Brewing Beer - A Major Industry Here For Many Years

By James Lammers and Steven Frierott

The history of brewing beer in Minster probably began on an individual basis shortly after the founding of Minster.

There were two small formal breweries in operation, brewing "brown beer" in 1869. One was operated by George Luckman and the other by B. H. Nienberg.

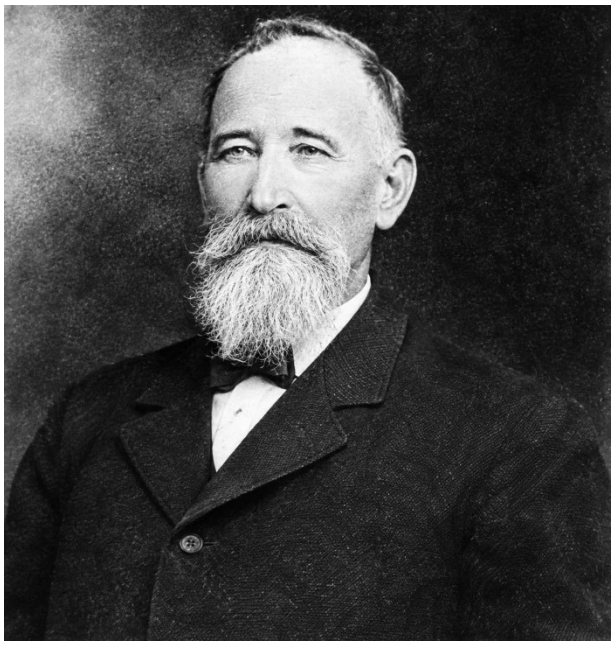
In the fall of 1869, Franz Lange started construction of his lager beer brewery on South Ohio Street.

The brewery was originally to be built in St. Marys, but because of the high cost of land, Lange decided to build it in Minster where land was cheaper.

The brewery was built of stone and brick, was 2 stories high and had an arched cellar. The building was very well furnished. The power to grind the malt and the pumping of water was supplied by horses, while Lange and his sons did all of the other work.

In the year of 1870 the first Minster lager beer came on the market and was well liked . These were hard times for the Lange's. They had to work hard to keep their small business going. One has to realize that brewing in the beginning was bound to have many failures. The smallest mistake could result in the loss of hundreds, even thousands of dollars according to the size of the brewery.

In the middle of 1870 a small steam engine of 20 hp was purchased and took the place of the winch. By now the Lange brewery was on its feet.



The first lager beer brewmaster at the Lange brewery was Peter Adolph Mittler. A native of Frimmersdorf, Germany, he Immigrated to the United States In 1868. He learned the brewery trade in the Cincinnati area.

At the same time Lange hired a man as brewmaster, whose know-how of brewing gave the Minster Brewery a boost. He was Peter Mittler, who gave all his efforts to the brewery until 1898.

In the spring of 1883 the brewery was sold to the Steineman brothers. On June 28, 1888, tragedy struck when fire destroyed the brewery to the foundation. It was immediately rebuilt, and on November 5. 1890, it changed hands again.



The successful operation of the Wooden Shoe Brewery for many years was, in large part, due to the efforts of these men: (left to right) Bernard Frierott, Henry Frierott, Anton Frierott, Joe Brinkman and Mike Hartman.

Peter Mittler, Matt Goeke, W. Gervais, Ben Frierott, and Frank Herkenhoff formed a company. Ben Frierott served as general manager and from then on the business flourished.

In the winter of 1890 the new firm bought a modern beer cooling system and expanded. In 1895 the main building was expanded with a cellar 40 x 80 ft. on the east side. This expansion called for a complete renovation, and on October 31, 1901, they bought a new ice machine and a 100 hp steam engine was installed.

