled in or demolished. In some places, like St. Louis and Cincinnati, some of them have recently begun coming to light, serving as points of interest for a growing public very interested in brewing history. In Milwaukee, however, almost all of the many vaults once here are gone, and now Gettelman's are distinctly threatened, along with heart of the brewery's aboveground history.

The opportunity rests in the hands of the Gettelman buildings' long-time owners, now MillerCoors, to acknowledge and respectfully make use of these important and historic structures. Their location, so close to Miller's tour center, makes them the perfect beginning point for their long-standing tours. With Gettelman's buildings included, Miller's tours would take on a more thorough architectural interpretation for visitors of what Milwaukee's and Midwest America's brewing history was actually like.

The HPC's approval of this nomination would be heartening encouragement that there is still support for the real history of brewing in "Brew City." I urge you to approve permanent historic designation for Gettelman.

Sincerely,

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