

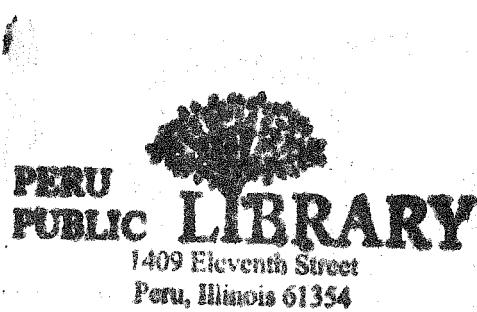
THE OLDEST BREWERY

IN ILLINOIS

STAR UNION

1845 - 1966

TOBY GUALANDRI  
SEVENTH GRADE  
DALZELL, ILL.



THE OLDEST BREWERY  
IN ILLINOIS  
STAR UNION

ALCOHOL - IN ILLINOIS BEER IS VERY POPULAR.

In the year 1845, before the War with Mexico, a brewery was established on the site now occupied by William Dresbach who distributes Pabst Beer.

William Kaiser came from Germany in 1845 and opened a small brewery in Peru, Illinois on Water Street. The Star Union Brewery was one of the first industries in the Illinois Valley. Mr. Kaiser was an experienced person when he came to Peru. Many of the residents were of German descent and he had a ready made market.

The brewery was started because of the situation of the town as it grew and a good Brewmaster. The town was founded in 1835 and the beer was made because of the demand of the supply of workers in that area. At the time most families did their own brewing, until a small community was established and then a brewery was usually started. Mr. Kaiser did his first brewing in large iron cooking kettles, tea kettles and any cooking pot he could obtain. He had one horse with a capstan to grind. Later after enough beer had been sold to provide enough working capital, Mr. Kaiser put in steam engines and gradually added other more productive machinery. Beer spoils faster than milk. It had to be manufactured on the spot because of no refrigeration. It was located by a river, which at that time had pure water, ice made and stored from this river for refrigeration, barges that traveled the river, later by trains. Mr. Kaiser knew that making beer required plenty of ice and a plentiful supply of water.

In the year 1845, beer was very pure using hops, corn, grits, malt, brewer yeast, and Star Union drilled and found an artesian water well 2800 ft. down, one-half mile deep. Geologists claim that this is the same vein of water used in Milwaukee. The well was another advantage to the Brewery because they used their own water supply and not the city's water. A plentiful supply of pure cold water is an essential in brewing of fine beer. It is also used for steam, washing, ice-making and cooling. This deep well, drilled and placed in operation at a cost of \$150,000 has a free flow of 300 gallons per minute and with the operation of a deep well pump with an out put of 1,000 gallons per minute. Mr. Kaiser continued in business successfully for fifteen years.

Benjamin Ream bought Star Union Products in 1860. Star Union Brewery's buildings on Peru Water Street were beehives of activity. They covered most of two blocks.

Before Motor Cars until 1910 its products were delivered by draft horse teams pulling wagons. The brewery hill was so steep that those same horses wouldn't be able to make it up "Brewery Hill". Star Union had other horses that were called an "extra team." This "extra team" was hitched to the wagons to get them to the top of "Brewery Hill." There were other horses that were waiting on the top of the hill to take over the wagon. Deliveries were as far as Olgesby, Mendota, not more than a 30-40 mile area because of no refrigeration before pasturization of beer.

Ice cut from the Illinois river was used to keep a temperature of 40 degrees for a good tasting beer. The less change in temperature the better the beer. In the spring ice was cut and brought to the caves in the hills. There it was stored for it had to last all summer. There was no mechanical way of keeping the ice except with the ground temperature in the cave or hill with saw dust on top and around.

Caves were below freezing which also kept the temperature cool if ice was added. The ice house was a refrigeration until the beer was delivered. In 1927 Star Union started manufacture of their own ice. One of the biggest manufacturing industry before refrigeration. They served the whole Illinois Valley Community area with cubed and blocked ice. People would not only buy beer but would come for ice. Ice was made from pure artesian water - crystal clear. The ice is frozen in large 400 lb. blocks and delivered by local distributors to hospitals, bakeries, railroads, defense plants, dairies, ice cream manufacturing, canning factories, hotels, restaurants, ---in LaSalle-Peru and surrounding area. Commercial ice was sold from the brewery up until 1966.

