

HISTORY OF BEER

(Stolen from Papazian, Miller, Jackson and others)

You wouldn't go into a restaurant and say, "I'll have a plate of food, please". People do not ask simply for "a glass of wine." They'll specify, at the very least, whether they would like red or white, and they usually order by style and vineyard. Yet these same discerning people often ask simply for "a beer" or perhaps a name brand without thinking about its suitability for the occasion or if the style compliments their meal. The *similarities* between wines and beers are far greater than their *differences*. Wines begin with fruits, usually grapes, while beers start with grain, usually barley. Both are made by fermentation and many of the flavor compounds, naturally formed, are shared between them. Distill wine and you have brandy, distill beer and you make whiskey. People who drink only the most conventional beers have failed to understand that there are different brews for each mood, moment or purpose. Before I get into the history of beer, it's important that you know what beer is and how it's made. So, *very* briefly, Beer is made from only four ingredients - 1) Water, 2) Barley, 3) Hops and 4) Yeast. The malted barley is slurried with warm water to form the "mash". This mash converts the barley's starches to sugars. The sugar water is strained from the grain and brought to a boil. Hops are added to offset the sweetness (sort of like seasoning the beer). Yeast converts the sugars to alcohol and CO₂ by fermentation. The beer is then aged and bottled.

And now, the history of beer...

Of all the great creations of civilization, few are more ancient or more important than beer! It may even have been the *cause* of civilization! Although wild grapes and grains were probably both turned into drinks before either was cultivated, the cultivation of *grain* seems to have been the beginning of farming between 13,000 and 8,000 years ago. Humans ceased to be nomadic hunter/gatherers and settled into organized communities to grow grain, --*but why?*

The Egyptians brewed beer 5,000 years ago. The Sumerians were brewing thousands of years before that. The first beer was home-brewed and probably discovered by accident. Barley was a staple grain of various Mediterranean cultures. It grew well in that climate and was used as the main ingredient in various breads and cakes. People soon discovered that if barley was wetted, allowed to germinate, and then dried, the resulting grain would taste sweeter and was less perishable. I'd imagine it like this: someone left a basket of grain in the rain and then tried to salvage the mess by drying it. Inadvertently, what they made was *malted barley*. When they baked with it, it made more pleasant breads and porridges. From here it's not hard to imagine someone leaving his or her *cake* out in the rain. I don't think that I could take it, because, back then, it took so long to bake it. Written language was rare, difficult and tedious so they probably *never* found that recipe again. Wild yeasts in the air fermented the dissolved sugars. When this mysteriously bubbly concoction was consumed, it was with pleasant surprise that the household felt a mysterious "inner peace" with their surroundings. However crude the process may have been, the first beer had been brewed.

In 1986 in The Museum Magazine of Archeology and Anthropology, Professor Solomon Katz described a series of clay tablets in the Sumerian language as "*the world's oldest recipe*" -*It was a recipe for beer!!* These early accounts, with pictograms of what is recognizably barley, show bread being baked, then crumbled into water to make a mash. It is then made into a drink that is recorded as having made people feel "exhilarated, wonderful and blissful". The baking rendered the barley soluble and was employed before man knew how to turn grain into malt. Was the bread *never* eaten, but *always* made into beer? Did a diet of bread come first, or did man live by beer alone? By baking the grains into hard loaves, the ancients had created a partly processed resource that could be easily transported and conveniently stored for later use.

Alcoholic beverages soon became a significant part of the cultures of Mesopotamia and Egypt. Remnants of breweries or relics showing or describing in detail the making and drinking of beer have been found in several parts of the Fertile Crescent that stretches around the converging valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. A seal, around 4000 years old, is a hymn to the goddess of brewing called "Ninkasi" and suggests that the Sumerians, by then, knew how to make malt. Much of the ancient evidence concerns beer as a drink of the gods (and, of course, priests.) Alcohol and its effects were not well understood. These beverages, made one feel, perhaps, godlike. It's not surprising then, that religious significance became attached to these gifts of vision. One can easily imagine the ceremonial significance fermented beverages played in such cultures as the Egyptians, Aztecs and Incas. Rice beers, barley beers, honey beers, corn beers = even the Eskimos had a mildly alcoholic fermented reindeer's milk. It all began at home, and in many countries most households brewed their own beer for thousands of years. This was especially the case in Europe and early America, in fact, George Washington was a home brewer, but I don't want to get ahead of the story. As the cultivation of barley spread north and west, brewing went with it. Romans

