

In Support of Preservation of the Gettelman Home/Office Building

I wish to offer several additional points in support of historic preservation of the Gettelman home and office building.

Many strong and compelling arguments were made for preservation at the Historic Preservation Commission hearing on April 24, 2017. I agree with and back them. Now I want to briefly add a few and expand on some.

I appeal as a long-time resident of the Westside. I feel that we will be greatly shorted on the Westside and in Milwaukee if we lose the almost 160-year-old Gettelman home and office building – a building that has endured through time and business changes - to gain nothing other than a little more truck trailer parking.

Introduction

I need to introduce myself again. 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.

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

The Long Life of Gettleman Brewing

In an argument against preservation, it was questioned if in a 100 years would anyone be talking about the craft breweries' buildings operating currently.

I don't know. I will have to ask my great great grandchildren when they reach me on the other side.

However, I do know that today all the way 160 years after the brewery was created we are debating the historic significance and value of one building of the brewery complex on Watertown Plank Road, a brewery that George Schweickhart built into something his son-in-law Adam Gettelman took over. He, his son, and grandsons, as well as their employees, sustained and reaped the benefits of for many years, even through and after Prohibition.

Gettelman Brewing began brewing its famous \$1000 beer in 1891. It was still being brewed 70 years later when in 1961 the brewery was sold to Miller Brewing, who continued to brew it until 1971. It brewed a batch again in 2007.

Gettelman began brewing Milwaukee's Best in 1895. It is still brewed today 122 years later by Miller Brewing.

Anything that has been in the minds, hearts, and economy of Westsiders and Milwaukeeans for that many years connotes historic significance.

Lack of Acknowledged Gettelman Brewing History

In an argument against preservation, it was stated that Miller Brewing in the valley has done a lot to preserve beer history. Examples were renovations of the Miller Inn, opening the Caves, and other points. And I remember when years ago the dark gray dirt was cleaned off the bricks of the old Miller buildings and brought out the rich amber brick color.

However, I don't see any noteworthy preservation of Gettelman Brewing history, either in the valley where it started or any place else.

The Miller Fitness Center was a Gettelman Brewing building and is used. However, that alone does not acknowledge or preserve Gettelman history other than the Gettelman emblem remains on the building front.

I look at the rethinking and care that has gone into preserving what is left of Milwaukee's beer history and reputation with the Pabst, Schlitz, and Blatz buildings, plus at how Miller has cleaned up and used its buildings.

However, I see nothing of the sort for Gettelman - listed in Nancy Moore Gettelman's book as one of the seven main breweries in Milwaukee after World War II.

More Parking Lot Space?

In an argument against preservation, it was stated that Miller Brewing in the valley needs more space for truck parking. In addition, trucks had trouble maneuvering around the Gettelman building.

I must say that in all the years I have driven past or passed on evening walks the area of the former Gettelman Brewing complex, I have never seen as many truck trailers parked there as I have recently.

However, I argue that eliminating the Gettelman home/office building is not going to make much difference for parking truck trailers. Recently I took a good look at the area and came to the following conclusions:

1. Size of space – That Gettelman building does not take up that much space in the whole area.

2. Maneuvering – I watched semi trucks easily drive past the Gettelman building.

The tricky maneuvering came in the back rows of parked trailers. After semi cabs backed into trailers and hooked up, the complete semis had to pull out of narrow aisles and make incredibly sharp turns to get around the line of parked trailers in order to go on their way. None of this was near the Gettelman building.

Miller already has many parking lots – two for cars around the corporate headquarters (which once were blocks of homes), a two-tier parking structure there (which once was a public park), and another in the valley – all covering a least three to four city blocks. It has two large truck lots south of the bottling plant, north and south of Blue Mound Road. And another lot is in the Valley Neighborhood.

Does it really need the little more space elimination of the Gettelman building would offer?

No More Loss of Local History on the Westside and in Milwaukee

Miller Brewing, and so the Gettelman complex, is no longer locally owned. It is owned by Molson Coors Brewing Company out of Denver, Col. Perhaps its executives may not understand the significance of Gettelman Brewing to the Westside of Milwaukee and to Milwaukee itself.

As I stated for the hearing on April 24, we have lost so much tangible history on the Westside. I then listed some significant buildings we have lost, so I won't repeat myself. However, I could list more.

I personally am appalled and saddened by, what I label as, the “use it up, and throw it away” philosophy toward old buildings on the Westside.

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

Sources

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

“A. Gettelman Brewing Company” <https://emke.uwm.edu/entry/a-gettelman-brewing-company/>

“Gettelman \$1000 Beer (RETIRED)” <https://www.ratebeer.com/beer/gettelman-1000-beer/77809/>

<http://www.molsoncoors.com/en>

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