During the Civil War period several men were associated in ownership and management of the brewery Grasmick, Eck, Oscar Wahlin . A group of citizens rescued it from financial problems. Charles Bereiter, William Meyer, Fred Sculte and Fred Seepe incorporated under the name "Union Beer Company."

In 1880 Henry Hoerner bought out all of the stock holders except Phil Link. The corporate name was changed to the "Star Union Brewing Company." For sixty-five years it remained with the same ownership and management. Sons and Daughters came into the business and learned it from their fathers carrying on the the tradition. That same year a horse barn was built for the Brewery's 60 draft horses. A special feature of the old barn was its automatic feeding system designed by a Westclox employee that went into operation at six o'clock each morning. Automatically dumped the morning ration of feed and hay into 60 bins.

"Oscar Wahlin a Swedish man made a premium beer by Star and sold it in Chicago business "A Little Bit of Sweden". The beer was now traveling 100 miles to be sold." 1

When outside competitors began to market their beer in the area, Star Union bought up and leased out 49 saloons of its

(1) Hoerner Klein, Iona, wife of Executive Vice President and Manager of Star Union Brewery Co., 1938, also granddaughter of Henry Hoerner , owner of Star Union Brewery Co. for 50 years, Private Interview, March 25, 1982

own with the understanding that only Star's beer would be sold. Its labels were Star Union, Star Model, Star Pilsener and Sepp'l Brau. In 1919 a government law was passed and no longer owned by Star Union but Illinois Valley Realty Company.

Star Union employed over 100 workers in days of its greatest prosperity. Star Union's beer was very popular, too, in Peoria, Illinois. So much in demand that the company maintained its own Peoria warehouse, cooling facility and delivery fleet of railroads and trucks. They used the same refrigeration from 1880-1890. It was located at 2822 South Washington St. Peoria, Illinois.

#### "Brewing is truly a Fine Art"-----

"The artesian well water was demineralized and deironized so that it was purified before cooking in 200 lb. copper kettle. From there it was pumped over to the filtering barrell. It would sit in large barrells, which were called holding tanks, from 600 to 800 lbs. filtering itself. Particles would fall to the bottom where they were taken out. Next it was pumped over to the bottle house and put into Keg beers or bottled. No preservation was used . It was made of hops, corn grits, brewers yeast, malt and fine water. The fresher the beer the better the taste." 2

#### "Equipment"-----

The Star Union had a lot of brewing equipment. They had a huge water softener. All water for use in steam boiler, washing etc. was softened in order to do the most effective job. Star Union had a lot of refrigeration machines which played a large part in the manufacture and proper preservation of beer. Carbon dioxide was re-infected into the beer, which gives it its sparkle or foam. They had a machine that the beer is run through special filters before being bottled or kegged. There were machines that put beer into kegs. Also before the kegs were re-used, they were thoroughly sprayed, brushed, washed, and rinsed by a machine. They had a MashTun in which the malt extract was run from the cooker. They also had a machine which brought malt extract to a boil. There was a malt grinding mill which cracked the barley malt. They also

(2) William Dresbach, tape recording and interview

March 13, 1982

had a full supply of water, too. They stored beer in big storage tanks and put the Kegs of beer in rooms of the correct temperature. They shipped the beer out in cases. Star Union put the beer in bottles until 1945 when they put it in 12 oz. cans.

#### "Bottling"-----

In 1920 the company installed a new department to manufacture a line of soda's and gingerales. Star kept up with times, installing new brewing equipment when it became available: its own barrel manufacturing plant; ice making equipment, which plays a large part in the manufacturing and proper preservation of beer; and automatic bottle washing and filling machines.

When the bottles went through the automatic bottle washing and filling machines, the old labels were removed, and the bottles were sterilized, washed, and soaked in a strong caustic solution; then thoroughly brushed. Each bottle received one hour's soaking in a very strong caustic solution at a temperature of 160 degrees. The bottles received two brushings by rotary brushes and four rinsings before being re-used. The Star Union Plant also had modern bottle filling and capping equipment. The beer is automatically drawn into the bottles and capped with cork-lined crowns. There were two bottle lines that operated: one was for the standard "pints", and the other line was for quarts and half-gallons.