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such as Tacitus and Caesar, more accustomed to wine, noted that the people of the north drank beer. That's because grapes grow better in hotter climates while grains grow best in northern latitudes. Several of today's brewing strongholds are in areas of early Celtic settlement from Central Europe to Ireland. As towns and cities developed, good drinking water became scarcer and *home* brewing activities began to diminish. Beer, with its mild alcohol content and sterilizing boil was one of the few liquids safe to drink and thus in great demand. At about this same time, small-town breweries began to relieve the household of the essential task of making beer. Because of the development of the small-town brewery, distinctive beers became indigenous to a region, rather than to every household. Slowly, the variability of climate, agriculture and human activity began to express itself more profoundly. During this transition from household to small brewery, modern day beer came into historic perspective. The centralization of brewing served to consolidate regional trends. Beer styles were born.

During its long history, wine and beer had no competition in Europe until the spread of tea from Asia and coffee from the Arab world between the 15th and 17th centuries. In most of the traditional brewing countries, beer is seen as part of the national identity. Royal courts assumed brewing rights in medieval times as a means of raising revenue. Some noble families are still in the business. Farmers and private brewers owned and served their own pubs.

After the dark ages, Christian Abbeys, as centers of agriculture, knowledge and science, refined brewing methods. *Initially* they did this in the making of beer for the Brothers and for visiting pilgrims, *later* as a means of financing their communities. The modern abbeys that make beer today are all Roman Catholic. Protestant Christian's disapproval of drinking is a relatively recent phenomenon.

The world's classic pastries, cheeses and wines were each born in a particular place as a result of local materials, circumstances and the ideas of the original creator. The same is true of the classic styles of beer. As an immigrant nation, America once shared in this heritage. Sad to say though, prohibition stamped the color out of American brewing. Before prohibition there were literally *thousands* of breweries in the U.S., each supplying their respective regions with distinctive styles. There were, as well, *millions* of people home brewing quality beers.

Between January 1920 and December 1933 the United States suffered through prohibition and the dark ages of beer. When it was over, only the larger breweries survived. Equipment left idle and in disrepair for over a decade led to the demise of low-budget, small local breweries. What was reborn was an industry of larger breweries. They were still somewhat apprehensive of the prevailing attitudes toward alcohol. Many of the richer styles were not brewed in an attempt to appease the still active temperance movement and to market a beer that would appeal to the widest audience. Then came World War II. A shortage of war material necessitated the scrapping of steel; some of it was idle brewery equipment. A shortage of food diminished beer production. The beer that *was* made had less malt in it. Many men were overseas fighting a war and the beer drinkers back home were mainly women who preferred a milder beer. Cheaper grains such as corn and rice were replacing more of the barley, lightening the taste and the body. A lighter style of beer was thus beginning to gain popularity in the U.S.

Today, as though Chablis were the only wine that existed, Americans find it difficult to recognize as beer anything other than the light straw colored, watery, over carbonated and served far-too-cold American Pilsner Lager. If you order a Coors, Miller or Budweiser, you are ordering an American Pilsner Lager. Maybe an import then? - Heineken, St. Pauli Girl, Becks? Those are all *European* Pilsner Lagers. There are literally *hundreds of styles* of beer being brewed today. Pilsner is a noble enough style, but when the overwhelming majority of beer Americans drink are *all*, broadly speaking, Pilsners, what happened to variety? Isn't *choice* supposed to be the greatest benefit of capitalism and competition? Beer no longer holds a central place in our cuisine or culture as it does in Belgium, Great Britain, or Germany.

But, remarkably, an interest in beer is reawakening among the American public, a "beer renaissance" if you will. Americans are rediscovering the pleasures of good beer and the traditional methods of making it. Microbreweries are springing up everywhere creating unique and flavorful products thereby recapturing both a piece of our cultural heritage *and* the tradition of personal craftsmanship that was almost lost. The microbrewery movement was founded by home brewers who decided to make a profession out of their hobby.

As an agricultural industry, *and* a form of cooking, brewing beer remains a craft, an art, *and* a science. Despite technological developments, it is essentially brewed the same way today as it was 6000 years ago.