

BREWERIES OF EARLY KALAMAZOO, 1837-1915

KEITH HOWARD

‘The Brew from Kalamazoo’

By the 1980s, American beer had famously become a homogeneous mass-produced Pilsner-style light lager, with little variation among the leading brands. While beer consumption at the time was at the highest rate in US history,¹ the top ten brewers in the United States alone accounted for 93% of the total domestic beer production,² leaving little room for the few that could then be classified as ‘craft’ beer breweries. Still, a young Kalamazoo entrepreneur went into the brewing business, armed only with a recipe, a 15-gallon soup pot, and a \$200 birthday gift from his mom.³

Today, Bell’s Brewery, Inc. is the largest craft brewer in Michigan and ranks among the top 10 in the nation (by sales volume),⁴ employing more than 330 people with the capacity to produce more than 500,000 barrels annually.⁵ Others have since followed suit, placing Kalamazoo at the forefront of the craft brewing movement with the nation’s first higher ed program in sustainable craft brewing,⁶ an annual Kalamazoo Beer Week celebration,⁷ and significant worldwide recognition, including a nomination for ‘Beer City USA’ in 2013. Recently, *U.S. News & World Report* named Kalamazoo among the ‘eight underrated beer cities in the world’.⁸

Larry Bell and Kalamazoo’s many fine brewmasters follow a long line of local brewers and maltsters that reaches back to the early 19th century. In fact, the art of crafting fine (and some perhaps otherwise) beers and ales can be traced to Kalamazoo’s earliest days as a frontier village.

Early home brewing

Much of the beer that was sold and consumed in Kalamazoo before the 1870s was almost certainly of local origin. American beers, mostly British-style ales at the time,⁹ had been brewed stateside since colonial times, but beer as a product didn’t travel well in those times. These early American ales were highly susceptible to heat, light, and motion, and as a result they tended to sour rather quickly. Before the latter half of the 19th century when the arrival of the railroads, and inventions like pasteurization and refrigeration made it practical to bottle and ship the product over greater distances, Kalamazoo beer was for the most part a local product.

Many of the first brewers in Bronson (Kalamazoo) Village were do-it-yourself and family operations,

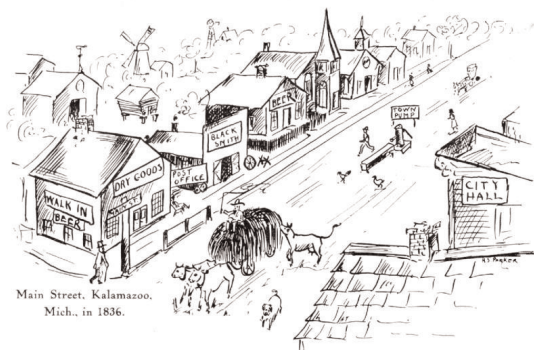


Figure 1. Sketch of downtown Kalamazoo in 1836, from a postcard published c.1906. Author’s collection.

where ‘each housewife made her own ale’. Recipes published locally during the summer of 1838 gave instructions for ‘cheap and agreeable table beer’, made with water, molasses and yeast. ‘Spruce Beer’ was made by adding spruce oil or twigs and leaves to the same basic recipe.¹⁰ Some advocated brewing with the shells of green peas, which was said to closely resemble malt. Others added wintergreen and sassafras. A simple recipe for ‘very excellent sugar beer’ called for water, sugar (or treacle), yeast and hops. The brew was ‘fit for drinking in a week’, but the writer cautioned that ‘this beer [would] not keep any length of time’.¹¹ (Safe to say that today’s local brewers probably won’t resurrect this recipe anytime soon.)

Brewing supplies

No matter what recipe was used or what quantities were made, brewing supplies were readily available in 19th century Kalamazoo. By 1837, hops extract (also sold for its medicinal qualities) could be found at Dr. Starkey’s Medical Store on Main Street, ‘nearly opposite the Land Office’.¹² Barley was grown locally, and could be purchased at Edwards’ Grocery Store, also on Main Street.¹³ The going rate in October 1837 was 62½¢ per bushel.¹⁴ In October 1841, Francis March began offering ‘the highest market price’ for hops.¹⁵ Likewise, William T. Campbell began offering ‘cash or goods’ as payment for hops in October 1845.¹⁶ Fresh hops by the bale were available in 1849 at J. Dudgeon’s warehouse near the railroad depot.¹⁷

Brewer’s thermometers were found at J.P. Clapham’s Drug Store,¹⁸ and by the 1860s, the Roberts & Hillhouse City Drug Store was selling large quantities of extracts of roots expressly for beer making.¹⁹ By the end of the decade, A.C. Wortley was advertising ‘a large and varied assortment of barometers, intended expressly for the use of brewers’.²⁰ As stated in a 1920 edition of the *Kalamazoo Gazette*:

... while the village made no effort to become famous because of the excellence of the brew turned out, those in a position to judge often declared that nowhere could there be found such beers and ales as those made here and that the ales would in fact rival in quality those of the oft praised ‘nut brown’ brew of merry old England, while the beers were, it was declared, as good or better than those of Munich or Old Heidelberg.²¹

The first round: Kalamazoo’s earliest commercial brewers

By April 1837, Kalamazoo had within four short years grown from a handful of log huts into a bustling frontier village, with more than a thousand inhabitants, a dozen stores, a weekly newspaper, mills, offices, shops, and at least one established commercial brewery.²²

The location of this first (1837) brewery and the identity of its owner are still the source of much speculation. This first brewery could have been connected with T. Clark & Son, who ran the first local distillery near the Kalamazoo River. Or, it could have been located on North Burdick Street near the (then future) MCRR depot, a spot once referred to as ‘Wood’s Brewery’. One early pioneer later recalled that ‘Kalamazoo’s first brewery’ was located on Jackson Street²³ near Olmstead Road (Lake Street), while another claimed it was on Kalamazoo Avenue,²⁴ but evidence in both cases suggests otherwise. In reality, it was most likely an early operation of John Hall, who opened his ‘large brewery’ west of the village in 1846,²⁵ but may have been in Kalamazoo as early as January 1837.²⁶

Although the exact source of their (most likely local) brew is unknown, merchants Foster & Fish were offering ‘Strong Beer’ by the barrel and half-barrel at their dry goods store on Main Street in 1842, along with corn, rye, and barley, still years before the Michigan Central railroad arrived in Kalamazoo.²⁷

