

4-2016

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Recommended Citation

Hanlon, Ann (2016) "A Digital Tour of Brew City: Milwaukee on the Web," *MAC Newsletter*: Vol. 43 : No. 4 , Article 8.

Available at: <https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/macnewsletter/vol43/iss4/8>

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A Digital Tour of Brew City: Milwaukee on the Web

By Ann Hanlon, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

When you think of Milwaukee these days, you might well anticipate this year's upcoming Annual Meeting. But any other time, you almost certainly think beer—and for good reason. Our “gathering place by the waters” geography, our blue-collar industrial heritage, and our allure as an immigrant destination all conspired to make beer what made Milwaukee famous. Those same forces all contributed to make Milwaukee all the things it may not be quite as famous for. The same German immigrants who established the most iconic breweries also made Milwaukee the home of a long tradition of socialist government that gave the city a reputation for some of the finest parks and sewers in the country. It wasn't just the Germans that built Milwaukee, though—the city's history embraces numerous ethnicities, including a strong Polish presence on the south side, more recent surges in the Latino population and, following the Vietnam War, the settlement of a sizable population of Hmong refugees. African Americans have contributed significantly to Milwaukee's history, with Vel Phillips, Lloyd Barbee, and other activists leading the city during the civil rights movement of the late 1960s, when Milwaukee became known as the “Selma of the North” because of its central role in the national struggle to desegregate schools and housing. But these examples are only the froth on the brew that is Milwaukee. You can investigate nearly any aspect of Milwaukee's history more deeply by exploring the rich variety of digital collections the city and state have to offer.

Why not dive right into the history of beer and brewing in Milwaukee? The **Wisconsin Historical Society Image Galleries** at wihist.org/1U85pzC include a portal to over 500 images documenting taverns and brewing in Wisconsin, including iconic Milwaukee breweries Pabst, Schlitz, and Blatz. Of particular interest are the 100-plus images of beer labels, featuring both long-gone and long-running brands, and an 1896 photograph of the Schlitz Palm Garden, an ornate beer garden formerly located only three blocks away from the downtown Hilton (venue for our Annual Meeting), at Third and Wisconsin.

Images depicting the prevalence of the brewery and beer-drinking culture in Milwaukee are sprinkled throughout numerous digital collections. A search for “beer” across the digital collections at the **University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee** (collections.lib.uwm.edu) yields over 500



A view of the interior of the Schlitz Palm Garden, circa 1896. Wisconsin Historical Society.

results, including postcards, taverns, and tied houses (bars “tied” to particular breweries). The **Milwaukee Public Library's** digital collections also include hundreds of images of Milwaukee taverns and breweries, including photographs of strikes at Schlitz and Miller in 1981 and 1983. See them at content.mpl.org/cdm/search/collection/HistoricPho/searchterm/breweries!strike/field/all!all/mode/exact!exact/conn/and!and/order/title/ad/asc.

Milwaukee—and the digital collections that document it—are about a little more than beer, though. A singular resource for delving into the city's (and the state's) many attributes can be found at the **Wisconsin Historical Society's Turning Points in Wisconsin History** (wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints). There you can learn more about the history of Wisconsin through a series of essays coupled with links to digitized articles, images, and other primary sources. The site helps put Milwaukee in the context of its earliest inhabitants, the steady procession of new visitors and settlers to the state and region, the industrialization that shaped the city and the labor struggles that followed, and the effect of national and world events. The essays are searchable, so if you still want to learn more about beer, a search for the term returns dozens of results, including an article on the first commercial brewery in Milwaukee (Owen's Brewery, opened in 1840 by three Welshmen) and even more resources on prohibition. The essays are comprehensive, from an exploration of early native cultures and original manuscripts from the papers

(Continued on page 22)

(Continued from page 21)

of noted Wisconsin naturalist, Increase Lapham; to an essay on nineteenth-century immigration to the state that provides an introduction to the earliest waves of European immigrants and where they settled; to essays on the Progressive Era in the state; and finally the changes wrought by two world wars, economic collapse and recovery, and the struggle for civil rights. The site takes you on a guided historical tour, accompanied by an expert selection of materials from the holdings of the Wisconsin Historical Society. It is one of the best online introductions to the history of the state to be found.

The digital collections at the **Milwaukee Public Library** include over 7,000 digitized photos drawn from the nearly 50,000 photographs that make up the **Milwaukee Historic Photos Collection** at content.mpl.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/HstoricPho. The historic photos are an especially rich source for images of Milwaukee's historic buildings. The collection includes eight images of the Schroeder Hotel, now the Milwaukee Hilton, and site of the MAC 2016 Annual Meeting.



Looking east on Wisconsin Avenue (then Grand Avenue) in Milwaukee, 1885. Historic Photo Collection, Milwaukee Public Library.