#### "Recycle"-----

All of the spent used grain was loaded onto trucks each morning, then it is hauled away to farms. The grains are admirable feed for the livestock and also used for fertilizer.

In 1910 Star Union was the first industry in the area to switch to motor trucks. The company was able to travel farther with its product and quicker over a large area. Star Beer was shipped to ice houses in Peoria and small surrounding towns where the beer was stored for local delivery.

In 1931 Henry Hoerner retired from the brewing business and his son Martin Hoerner became president and general manager.

During Prohibition Star Union had been forced to suspend the making of beer, and in despiration switched to "near beer" and soda pop, Whistle-orange drink, Cleo-coke, Dad's Old Fashioned Root Beer, Bubble Up, Grapette, Gingerale, Artificial ice which was sold by Star Union. The moment prohibition repeal became effective, Star was rushing its beer back to its saloons. At this time President Franklin Roosevelt made a suggestion, "they were to be called taverns." 3 When Martin died, his sister Kathryn Hoerner Ellis, became president and manager of the company.

In the 40's Star Union shipped their beer to Texas. It was hard to get and there was an army stationed in Texas. During World War II 15 gals. per person per year was consumed.

" The year of the brewery's 100th Anniversary a disastrous \$75,000 fire occured. Plans were being made to enlarge the bottle house. The portion that was destroyed by fire has rebuilt and over \$300,000.00 was spent on modern and automatic washer, filler, crowner, pasteruizer, labelers, automatic case packing machine and conveyor systems were installed. This bottling line turns out 180 bottles per minutee and the and the bottles are untouched by human hands. " 4 The smooth operation of a great brewery requires real co-ordination and foresight.

Ernest Casson, consulting engineer of the Star Union plant, another "behind-the-scenes" man improving the efficiency of the plant's steam boiler, power generation, refrigeration or pumping.

(3)Baron, John "Early Star Union Crew" Peru News 1979  
volume 5 page 16

(4) Hoerner Klein, Iona, wife of Executive Vice President and Manger of Star Union Breweru Co., 1938, also grandaughter of Henry Hoerner, owner of Star Union Vreweru Co. for 50 year, Private Interview, March25, 1982

A Brewer also knows his Art-----Oscar Wablin was Star's master brewer since 1933 when the manufacture of beer was legalized. He learned from a long line of apprenticeship beginning in Sweden, and years spent in brewing practice in Germany, Russia, Finland and leading American breweries. Green Beer --was made on St. Patrick's day. Bock Beer---was sold in the spring. Few brewery's made their own Bock. It is a heavy sweeter beer, also used as a tonic.

Star Union Manufacturing was a happy place to work. They had a beer break in the morning and in the afternoon. The workers took pride in their jobs.

As said by Mr. Dresbach, "On September 10, 1963, the stock of the Star Union was sold to the Canadian Ace Brewing Co., represented by Attorney Alan Schultz of the law firm of Biro, Carmel and Schultz of Chicago. Beer was bottled at Peru under the Star Union label until January 9, 1966. Beer was bottled in Chicago after that time until 1968, when Canadian Ace declared bankruptcy and sold the label rights. I was in sales with Star Union and later with Canadian Ace. I purchased the brewery property from Canadian Ace and I still use the building on the west side of Pike St. for my Pabst distributorship. The property on the east side of the street I sold to Mr. Ronald Yanke, 2810 second st..., Peru, Illinois." 5

The big U. S. brewing companies with their great volume, modern marketing methods, and automatic equipment were forcing hundreds of small breweries to shut down. Star Union could not meet the competition.

On January 6, 1966 two years after his company had aquired Star Union, Canadian Ace president Allen Schultz said:

(5) Dresbach, William, Owner of Star Union Brewery,  
Private Interview," March 13, 1982

"We tried desperately to keep the brewery operating. However , large breweries have cut prices. This has made it impossible for a little fellow like us to stay in business. We have been operating at a tremendous loss and our volume is still going down. It is no longer fessiable for us to stay in business".<sup>6</sup>

He also added that heat and power was costing \$2,00.00 a week. The complication eas that the brewery's power was direct current and the cost of converting so it could buy power" was very astronomical."