The English influence: beers and ales

The village continued to grow and by 1850, the local population had increased fourfold. By this time, at least two commercial breweries were operating within the corporation limits of Kalamazoo.²⁸ The area’s earliest settlers were for the most part of predominantly English ancestry, and with them came the brewing styles and traditions of ‘Merry ol’ England’. Popular among these British immigrants at the time were the ‘mild’ (young) English beers (brewed with hops as a preservative and to add bitterness) and ales, which did not require extensive aging and were somewhat cheaper to produce. (‘Ale’ was brewed with malted barley, water and yeast but without hops, although that did change over time. In addition, ale yeast strains (commonly regarded as top-

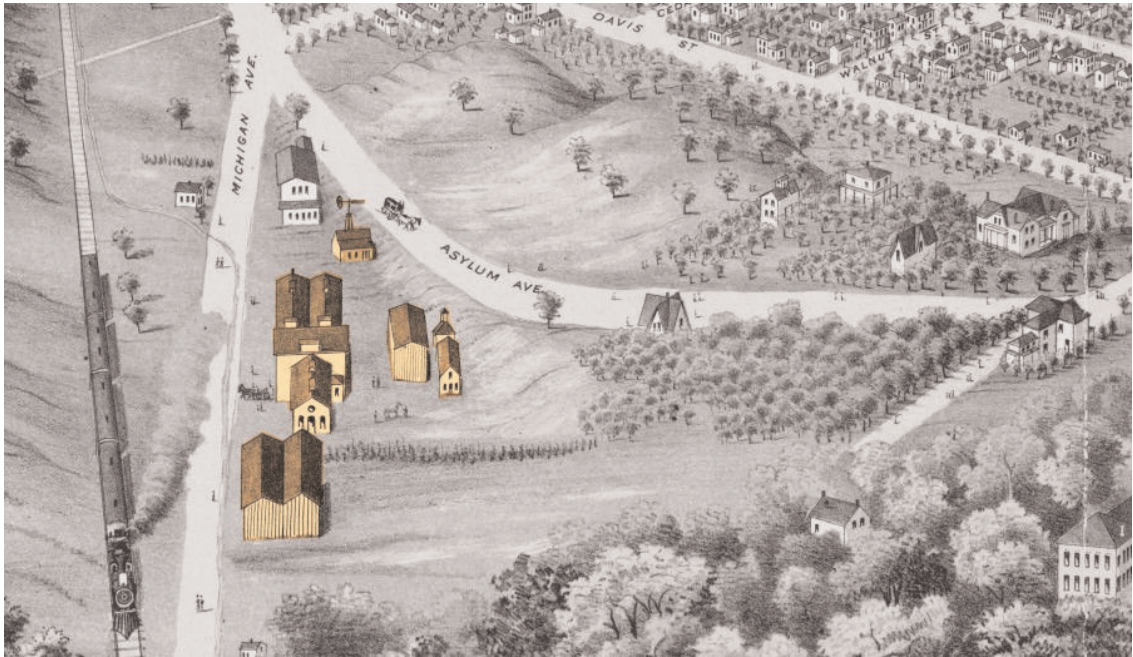


Figure 2. Detail of a bird's eye view of Kalamazoo published in 1874 by J.J. Stoner (Madison, Wis.) showing the Kalamazoo Brewery complex c.1874 (all those buildings in the section between Michigan Avenues and Asylum road excluding the upper most two). Courtesy, Kalamazoo Public Library.

fermenting yeasts) ferment at higher temperatures and tend to rise to the surface during fermentation, creating a rich foamy brew.) During the 19th century, a typical brewery might produce three or four styles of these 'mild' ales, with alcohol content ranging from 5 to 7% a.b.v.²⁹

John Hall's 'Kalamazoo Brewery'

One of Kalamazoo's first documented commercial brewers was an Englishman named John Hall (born about 1799). In November 1845, Hall was offering cash for hops at his house on Portage Street.³⁰ A year later, the *Kalamazoo Gazette* referred to the great many improvements being made in Kalamazoo Village, including '(t)he large brewery of Mr. Hall' which had 'just gone into operation'.³¹ Hall's brewery was located just west of the village where 'the road to Genesee Prairie' (later called 'Asylum Road' and today Oakland Drive) met the 'Paw Paw Road' (now Michigan Avenue) next to Arcadia Creek, about where the W.M.U. Physical Plant near Waldo Stadium is located.

Benjamin Hall & Jason Russell

In May 1849, an English immigrant named Benjamin Hall (born about 1802) formed a partnership with native New Yorker Jason Russell (born about 1813) under the name of Hall & Russell and took over John Hall's brewery operation on the Arcadia.³² According to the 1860 U.S. Federal Census, John Hall had remained a brewer by trade, although there is no indication he did so commercially. (Modern accounts often refer to Jason Russell as 'Rupello', perhaps due to poor handwriting on the 1850 census.)

By 1850, Hall & Russell's operation was consuming some 2,000 bushels of barley each year with annual production reaching 14,000 gallons.³³ But for reasons yet unknown, Hall & Russell gave up the brewery on Arcadia Creek and in April 1852, Ansel K. Post put the 'celebrated Kalamazoo Brewery' up for sale, describing it as 'one of the best and most convenient establishments of the kind in the state'.³⁴

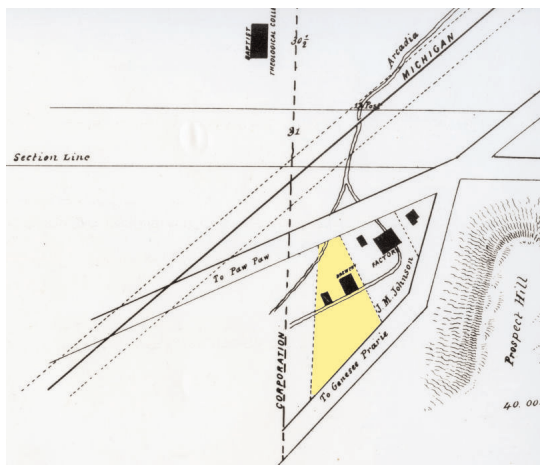


Figure 3. Kalamazoo Brewery c.1853 (the larger building in the section north the text 'To Genesee Prairie'). Courtesy, Kalamazoo Public Library.

James Holmes & Jacob Harlan

Kalamazoo's second documented pre-1850s brewery was located on Burdick Street near the Michigan Central depot. This could very well have been Kalamazoo's first brewery as described in an April 1837 *Gazette* article, but details of its exact origin are open to speculation. An 1853 *Gazette* article describes the location as 'Wood's Brewery',³⁵ though further details of its original ownership have yet to be located.