Use the “Browse all” and the facets on the left of the results page to narrow your search to topics including images of Harley-Davidson motorcycles and manufacturing, and over 300 images of Milwaukee festivals—with photos of Summerfest, Brady Street Festival, and the annual Juneteenth Day celebration to mark the freeing of slaves after the Civil War. For another view into the city's history, try the **Wagons of Milwaukee Businesses** collection to

find just that—images of wagons used by local businesses in the early twentieth century to deliver sausages, bedding, milk, mail, and cheese to Milwaukee's citizens. Search this collection at content.mpl.org/cdm/search/collection/milwbiz. And, speaking of transportation options, the **Milwaukee Waterways** collection includes images of the ships that still deliver goods to the port of Milwaukee (content.mpl.org/cdm/search/collection/MilwWaterwa). Notably, the collection also includes aerial photos of the Milwaukee River that illustrate the changing skyline of the city over the course of the middle twentieth century. And, look for a dramatic image of a captured German U-boat being tugged up the Milwaukee River in 1954—the same submarine now on permanent exhibit at the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry.

The **University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee Libraries' Digital Collections** include over 120,000 images, films, oral histories, manuscripts, and newspapers at collections.lib.uwm.edu. Materials from the **UWM Archives** (uwm.edu/libraries/archives) highlight the diversity of Milwaukee and how that diversity has shaped the history of the city. A number of oral history collections from the archives narrate the experiences of disparate groups in Milwaukee, including barbers, Italian and Danube-Swabian immigrants, and a recent project to document transgender experience in the city, the **Milwaukee Transgender Oral History Project** (collections.lib.uwm.edu/cdm/search/collection/transhist). The underground scene is represented in the collections by *Kaleidoscope*, a major underground newspaper published in Milwaukee between 1967 and 1971, and the subject of a Supreme Court case on obscenity that ultimately ruled in the paper's favor (collections.lib.uwm.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/kal). The official student perspective is well represented by the UW–Milwaukee student newspaper, the *UWM Post*, currently under construction at collections.lib.uwm.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/uwmpost. Or, for the Marquette student perspective, which goes all the way back to 1916, see the *Marquette Tribune*, part of **Marquette University's** e-Archives collections at cdm16280.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/p16280coll3.

Milwaukee Polonia, a significant collection from the holdings of the UWM Archives, includes over 32,000 glass-plate negatives that visually document the south side of Milwaukee when it was predominantly Polish (uwm.edu/mkepolonia). The site includes guided browse categories to help users navigate the vast collection. Browse

the “urban scenes” category to find over 1,300 images of the streets of (mostly south-side) Milwaukee and its businesses. Or narrow your search to “Traffic accidents” to find nearly 300 images of car, buggy, and wagon wrecks. The collection is also a rich source for genealogists and anyone with Polish roots in Milwaukee. The collection is keyword searchable, and its scope and size lends itself to searches for Polish surnames, Milwaukee street names, or any number of subject-oriented keywords.



A crowd gathers to see a truck crashed into a building on Milwaukee’s south side. Milwaukee Polonia Digital Collection, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee Libraries, Archives Department.

The **March on Milwaukee** digital collection at uwm.edu/marchonmilwaukee skips ahead a few decades to the late 1960s to tell the story of the struggle for civil rights in the city. The collection includes news footage of protest

marches and counterdemonstrations, news conferences, and other events related to the struggle. Photographs, archival documents, and oral histories all help tell the story of this pivotal time in Milwaukee’s history. An updated site was launched in February and includes newly added news and archival film footage. A highlight is the addition of materials from the papers of Vel Phillips, the first African American woman to serve on Milwaukee’s Common Council, and a major force for fair housing in the city. She donated her papers to the Wisconsin Historical Society in 2015.

The **UWM Digital Collections** also document the local LGBT community, with, for example, videos from the Milwaukee Gay-Lesbian Cable Network—among the first LGBT-oriented, publicly broadcast programs in the United States (collections.lib.uwm.edu/cdm/search/collection/mglcn)—and the Milwaukee Transgender Oral History Project. Of particular note are collections documenting organizations that formed to combat the AIDS crisis beginning in the early 1980s, including the papers of the AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin (ARCW) at collections.lib.uwm.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/arcw, and a series of videos broadcast by AIDS activists ACT UP Milwaukee in the early 1990s at collections.lib.uwm.edu/cdm/search/collection/actup.

The rich histories of Milwaukee and Wisconsin are nearly matched by the rich digital collections available to explore them. And, like the city, those collections are constantly changing and growing, so check back frequently. After you’re done exploring the city virtually, come see it in person, and hoist a glass to the long history of visitors who have spent time in Milwaukee, the stories and documents they’ve left behind, and your place among them.