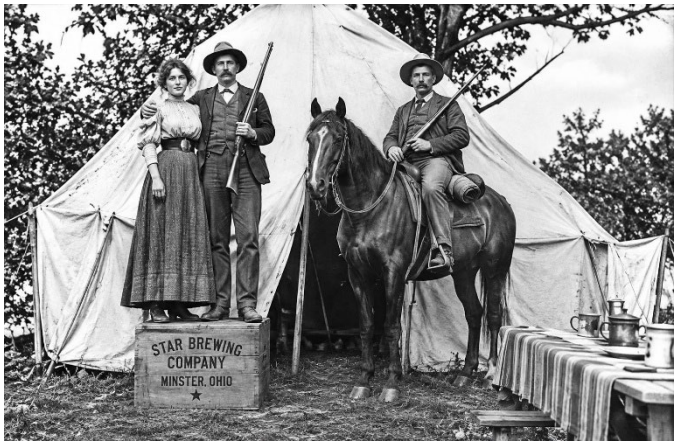
In 1892 the bottles were filled by hand and capped by hand. After one year this method was discontinued and a modern machine was installed, which could wash, fill, and cap far better than human hands could!

In the year 1899, Peter Mittler, the brewmaster, sold his share to J.B. Meyer, which culminated his association with the business. Mittler's apprentice, Joe Brinkman took over as brewmaster. A decided change took place in May, 1903, when the manager, Bernard Frierott Sr., died.

It was decided to discontinue the old company and form a new management and new name. On July 1, 1903, the name of the brewery was changed to the Star Brewing Company with the following board of directors: Matt Goeke, Pres.; Frank Herkenhoff Sr., Vice President; Charles Herkenhoff, Secretary, and Treasurer and manager; A. W. Gerwals and George Van Oss as directors. In July of 1907 to favor the former manager, Van Oss stepped out in favor of Anton Frierott.

The Star Brewing Company was then one of the leading breweries and had an output per year of 15,000 barrels.

The company which started with a capital of $1,000 and was incorporated, consisted of the brewery and had inventory of buildings, ponds, ice-house, and warehouses in New Bremen, Lock-Two, Ft. Recovery, St. Marys, Chickasaw, St. Henry, Yorkshire, and Versailles.



Whenever area residents gathered before Prohibition you could count on Star Brewing Company beer being Included. Note case in foreground.

In the brewery 2 steam engines of 100-20 hp were installed to process the grain. Also two Artesian wells were drilled, which produced the necessary water, also an electric generator to produce the necessary electric for 60 lights for the entire dept.

Five wagons were practically kept busy the entire year. The business also employed 25 people, and the monthly payroll was $1000.00 and $1500.00.

In 1919 the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution abolishing the manufacture and sale of all alcoholic beverages had a great impact on the business.

The company changed its name to the Star Beverage Company and manufactured a line of soft drinks and "near beer". They also manufactured a product called "The Home Malt Tonic". The label on this product read, "The Home Malt Tonic has become very useful to nursing mothers, frail children, convalescents, the aged and for all run down and nervous conditions. Recommended by the medical profession. Aids digestion and induces restful sleep." Sounds a bit like the old "medicine show" pitch, doesn't it?

The soft drink business kept the company alive during Prohibition. When beer "came back" in 1933, manufacture of the stronger stuff quickly replaced the soft drink business.



Many area residents and visitors to the brewery "hoisted a few" mugs of the golden brew in the brewery's "rathskeller".

The years following repeal were excellent ones for the brewery. Wooden Shoe beer was shipped and sold in most of the United States. From 1933 for about 10 years until the statute was changed, taxes from the brewery met the entire operating expense of the town.

Brewery tax money paid for the police and fire departments, the street department and other expenses.

From 1933 to 1947 the brewery experienced a steady increase in sales. In 1935 the brewery was expanded with its floor space doubled and its production potential nearly doubled. In1940 the name was changed to the Wooden Shoe Brewing Company.



John Kemper, Minster, a long-time employee at the brewery is dwarfed by one of the large wooden kegs at the brewery.

In 1946 gross sales amounted to $1,781,000. Of this amount $866,006 was retail sales (by brewery truck in this area) and $915,000 was listed as wholesale receipts. The company employed 77 persons in 1946.