According to the 1850 U.S. Federal Census, there were four professional brewers in Kalamazoo at the time; Benjamin Hall and Jason Russell (both associated with the Asylum Road brewery), an English immigrant named James S. Holmes (born about 1810), and a German immigrant named Jacob Harlan (born about 1798), both of whom were presumably connected with the decidedly smaller operation on Burdick Street. The 1850 Michigan nonpopulation census tells us that Harlan led the more modest of the two breweries, consuming some 1,100 bushels of barley annually and producing just 6,000 gallons in the process.³⁶

Hall & Holmes' Brewery & Saloon

By 1853, Harlan was out of the brewing trade and James Holmes was in partnership with former 'west side'

brewer Benjamin Hall when they opened their 'new and spacious dining saloon' next door to the Burdick Street brewery.³⁷ Within a few months, Hall & Holmes were offering market price in cash for up to 5,000 bushels of barley for their brewery.³⁸

Hall died in February 1859, leaving Holmes as the sole proprietor, yet the operation was still producing about 350 barrels (roughly 11,000 gallons) annually.³⁹ An 1861 map indicates that J.S. Holmes still operated a saloon and brewery at that time, but by 1862, he had evidently given up the brewing trade and by 1867, his saloon had also ceased operation.

Michigan's first round of Prohibition

Today, we tend to associate Prohibition with the 1920s, but the truth is, the movement against the consumption of alcohol (known as temperance) began in the United States nearly a century beforehand, during the 1820s. Some three decades later, Maine passed one of the nation's first liquor laws in 1851, which prohibited the sale of all alcoholic beverages 'except for medicinal, mechanical, scientific and sacramental purposes'. While many supporters advocated moderation rather than total abstinence, the movement continued to gain support and in 1853, Michigan passed a similar law banning the sale of alcohol.⁴⁰

While some parts of Michigan took immediate action to enforce this new 'dry' mandate, the law lacked broad

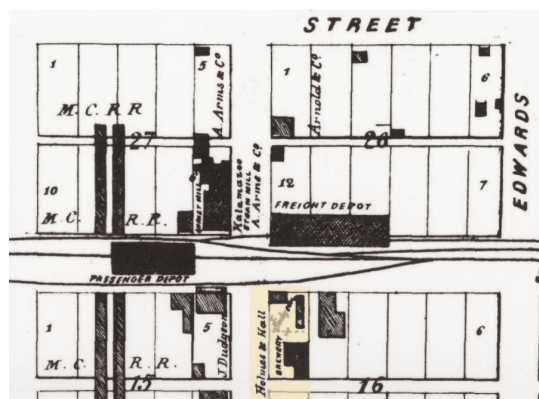


Figure 4. Holmes & Hall Brewery c. 1853 (left section of the lower right-hand block). Courtesy, Kalamazoo Public Library.

support and many judges refused to enforce it, including Kalamazoo judge Abner Pratt.⁴¹ Defiance of the law became so widespread that by 1875 the law was dissolved and replaced with a statewide liquor tax program. While efforts to re-enact the prohibition law in 1877 and 1879 both failed, the movement continued to gain momentum.

The temperance movement was against most forms of strong drink, but its primary focus (at least in the beginning) was on moderation (hence the term ‘temperance’). Early followers rallied strongly against the excessive consumption of hard spirits (whiskey, rum, etc.), but many stopped short of total abstinence. The brewers soon tried to distance themselves from the distillers by portraying beer as a healthy alternative to hard liquor, and began promoting their product heavily during the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a ‘family’ beverage; a ‘temperance drink’ or ‘liquid bread’.

A second round: commercial brewing in Kalamazoo after 1850

Distilling ceased in Kalamazoo after 1858, but Kalamazoo’s brewery business witnessed unprecedented growth during the 1860s, despite the statewide alcohol ban. As of 1856, there were still just two breweries in Kalamazoo. By the end of the Civil War, however, at least six commercial breweries were operating within the confines of the ‘Big Village’. The largest of these breweries were located on Asylum Avenue, just west of the village; on East Main Street near the river; on North Burdick Street, two blocks north of the railroad depot; on Walnut Street, one block east of Burdick Street; on Winstead Street, near the intersection of Portage and Lovell; and on Lake Street, just east of Portage Street. Other brewers, like ‘Old Joe’ and Dorothy Burchnell, began operating during the same time period in nearby rural areas. Many were established well before the Civil War and most enjoyed modest success until the late 1870s.⁴² According to the *Kalamazoo Gazette*:

Just how much brewed liquor was turned out by these Kalamazoo breweries will perhaps never be known, yet in their palmy days each one did a flourishing business, their owners operating them on the ‘live and let live’ principal, none trying to get rich, and each one finally yielding to the onslaughts of importations from the great brewing corporations in large cities.⁴³

NEW ADVERTISEMENTS.

OLD JOE’S XX



BREWERY.

I WISH to inform my friends and the Public generally that the Brewery will be continued as heretofore, I having had the superintendence of the same for the last six years. Embracing this opportunity of returning thanks to my late husband’s numerous friends and customers for their liberal patronage in the past, I hope the same will be in a measure extended to me, assuring them that nothing shall be wanting to merit a continuance of the same.

I shall make it a specialty to furnish Private Families with Beer in quantities to suit.

MRS. JOSEPH BURCHNELL,

NOTICE.

ALL persons indebted to the late Joseph Burchnell are requested to call upon Mrs. J. Burchnell, at her residence, and pay the same at as early a day as possible, as it is desirable to have a full settlement of all the accounts.

Kalamazoo, April 29th, 1873. 1216w1

Figure 5. Dorothy Burchnell Brewery advertisement from the *Kalamazoo Telegraph*, 28 April 1873. Courtesy, Kalamazoo Public Library.

John Williams’ Small Beer Manufactory

On the ‘light’ end of the brewing spectrum, John Williams began advertising his Small Beer (low alcohol) Manufactory in May 1852, located on Main Street, opposite the court house. Soda water, lemon pop, and ‘Dr. Cronks compound Sarsaparilla Beer’ were Williams’ specialties. William Seymour and Henry F. Schoenheit later ran similar operations.

Dorothy & ‘Old Joe’ Burchnell’s Brewery

Joseph and Dorothy Burchnell (sometimes spelled Burchnell or Burchnal), both English immigrants, arrived in Kalamazoo (probably from Wisconsin) about



Figures 6 & 7. Joseph Burchnall (Burchnal) c.1870 and Dorothy Burchnall (Burchnal) c.1865.
Both courtesy, Kalamazoo Valley Museum.