As Mr. Dresbach in an interview said "We ended the brewery with bottling of  $\frac{1}{2}$  gallons. They were not pasturized and had to be refrigerated. We worked on Sunday to get everything out. It is an absolete product." <sup>7</sup>

Mr. Jerome Preiser of Olgesby, whom I visited twice has a collection of items and stories, glasses etc., said "Star Union is the most fascinating industry that started in this Illinois Valley Area. Being a collector of Star Union tells about all of its history."<sup>8</sup>

Star Union, not only the oldest industry in this area, but the oldest brewery industry in Illinois, had to close its' doors forever in 1966.

(6) Dresbach, William, Owner of Star Union Brewery,  
Private Interview," March 13, 1982

(7) Baron, John "Star Model Beer" Peru News, 1968  
volume 5 page16

(8) Preiser, Jerome,collector of Star Union, Tour of his  
collection oglesby, February 13, 1982--April 17, 1982

Baron, John "Star Union Brewery Company" Peru News, 1968,  
volume 5 pgs. 12-16

Dresbach, William A Bright Star for 100 Years 1945-1845.  
Peru, Illinois, 1935

The Historical Committee Peru Centennial 1835-1935.  
Peru, Illinois, 1935

Dresbaach, William, the owner of Star Union Brewery,  
Star Union Brewery Private Interview, March 13, 1982  
Mr. Dresbach gave me a private tour of the brewery and ice  
house, March 13, 1982

Preiser, Jerome, collector of Star Union, Tour of his  
collection Oglesby, February 13, 1982-April 17, 1982

Mr. Preiser gave me bottles, picture etc. of his collection  
to use and study

Hoerner Klein, Iona, wife of Executive Vice President  
and Manager of Star Union Brewery Co., in 1938 also granddaughter  
of Henry Hoerner owner of Star Union Brewery Co. for 50 years,  
Private Interview, March 25, 1982

MY DISPLAY

CAN.....I made the can out of wood by cutting a circular base and nailing wood strips around the base to the shape of a can. Put hinges on one side to keep it together. Painted the inside and outside of the can after I woodburned it.

BOTTLE.....Cut a piece of wood in the shape of a bottle. Stained and sanded the wood. I used a dark kind of stain to represent the first bottles that were made of amber color. Sprayed the back of the bottle and wood stand.

COASTER.....Woodburned the design. I found the design from Mr. Preiser and Mrs. Iona Klein collection. I made it of scrape wood and then sawed it to shape and sanded.

NAPKIN.....I made the napkin of my own design, no pattern, with cotton floss and a counted cross stitch. The napkins were used in taverns only made of paper.

ICE CUBES....I used blocks of wood and melted wax. I then dipped the blocks into the melted wax and coated the blocks to look like ice that they used to keep the beer cold before refrigeration. This was layered with wax.

ICE PICK.....I melted wax. After it started to set I molded it into the shape of an ice pick with a finishing nail as the pick. This was used to chop the ice in pieces.

ALBUM.....The cover is made of red poster board and gold contact velvet paper. I used page protectors to display the pictures I copied from "A Bright Star for 100 Years 1945-1845" and pictures I took of Mr. Jerome Preiser's collection of what was used and how the "Brewery" advertized. Also the changes in bottles and labels and finally a can of beer.

PLATFORM.....It was made of scraps of wood paneling and pieces of board. A hinge to be able to close it. It is 30" deep and High 40" wide. It is used to display information and items of project.

MY COST

PLATFORM-----DONATION

WOOD-----Donation

BRUSHES-----\$ 1.00

POSTER BOARD-----\$.55

CONTACT-----\$2.80

ALBUM PROTECTORS-----\$.70

AIDA COUNTED CROSS MATERIAL-----\$.20

FLOSS-----Donation

PA

PAPER AND PLASTIC COVER-----\$.79

TURN TABLE-----On Hand

TOTAL-----\$6.94