

HERE'S TO BUCKEYE BEER

Collectors toast legendary local brewery

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It's been decades since the Buckeye Brewing Co. in North Toledo made a drop of beer, but that didn't stop Bill and Beverly Timming from getting a taste a few months ago.

The West Toledo couple, who collect all sorts of things associated with the once-popular brewery, popped open a can of Buckeye Beer from the '50s. (It doesn't hurt its value and prevents the suds from eating away at the can.) Then ... down the hatch.

"It wasn't too bad," Mrs. Timming said of the sip she tried.

"To me it was," Mr. Timming interjected.

Other than the occasional beer-filled can and other pieces of memorabilia, little remains of the brewery except empty lots and a vacant building along Bush Street near Michigan and Champlain streets.

There was a time, though, when the site was home to a local beer hub that produced nearly 300,000 barrels a year.

"Really, it was one of the more successful breweries, one of the longest lasting," said Rob Musson, author of *Brewing Beer in the Buckeye State*. "One hundred and thirty four years of being in the brewing industry is a real rarity in this country."

The origins of the company go back to the East Side in 1838 when the city was just a year old. It moved to North Toledo in 1854.

Before Prohibition, almost every city had several brewers and Toledo was no different. Many didn't survive the country's dry spell, but Buckeye did by bottling soft drinks and acting as a cold storage business.

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[See and hear Vic Lucarelli talk about the Buckeye Brewery](#)



Collector Vic Lucarelli with a sampling of his Buckeye Beer breweriana.

The brewery came to dominate the regional market with its American pilsner-style beer, which was famously marketed in the '30s with the image of Bucky, a shortstatured waiter running with a glass and bottle of beer on a tray. The company even hired an actual person, 52-inch Carl Walinski, to be its mascot for a while.

Mr. Walinski, who was a bat boy for the Toledo Mud Hens when they were managed by legendary Casey Stengel, appeared in parades and promoted the brewery's image. He was well-known for roller skating around town holding a tray with a glass and bottle of beer on it. (A glove was glued to the tray, which was glued to the other items so that nothing would fall.)

Vic Lucarelli, a Temperance breweriana collector, said his uncle told stories about how excited kids lined up and waved at Bucky as he skated by. Mr. Lucarelli learned more tales from Bucky himself.

"He told me personally he would roller skate in the front door of a bar, through the bar, and out the back door," he said. "He told me that it got difficult by the end of his shift because everywhere he went they all wanted to give him a beer. After so many bars, it became difficult to finish his route."

By 1950, Buckeye was the only brewery left in the city, and eventually it supplied about 85 percent of the draft

beer served in Toledo, Mr. Lucarelli said.

The company was bought in 1966 by Chicago's Peter Hand Brewing Company, which later changed its name to Meister Brau Inc., as part of an expansion plan.

The brewery closed in 1972 after it changed hands again and was sold to Miller Brewing Co. At the time, it was the second-oldest business in Toledo and the second-oldest brewery still operating in America.

But that wasn't the end of Buckeye Beer, even after Miller stopped making it in Milwaukee a couple of years later. It lives on today — at least in name — at the Maumee Bay Brewing Company in the Oliver House in Toledo.

"We tried to get it as close as we could," said owner Jim Appold. "We do not have the original formula."

It also lives on in the homes of collectors such as Mr. Timming. He has a basement filled with beer tap handles, lighted signs, posters, bottles, and cans. Closest to his heart are those from the Buckeye Brewery because it's where his father worked for 37 years. (Mr. Timming still has one of his dad's old paychecks for \$34.57).

"I was born and raised on Buckeye Beer," he said. "There was always beer in the house."

It was a smooth-tasting beer — back in the day, not the ancient stuff he tried a few months ago — that he still rates highly. He wasn't alone in this affinity.

"My dad had a beer belly," he said. "It runs in the family."

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An old postcard featuring Bucky, the one-time mascot of Buckeye Beer.

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