1858. By 1861, the couple had established a brewery on their family farm south of the village in section 34 of Kalamazoo Township, between Portage Creek and the 'Kalamazoo and Three Rivers Plank Road' (Lovers Lane), near where Milham Park is today. According to the *Gazette*, 'This establishment was not a large one, in fact, it was a rather enlarged 'home brew' outfit, but the excellence of its product was scattered by all who loved beers and ales made in the real old English way'.⁴³ But the Burchnalls' output during the 1860s was significant, and by 1865, they had become the second largest producer (by taxable value) in Kalamazoo, averaging up to 60 barrels or more each month.⁴⁵ Burchnall's 'Home Brewed Ale' (known famously around the area as 'Old Joe's XX') was available by special arrangement at Joseph Moore's Portage Street Grocery store.⁴⁶ ('XX' indicated the strength of the

product, which commonly ranged from 'X' (the weakest) to 'XXXX' (the strongest).)

By 1867, Dorothy Burchnall had become superintendent and was overseeing the day-to-day operation of the brewery. Even after Joseph Burchnall's death in 1873, Ms. Burchnall continued to maintain the brewery on her own for several years; her ginger ale was a specialty.⁴⁷

As an interesting aside, Joe and Dorothy Burchnall's daughter, Mary Elizabeth Burchnall (b. 1847), later married Thomas Westnedge (b. 1834) and they became the parents of Col. Joseph Burchnall Westnedge (b. 1872), Kalamazoo's famous World War I hero.

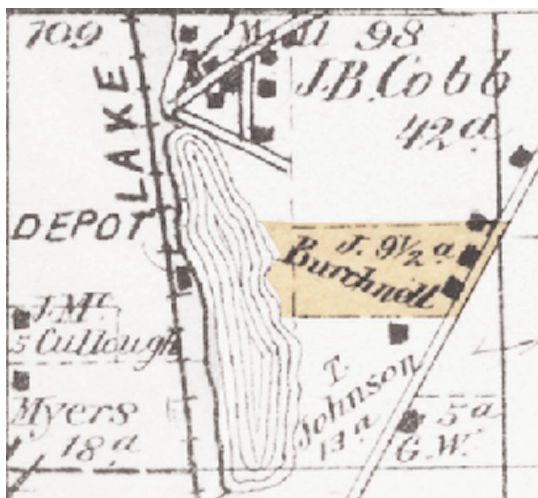


Figure 8. Burchnell's Brewery, Schoolcraft Road (Lovers Lane) c. 1873. Courtesy, Kalamazoo Public Library.

Robert Walker's Plank Road Brewery

But the Burchnell story doesn't quite end there. In 1876, three years after her husband's death, Dorothy Burchnell married Robert Walker, a Kalamazoo farmer and English immigrant. Walker engaged in the brewery trade on the former Burchnell property at least until 1878, though the operation apparently didn't last long after that. Little else is known about Robert Walker or his 'Plank Road Brewery'.

When the census taker came around in June 1880, Robert and Dorothy Walker were identified as married and living in Kalamazoo Township; he was a farmer and she was 'keeping house'.⁴⁸ No mention is made thereafter of a brewery operation on the Burchnell property. By 1881, Dorothy Walker was listed as a lone resident on her farm, perhaps widowed once again. Dorothy Burchnell (Walker) passed away a widow in April 1892;⁴⁹ an accidental fire claimed the old brewery barn and house later that same year.⁵⁰

George Judge's Kalamazoo Malt House

Born in Kent, England, in 1820, George Judge settled in Kalamazoo and soon became a successful maltster.⁵¹ In 1857, Judge opened his celebrated Kalamazoo Malt

KALAMAZOO MALT HOUSE.

Cash for Barley.

Burdick Street, Near Central Depot,

Kalamazoo, - - Mich.

All orders attended to promptly.

GEORGE JUDGE.

754dw1m

Figure 9. Advertisement for the Kalamazoo Malt House from the Kalamazoo Gazette, 28 January 1880. Courtesy, Kalamazoo Public Library.

House at 82 North Street in Isaac Moffatt's former distillery building near the corner of Frank Street and Burdick (where Judge Avenue now stretches between West North and Frank streets). Judge's Kalamazoo Malt House was primarily a wholesale and retail supplier of malted barley and rye (used for animal feed, brewing and baking) and hops, but locals knew the establishment well for its small batches of light amber and 'black as ink' dark ales, both said to be very good.⁵²



Figure 10. Birds eye view of Judge's Kalamazoo Malt House, 1867. Courtesy, Kalamazoo Valley Museum.

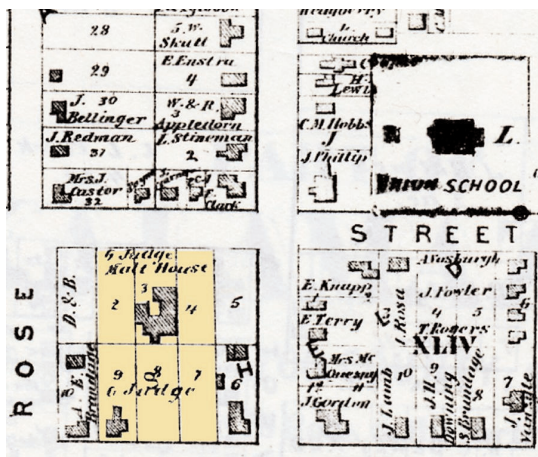


Figure 11. 1873 map showing Judge's Kalamazoo Malt House (lower lefthand block). Courtesy, Kalamazoo Public Library.

By 1880, George Judge was supplying malt to the Goebel Brewing Company in Detroit and doing business with his son-in-law, John Bommersheim, a saloon operator and proprietor of the Detroit Bottling Works on Main Street in Kalamazoo (the local bottler and distributor for Goebel).

Judge retired from active operation about 1882. Bommersheim later purchased the former Judge property on North Burdick Street in 1886 and moved his saloon and beer bottling operation to that location.⁵³ George Judge remained in Kalamazoo until his death in 1893.⁵⁴ His wife died a few weeks later.⁵⁵ The entire block, including John Bommersheim's saloon and warehouse, was destroyed by a massive fire in June 1895.⁵⁶

The German influence: lager

While Kalamazoo's earliest brewers were mostly of English descent and their British-style ales dominated local brewing until the mid-19th century, German immigrants began to arrive in Kalamazoo around 1850, bringing with them a vibrant culture of hard working laborers, merchants, craftsmen, and brewers.⁵⁷ Soon, the English ales were supplanted by the German style lagers, which were not only less costly to produce, but would keep longer than their British-style counterparts. Unlike ale, lager (German for storeroom or warehouse)

or 'Lagerbier' was made with a bottom-fermenting yeast (lager yeast produces less surface foam and tends to settle to the bottom during fermentation) and kept under cold storage for several weeks to produce a mild, lightly colored and stable beverage. This style of beer would dominate American brewing throughout the coming century.⁵⁸

Kalamazoo Spring Brewery

Sebastian Syke & George Foegele

Born in Spain of German parents about 1795, Sebastian Syke arrived in Kalamazoo from Rochester, New York, about 1856 and took over Hall's old Kalamazoo Brewery on Asylum Road. Later the same year, Syke went into partnership with a young French master brewer named George Foegele (Foegle) (born about 1828), also from Rochester.⁵⁹ Together, they called their operation the Kalamazoo Spring Brewery.