Competition became ever keener and in 1947 the firm expanded its advertising budget and sponsored TV broadcasts of the home games of the baseball team at Dayton. Thousands of dollars were spent for newspaper advertising in a number of cities in Ohio.

In August of 1946 controlling stock in the Wooden Shoe firm was acquired by Ulreh Vogt, Jr., a Chicago financier. Sales gradually dropped off until in 1950 the company's financial structure was weakened considerably.

Records of the company show that Vogt poured good money after bad into his venture - that he put an additional $125,000 cash into the now defunct business to cover deficits and meet operating costs after 1950.

In November, 1953 a court order issued in the case of Van Wert and Celina financial institutions versus the company, forced them to discontinue the manufacture of beer on November 17.



A group of Wooden Shoe Beer distributors and their trucks. Far right: John Fullenkamp (foreground) and son Ray Fullenkamp of Fullenkamp Distributing Co., St. Henry, Oh.

In March, 1954 the business was placed in bankruptcy. On June 24, 1954 the real estate, buildings and equipment were sold at public auction to satisfy claims of creditors.

There was one man who was largely responsible for favorable reception of Wooden Shoe lager beer during most of the company's years of operation. He was Joseph Brinkman who came here from Germany and was brewmaster continuously more than 50 years until his death in 1942.

After the death of Mr. Brinkman Mike Hartman became brewmaster. Herman Erath had charge of the brewing department 1946 to 1950, Charles Cook for two years until 1952 and Ray Huelskamp from September of 1952 until the company ceased operations at direction of the court.

• In 1850 there were 38 occupations listed in the Minster U.S. Census records. By 1900 there were 86 occupations noted. In 1850, there were 18 coopers but by 1900 that number rose to 64. In 1870 34% of the population in German and Jackson Townships were German born. By 1900, it was only 2%.

Drink recipe from a booklet published by the Star Brewing Co. around the turn of the century;

Gin and Pine
(Use Whiskey glass)

Put 3 ounces of splinters from the heart of green pine log in a bottle of gin. Steep 2 hours. Put a lump of ice in the glass and hand out the bottle for the customer to help himself. (Editor's note: So that's why we don't have any virgin pine timber left in Minster!)

• In 1956, The Minster Implement Co., Phone 139, was advertising the new International four-wheel drive pickup for $2,177.

• The Minster Post: Ad Friday, December 19, 1919: The Star Beverage Company, Minster, Ohio, the manufacturers of the famous dry Wooden Shoe Beer. Also our old line Wooden Shoe Cream Soda, Wooden Shoe Strawberry, Wooden Shoe Lemon, Wooden Shoe Ginger Ale, Whistle, our new line Indian Rock Ginger Ale, a very fine drink, Bubble Up an imitation champagne drink. We contemplate in the near future to place several more new drinks on the market. Break in the New Year with a new drink.

• The following appeared in the June 17, 1917 issue of the Minster Post: An ad for the Star Brewing Company dated June 7, 1917: TO OUR PATRONS: Owing to the further enormous increase in cost of all materials and supplies which enter into the manufacture of beer we are compelled to advance our prices on beer as follows: case beer from 60¢ to 65¢, per dozen, plain bottles. The above advanced price will go into effect June 11, 1917 and you will kindly govern yourself accordingly in the future. This is but a small advance in cost to you considering the additional cost we are experiencing over prices of raw materials. It is our aim to maintain high quality of our goods and rather than give you an inferior article we deem it advisable to add this slight advance trusting that you will appreciate the necessity of our actions. Thanking you for past favors and soliciting and continuance of your patronage we are very truly yours, The Star Brewing Company, C. F. Herkenhoff, Secretary. F. Herkenhoff, president; F. Goecke, superintendent of sales; A. W. Gerwels, vice-president; and C. F. Herkenhoff, secretary-treasurer.



Before reception halls for large public gatherings were built, wedding receptions were held at the home. This picture of the Joseph Thieman and Millie Woehrmyer wedding was taken in 1906.



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