

Breweries

Naperville Heritage Society History Stories

Besides a few fragments of bottles, a large 46" x 80" x 7" limestone block carved with the words, "J. & N. Stenger Brewery 1856," and a handful of paper records, there is no physical evidence of the one-time great and flourishing brewing industry in Naperville.



Jacob Engelfreidt is considered Naperville's first brewer. Engelfreidt bought two lots from Joseph Naper on the northwest corner of Jackson and Webster where a small brewery was built. This building was later purchased by Xavier Egermann and operated as the Egermann and Sons Brewery (c. 1860-1872). In 1872, this brewery was sold to George Von Hollen and Charles Kluetsch of Chicago and renamed the DuPage Brewery, but the business was short-lived. Some time between

1842 and 1848, Engelfreidt built a larger brewery four blocks north on the northeast corner of Webster and Franklin. This brewery was purchased in 1849 by Peter Stenger, an immigrant from Bavaria, Germany. The Stenger family built and operated their first brewery sometime prior to 1849 on the northwest corner of Eagle and Jackson. Between this brewery and the Egermann Brewery, massive stone-lined and arched tunnels were built into the limestone on the north bank of the DuPage River. These tunnels were used to keep the beer cool while processing and storing.

After a devastating fire, Stenger, with the help of his sons, Nick and John (who had just returned from the California gold fields), would rebuild the brewery, forming the backbone for the largest brewery in Naperville. Among the many employees was a young German immigrant, Adolph Coors, who brewed for the Stengers from 1869-1872.

Tragedy struck the Stengers when brother Nick died suddenly. John was left to manage the brewery. Of John's three daughters, two married into brewing families—the Egermanns of Naperville and the Schamburgers of Oregon. By the 1890s, large Chicago brewers began to syndicate and the smaller Naperville brewery was threatened. Joseph Schamburger operated the Stenger brewery one year and then took the equipment and his family to Oregon.

History Stories are developed by the Naperville Heritage Society Research Library and Archives staff at Naper Settlement. As a bountiful resource for learning about a variety of topics related to Naperville, they provide unique insights into the past. For more information, please call the Curatorial Department at 630.305.3535.

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For years, the brew and malt houses were vacant before the windows were boarded up and long rows of mushroom beds installed. For 25 years, mushrooms were grown in the cool dark buildings and tunnels that once brewed rich dark, lager beer. By the mid 1950s, the large castle-like buildings were abandoned and were eventually torn down.

The few remaining artifacts of this once-flourishing Naperville industry are housed in the Naperville Heritage Society archives at Naper Settlement. Stenger Brewery's carved limestone, building date stone is now part of a permanent exhibit, "Brushstrokes of the Past:Naperville's Story," at Naper Settlement.

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