Frederick William Seyfferth & John Stearn

By 1860, Syke & Foegele's Kalamazoo Spring Brewery had added two new resident brewers to its ranks; an immigrant from Württemberg, Germany, named Frederick William Seyfferth (Seyferth) (born about 1829), and a young New Yorker named John Stearn (born about 1838). With the arrival of Seyfferth and Stearn, we begin to see the first evidence of German-style lager in Kalamazoo.⁶⁰

According to 1860 records, the Kalamazoo Spring Brewery consumed some 3,700 bushels of malt and

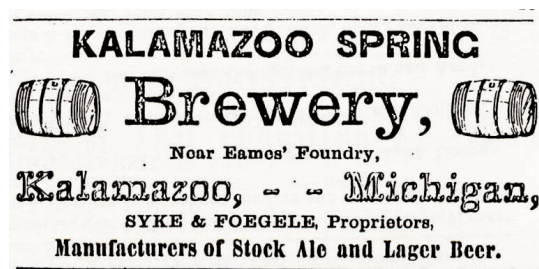


Figure 12. An 1860 advertisement for Syke & Foegele's Kalamazoo Spring Brewery. Courtesy, Kalamazoo Public Library.



Figure 13. An 1863 advertisement for Foegele & Baumann's. Courtesy, Kalamazoo Public Library.

2,500 pounds of hops each year, and produced 'a superior article of ale and lager beer', with annual output of approximately 1,500 barrels (nearly 46,000 gallons).⁶¹ An 1861 *Kalamazoo Gazette* advertisement emphasized the healthful, indeed medicinal qualities of its product, promising a 'pure and lively tonic beverage, unsurpassed [for] those suffering from debility, ague and chill fever'.⁶²

Foegele & Baumann; Nicholas Baumann & Co.

About 1862, Syke and Foegele were joined by another local brewer of German heritage, Nicholas Baumann, who eventually took over the operation as Nicholas Baumann & Co. By 1865, Syke, Foegele & Baumann were the largest producers (according to taxable value) of the four local (licensed) brewers.⁶³ Sebastian Syke retired from the operation about 1868, while well into his seventies. Once a soldier against Napoleon and wounded in the famous 1813 Battle of Leipzig, Syke lived to see his 90th birthday before his death in 1884.⁶⁴

On leaving Main Street, the first object of interest that meets the eye is Bauman's large brewery, which is not only a prominent feature in the landscape, but somewhat suggestive, especially if one happens to be a little thirsty.⁶⁵

Kalamazoo Steam Brewery

In October 1867, a devastating fire broke out at Baumann's Asylum Road brewery. The house next to the brewery and a few of the out buildings were spared, but the large main (wooden) structure burned to the ground.⁶⁶

The following summer, Baumann had his brewery rebuilt by Henry W. Coddington, a prominent local

architect and builder, and he renamed his operation the 'Kalamazoo Steam Brewery'. Steam brewing was a relatively new process that gained popularity around this time out of necessity due to lack of refrigeration. It employed a strain of lager yeast which fermented at higher temperatures than other lager and ale yeasts, creating a light and inexpensive lager-style brew that was especially popular among the working class.⁶⁷

During the brewery reconstruction process, a \$25,000 addition was built that featured a new belowground ice-chilled lagering cellar.⁶⁸ Ice cut during the wintertime from a nearby pond was stored and used to cool the 150 butts (large wooden storage tanks), each of which stored roughly thirty barrels (over 900 gallons) of lager. The cellar provided ideal conditions for the lagering process, which required the beer to be stored below 60 degrees for several weeks.

By 1868, William S. Downer was Baumann's head brewer. George Foegele left the operation to become a prominent local fireman and saloon keeper until his death in 1874 at the age of 47.⁶⁹ Nicholas Baumann received a patent in May 1869 for his process for using unmashed Indian corn in brewing beer, but there is no further evidence that the process was ever employed.⁷⁰ Baumann later sold his interest in the brewery in 1871 for \$42,000 (roughly \$750,000 today), and went on to become a successful local developer. He built the Baumann block on Burdick Street in 1870, two stores on Water Street in 1872, and a saloon, restaurant and billiard hall known as the Peninsular Building on the north side of Main Street in 1875. (The Olde Peninsula Brewpub draws its name from Baumann's building, although contrary to a plaque on the side of the current building, it is not the same location.)

In February 1871, it was announced that C.W. Minard of Detroit had leased the brewery on Arcadia Creek.⁷¹ Later that fall, Minard exhibited a half barrel of porter, a keg of lager beer and a half barrel of ale in twenty-third annual Exhibition of the Michigan State Agricultural Society (Michigan State Fair), which was held in Kalamazoo during September.⁷²

Three of our boys went to Long Lake Sunday. On their return home, they became very dry and stopped at the steam brewery for a glas [sic] of ice water. While enjoying the invigorating glass a train of cars approached, which so



Figure 14. Detail of a bird's eye view of Kalamazoo published in 1883 by J.J. Stoner (Madison, Wis.) showing the Kalamazoo Steam Brewery complex c.1883 (all those dark-roofed buildings lower middle section). Courtesy, Kalamazoo Public Library.

frightened their horse that he started for home, but had gone but a short distance before the carriage and horse were both upset. When found the horse was under and a somewhat demoralized carriage on top. The horse had none of the ice water either.⁷³

Michigan Liquor Tax Law

In 1875, the State of Michigan repealed the 1853 liquor ban and instead imposed an annual tax on beer and liquor retailers, wholesalers, distillers and brewers. For a 'class B' brewer (producing less than 500 barrels per year), this meant a flat annual tax of \$50. For a 'class A' brewer (producing in excess of 500 barrels per year), the annual fee was \$100.⁷⁴

George Neumaier & Leo Kinast

Four local brewers were on the 1875 list for tax collection, including another new arrival of German descent, George Neumaier. Born 27 April 1842 in Baden, Germany, George Neumaier and his wife, Valentina,

arrived in Kalamazoo from New York in 1872. George immediately went to work at the old Steam Brewery on Asylum Road, and by the following spring had become its proprietor, in partnership with fellow German Leo Kinast (born in Baden about 1841). Neumaier & Co. began distributing its 'Bock Beer' in May 1873, along with a 'fine Lager for Family use'.⁷⁵

