

## BOOK REVIEW

### **Brewing in Baltimore (Images of America)**

**By O'Prey, M.**

**New York: New York University Press**

**2012, Pp. x + 127, \$21.99**

**ISBN 978-0-7385-8813-1**

Maureen O'Prey's *Brewing in Baltimore* provides insight into the past, present, and future of beer in Baltimore. The book starts with the emerging 18<sup>th</sup> century breweries of Baltimore town beginning not long after a 'small tract of land' was established in 1729.

In her introduction, O'Prey addresses the quantities Americans consumed at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Americans were estimated to consume 30 gallons of spirit annually, 24 of those which were beer. As the face of Baltimore changed throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Americans in Maryland purchased product from massive porter breweries and tiny weissbier

breweries alike. O'Prey's book acknowledges brewers past, demonstrating that far more varied styles of beer existed in Baltimore in 1885 than in 1985.

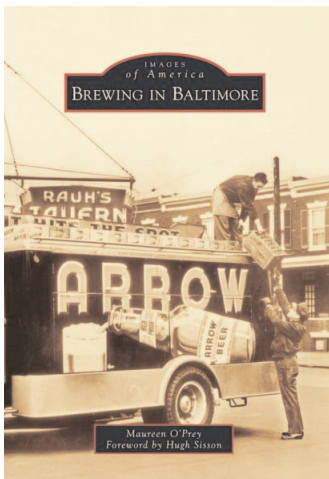
O'Prey writes a variety: 'of brews were produced in

Baltimore, including ales, porters, stouts, weiss beer, strong beer (high alcohol), table beer, ship's beer (low quality for sea travel), and small beer (low alcohol).' Some beers were opaque, tasted heavy, and were akin to the colonial beer of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Some beer, weiss, was bottled with sodium bicarbonate, or baking soda. There was even a Weiss beer brewer, Frank Sandkuhler, who brewed his weiss beer without any wheat whatsoever.

Hugh Sisson, founder of Clipper City Brewing Co. Heavy Seas Beer, writes in the book's foreword, 'As I grow older I become more nostalgically aware of my predecessors.' And what predecessors Hugh had. Much of *Brewing in Baltimore* reads like a who's who of brewing forefathers.

Perhaps bigger than surnames are the institutions mentioned, giants in their own right, particularly the American Can Company, canning goods since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The attempt to can beer before prohibition was unsuccessful. After repeal, in 1935, the American Can Company became the first to successfully can beer. They figured out how to retain the fizz and eliminated beer's metallic taste with the invention of a liner. Without the American Can Company, there's no canned Flying Dog, Brewer's Art, or DC Brau; all Mid Atlantic brewers whose cans are impervious to light. American brewers, both micro and macro, owe the success of their can sales to Baltimore's American Can Company.

While many Baltimore breweries struggled to compete with larger national breweries (Budweiser and Pabst for example) National Brewing Company thrived, shipping National Bohemian overseas to the military during WWII.



Though the majority of the book takes place in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries; O'Prey expresses the struggle present in American beer today: how to do away with weak-tasting beer in favour of the more flavourful?

While no craft brewer today wants to release less than quality beer, many are consumed with the packaging and production of a fresh, living product, so varying degrees of quality are to be expected. As most consumers know, over time the product will change. The average beer hunter should purchase their pint and select their snifter accordingly. In the words of the original beer hunter, Michael Jackson, 'a brewer with his beers can be like a mother with her children. Some head brewers secretly wish that their beer never had to leave the brewery.'

O'Prey is meticulous in her record keeping, noting that since Prohibition was repealed, the National brewery spent over 2 million dollars. By 1964 they were producing over 1 million barrels per year. National Brewing Company would eventually sponsor the Baltimore Colts

football team and Jerold Hoffberger, its President, would own the brewery as well as the Orioles baseball team.

Despite all the numbers, O'Prey never loses sight of the real story behind Baltimore brewing, the people. As Hugh Sisson says in his forward, 'brewing is a history more of people than product ... think Jerry Hoffberger and the Baltimore Orioles ... I find myself wishing I could sit and have a beer (and maybe crack some crabs or catch a ball game) with many of these folks,' the question is, which beer would they have? We can only speculate.

The 127-page book is a quick read with images on every page and fascinating facts throughout. Many of the photo credits are attributed to the author, a testament to O'Prey's love for all things Baltimore and all things historical.

MICHAEL STEIN

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