Howard's Brewery

George Neumaier left the Kalamazoo Steam Brewery about 1878 to begin his own brewing venture. Kinast maintained the Steam Brewery on his own until his death about 1880. Thereafter, the property was owned by Robert R. Howard from Detroit, who attempted to revive the brewery in 1883 by renting it to a firm from Marshall, but his efforts were of no avail. After Kinast's death, the brewery remained vacant for several years, save for 'a number of casks and vats'.⁷⁶

A \$12,000 fire, probably caused by a passing Michigan Central locomotive, gutted the old brewery building and destroyed a nearby ice house in June 1886.⁷⁷ The grow-

ing local temperance movement celebrated the event, declaring that ‘it was an act of providence to do away with the nefarious business of brewing the devil’s drink’. Nevertheless, the ruins of the burned out building stood until 1890;⁷⁸ a decade later the land was cleared and platted for residential use.⁷⁹

Kalamazoo Brewery

Lorenz Brentano

The other so-called ‘Kalamazoo Brewery’ was established during the 1850s by Lorenz Brentano. Probably built by Nicholas Baumann, the brewery was located along the south side of Walnut Street on a portion of the old denBleyker homestead just east of John Street, roughly where the Bronson Hospital emergency room is now located. In 1858, Brentano advertised that he had ‘the entire control’ of this ‘excellent establishment’ and his ‘celebrated Bavarian lager beer and ale’ would be delivered free of charge if ordered at the brewery or at Stofel’s Lager Beer Saloon on Burdick Street. Brentano offered the ‘highest market price’ for hops and barley, and called special attention to his product, ‘a choice article of Ale and Beer, expressly for family use ... (an) excellent, wholesome, healthy beverage’.⁸⁰

Peter Heirboldsheimer

By 1860, Brentano was in Chicago (where he eventually became a prominent politician),⁸¹ Baumann had built a new brewery of his own on Winstead Street, and Peter Heirboldsheimer (born in Bavaria about 1807) had taken over ownership of the Kalamazoo Brewery. Heirboldsheimer’s small two-person operation consumed approximately 300 bushels of barley and 400 pounds of hops annually, and produced roughly 150 barrels (nearly 4,700 gallons) of beer each year.⁸²

Barney Locher

By 1863, Heirboldsheimer was brewing beer in Topeka, Kansas, and Bernhard ‘Barney’ Locher (born about 1838 in Württemberg, Germany) had become proprietor of the brewery on Walnut Street, selling ‘good Hay and Harvest Ale and Beer’ at \$9 per barrel.⁸³ When Locher

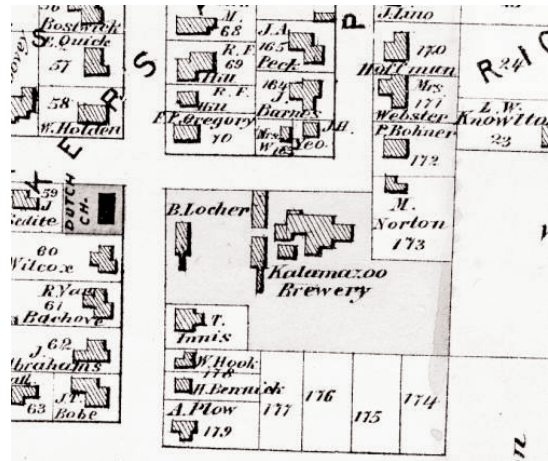


Figure 15. 1873 map showing the location of Barney Locher’s Kalamazoo Brewery. Courtesy, Kalamazoo Public Library.

and his resident brewers Albert Fogt and Michael Henkee took over, it was the smallest of the four local breweries (in terms of taxable value). By 1865, Locher’s operation had grown to the point where it was second only to Foegele & Baumann.⁸⁴

Locher added a new brick building to his operation during the early months of 1874. Federal and state tax assessments show that Locher operated consistently through 1878, when he was advertising the release of his ‘celebrated Bock Beer’.⁸⁵ But competition was stiff and by 1879, Locher’s luck had apparently run out. After losing one of his buildings to an accidental fire and with his 1878 state liquor tax listed as ‘uncollected’, Locher defaulted on a mortgage.⁸⁶ In October 1879, the brewery on Walnut Street and all of its contents went up for public auction.⁸⁷ After Locher’s unexpected death a year later, the land was sold and platted for residential use. Portions the old Kalamazoo Brewery buildings survived as an apartment building until 1968, when the last remaining brick walls were torn down to make way for a Bronson Hospital expansion project.⁸⁸

Frank’s Brewery

In 1856, Richard (Beckham) Frank established a small ‘class B’ brewery at 77 East Main Street (a.k.a. 69 Kalamazoo Avenue), near the corner of Main Street

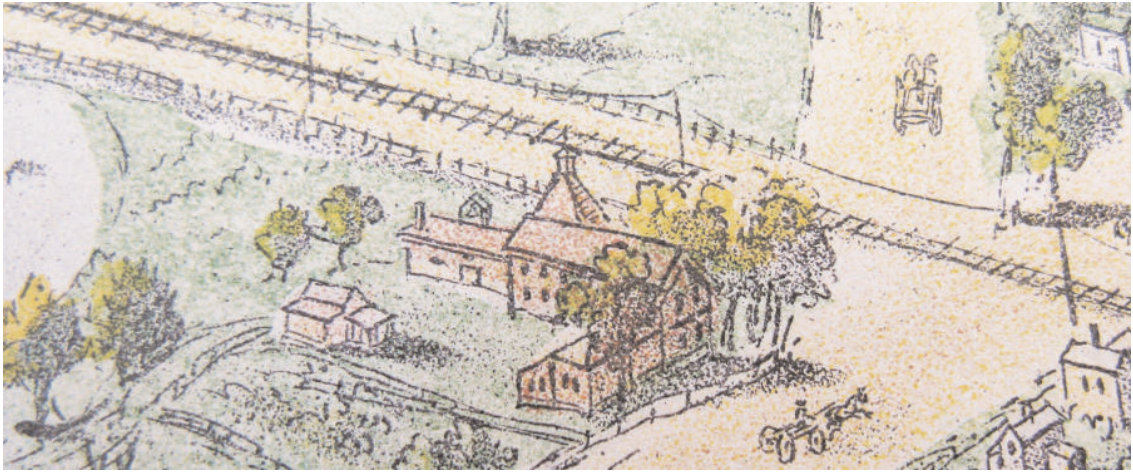


Figure 16. *Schroeder's (Frank's) Brewery c.1867 (looking west, corner of Main Street and Kalamazoo Avenue). Bird's eye view lithograph, 1867-8, by Charles Shober, Chicago, Il. published by the Gazette Office, Kalamazoo, Mich. Courtesy, Kalamazoo Valley Museum*

(Michigan Avenue) and Kalamazoo Avenue, just west of the Kalamazoo River bridge. Frank's operation started small and remained consistent, averaging between ten and thirty barrels each month. By comparison, Frank's Brewery produced in 1865 roughly one quarter (in terms of taxable value) that of Foegele & Baumann's outfit.⁸⁹

Henry Schroder

Frank passed away in April 1865 and by December, Frank's Brewery, by far the smallest operation in the village, had been taken over by Henry Schroder (born about 1834), an immigrant from Prussia, who soon thereafter married Frank's widow, Caroline. George Foegele of the former Kalamazoo Spring Brewery later joined Schroder's operation.

Schroder himself was a lively character who often decorated his brewery wagon and took part in local holiday parades. Schroder was seen more than once in front of a judge for selling beer on Sunday.

Village tax rolls for 1877 and 1878 indicate \$50 was collected each year from Schroder (as a Class 'B' brewer),⁹⁰ but at some point, evidence suggests that Schroder's tax payment schedule went awry. 'Many thousands of gallons of brew went into the placid

Kalamazoo', recalled the *Gazette*, 'when revenue officers breached the barrels and sent their contents into the ditch when this place went out of business'. In November 1884, the remains of the Schroder Brewery was sold to Albert Frank (the original owner's son) for \$3,400. In 1913, the site was purchased by the Chicago, Grand Rapids & Indiana (G.R. & I.) railway company to make way for a new interurban line. The old brewery building, considered a local landmark, was torn down at that time. 'The brewery ceased business because the great concerns in Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Louis shipped in their products much cheaper than the home product could be sold for', explained a *Kalamazoo Gazette* writer in 1920. 'Other breweries here ceased operations for the same reason'.⁹¹

Portage Brewery

Nicholas Baumann

The Portage Brewery was yet another small brewery that sprang into operation during the 1850s. Built by Nicholas Baumann (Bauman) along the west side of Winsted Street (since absorbed by a parking lot), the brewery was located near the outskirts of town at what was then known as the 'lower end of Portage Street' near the intersection of Portage and Lovell. Baumann, who would become involved in several local

along Lake Street, including the brewery, was sold by the village of Kalamazoo for delinquent 1869 taxes.⁹⁶

George Neumaier

In 1878, George Neumaier left the Steam Brewery on Asylum Road and took over the remains of the old Taylor Thackwray operation on Lake Street. According to the *Telegraph*, the old brewery building was ‘overhauled, renovated and enlarged’ by Neumaier and was in full operation by fall.

Neumaier’s brewery became known as the ‘Cold Stream Brewery’ after Merrill & McCourtie’s nearby flour mills of the same name. By 1884, Neumaier’s brewery was the only such operation left in Kalamazoo, and was producing about 1,500 barrels annually.⁹⁷

Kalamazoo Union Brewery

Nearly a decade had gone by when in the fall of 1894 Alfred G. ‘Fred’ Neumaier took over his father’s brewing operation and formed the Kalamazoo Brewing Company with Leo Wagonman (Wagemann), an experienced brewmaster from Toledo, Ohio. The new company leased the old Lake Street facility and made significant changes within the organization. After four months spent perfecting its product, the first kegs from the new company were tapped in January 1895, and according to the local press, the firm was ‘turning out a fine article’.⁹⁸

By year’s end, management felt that the Kalamazoo Union Brewery had perhaps outgrown the existing building on Lake Street, so Wagonman purchased a former factory building at the corner of Mill and Vine streets. Plans were to have the new larger facility up and running by February.⁹⁹

City Union Brewery

Come February, however, plans for the new brewery (and the Neumaier-Wagonman partnership) had evidently fallen apart.¹⁰⁰ Fred Neumaier announced that he had severed his connection with the Kalamazoo Union Brewery (Wagonman) and would begin a ‘new concern’ at the existing building on Lake Street, featuring a for-



Figure 19. Kalamazoo’s lake street brewery located on a 1873 map. Courtesy, Kalamazoo Public Library.

mally educated brewer from Detroit, Steve Zanda. By May, Neumaier was advertising his City Union Brewery (823 Lake Street) with a ‘(f)ine staplety of choice beer for family use’.¹⁰¹ ‘Extensive improvements’ were made in February 1899, including the installation of a new 80 horsepower boiler by the Clark Engine & Boiler Company. By April 1899, Neumaier’s City Union Brewery was producing about 140 barrels per day.¹⁰² Wagonman’s brewery on Mill Street never got off the ground.

In October 1900, Neumaier announced that \$30,000 in new improvements would be made. The brewery was to be rebuilt and made one story higher to accommodate new machinery and equipment. Production was expected to double.¹⁰³

Kalamazoo Brewing Company

In October 1904, the City Union Brewery was converted to a stock company, and incorporated as the Kalamazoo Brewing Company on 1 January 1905 with capital stock of \$75,000.¹⁰⁴ Albert Doll, a prominent local saloon owner and future president of the Kalamazoo Liquor Dealers Association, was elected company president; Carl Schanz, vice president; Henry Buechner, secretary; and Fred Neumaier, general manager; while William Farley, Frank Flaits and William Pendleton rounded out the board of directors.¹⁰⁵ ‘The



Figure 20. Kalamazoo City Union Brewery c.1896. Courtesy, Western Michigan University Archives and Regional History Collections.



Figure 21. Kalamazoo Brewing Company, c.1900. From Picturesque Kalamazoo by Labadie, E.E. (1909) Kalamazoo Publishing Company. Courtesy, Kalamazoo Public Library.

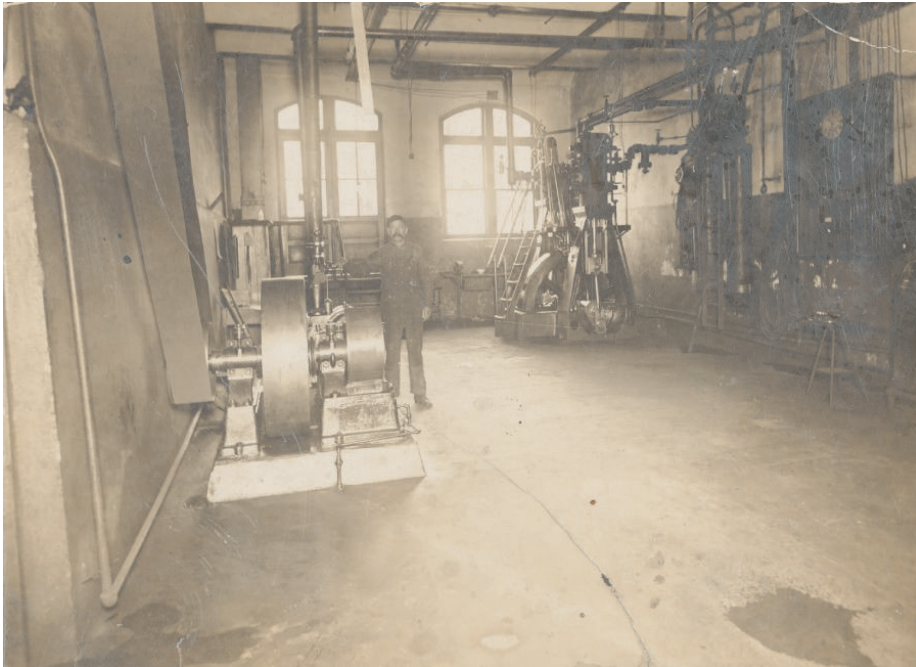


Figure 22. Unidentified worker at the Kalamazoo Brewery c.1910. Courtesy, Western Michigan University Archives and Regional History Collections.



Figure 23. Unidentified workers filling barrels at the Kalamazoo Brewery c.1910. Courtesy, Western Michigan University Archives and Regional History Collections.

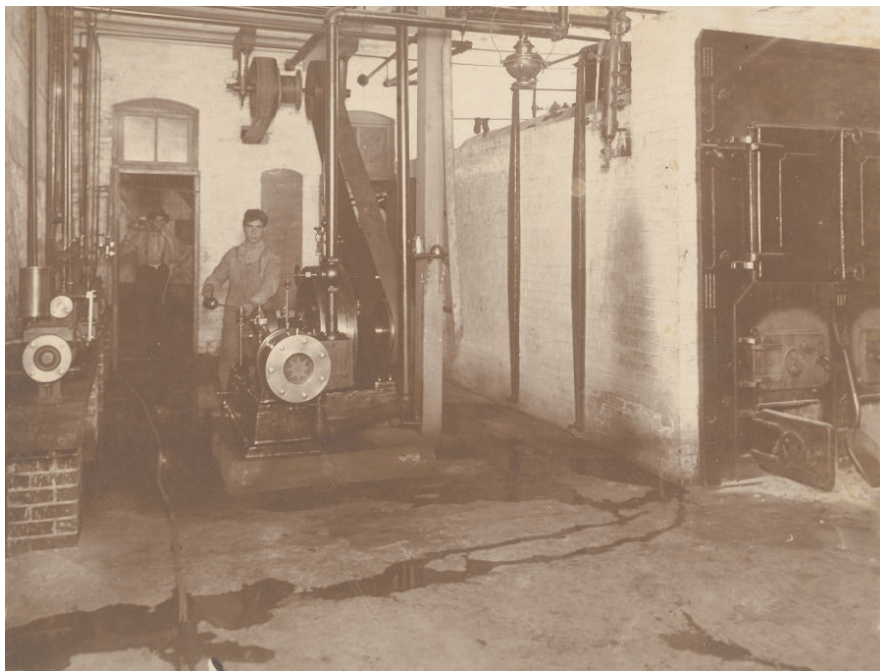


Figure 24. Unidentified workers in the boiler room at the Kalamazoo Brewery c.1910. Courtesy, Western Michigan University Archives and Regional History Collections.



Figure 25. Unidentified workers tend the beer vats at the Kalamazoo Brewery c.1910. Courtesy, Western Michigan University Archives and Regional History Collections.



Figure 26. Front page of the Kalamazoo Telegraph-Press, 6 April 1915. Courtesy, Kalamazoo Public Library.

Kalamazoo Brewing Co. aims to supply the better class of trade—those who appreciate quality and the value of a first class, healthful refreshing beverage'.¹⁰⁶

Facing formidable competition from much larger firms in Detroit, St. Louis and Milwaukee, plus the ever growing opposition to alcoholic beverages, the Kalamazoo Brewing Company made every attempt to appeal to a mass audience by positioning its product as a healthful 'temperance' drink, a suitable alternative to hard liquor. Brewers both locally and nationally tried to downplay the alcohol content while emphasizing food value.¹⁰⁷

Kalamazoo Brewing made additional attempts to promote its product as a 'safe' alternative to the highly competitive national brands, implying that unlike the local product, those could be contaminated with unknown or 'cheap' ingredients. Labels on the product stated clearly that Kalamazoo beer was 'pure and without drugs or poison'. A 1911 article cited an 'unsolicited recommendation' by the United States Health

Bulletin, commending the Kalamazoo product for its 'high degree of perfection from its care in preparation, its freedom from adulteration, purity of water used in its manufacture, and the sanitary and hygienic methods employed in the handling of it during both its production and delivery'.¹⁰⁸

By 1909, a major advertising campaign was underway to emphasize the advantages of Kalamazoo beer, a clean and well-made local product. 'In manufacturing the "Brew from Kalamazoo" we use hops and malt', stated Henry Buechner, 'and extend all a cordial invitation to pay us a visit so that we may show just how good pure beer is made'. Advertisements urged the locals to 'build up [their] hometown and patronize home industry by calling for The Brew from Kalamazoo'.¹⁰⁹

Last call: Kalamazoo goes 'Dry'

In April 1915, voters in Kalamazoo County elected to outlaw the production and sale of alcoholic beverages.¹¹⁰ On 1 May 1915, 65 business establishments were closed county wide, including 34 saloons in Kalamazoo, and the City Union Brewery.¹¹¹ The brewery equipment was dismantled and sold, and the building remained vacant until May 1917, when the Kalamazoo Creamery bought the building and converted it into a pasteurization plant.¹¹² Kalamazoo Creamery went into operation in the new location in 1919.¹¹³

After nearly 80 years of use, the creamery was closed in 1997 and the remaining building complex gradually fell into a state of disrepair. The old brewery building was finally razed in November 2011 to make way for a new mixed-use development.¹¹⁴

YOUR LAST CHANCE

ENJOY THE DELIGHTFUL QUALITIES OF

KALAMAZOO BEER

\$2.50 for 3 Cases, all additional cases **75c.** We will pick up the empties.

PHONE 260
ORDER EARLY

Figure 27. Advertisement from the Kalamazoo Gazette, 25 April 1915. Courtesy, Kalamazoo Public Library.

A version of this article was originally published on the Kalamazoo (Michigan) Public Library website.

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