



THE

# Northern Brewer

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GREAT NORTHERN BREWERS CLUB

## January 2022

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January Industry Meeting

49<sup>th</sup> State

January 27

### GREAT NORTHERN BREWERS CLUB

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## The Prez Sez

*By John Trapp & Liz Greer*

Happy New Year my brewing friends. I'm back one more time as co-president (can't get rid of me), but this time I have some help. Liz Greer has agreed to co-president the club with me for the next year. Liz is a pillar of knowledge in the brewing world, and has experienced activities in other brew clubs around the country. I, and we as a club, are very fortunate to have her as co-prez.

And speaking of the Prez, I give a very large Thank you to our out-going President Mike Fisher. Not only did he step up during the start of the COVID pandemic, he stuck around for a third year as President. Let me tell you, that's no small feat. So pour him a beer and say thank you for a job well done next time you see him.

Here's the 3 month calendar:

January 23<sup>rd</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> – AK Beer Week!

Industry/GNBC Meeting on Thursday the 27<sup>th</sup> at 49<sup>th</sup> State Brewing Company.

GABBF on the 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>.

February 15<sup>th</sup> – GNBC monthly meeting at 49<sup>th</sup> State Brewing, 7:00 p.m.

March 15<sup>th</sup> – GNBC monthly meeting at 49<sup>th</sup> State Brewing, 7:00 p.m.

For AK Beer week there will be more e-mails and notifications on specific events and calls for help in volunteering. We are fortunate to have this going this year, but let us not get ahead of ourselves. There's lots of COVID issues going on right now and I'm sure we will be re-evaluating the go/no-go status as the dates approach.

Now, how about we brew some beer! The February meeting is our "Bock" meeting. Everyone should be brewing a bock and fermenting it in a nice cool lagering area of your home. If it's ready for consumption bring it to the meeting and we'll share what we have. My garage is staying at a perfect 50 degrees, so I have 3 more lagers to brew up this season.

Our Christmas party was a big hit, everyone that attended had a very nice relaxing get-together with fellow brewers. Plenty of food (way too much) and great beer (never too much) was had by all. A big thank you to Gabe Fletcher and Anchorage Brewing Company for allowing us to have our party there. It was a very nice venue and it still amazes me when I see the beer palace Gabe has built.

I think that's all for now, Liz and I are looking forward to great year of beer, brewing and friends. Cheers.

## **Membership Column – Meeting and Counting Members**

*By Steve Johnson*

At GNBC's in-person meetings in September, October, and November at the 49<sup>th</sup> State Barrel Room and the December 2021 party at Anchorage Brewing company, I met more GNBC members than in many years past. Though my club membership goes back to 2008, with a short break in the teens, I've mainly attended the January Industry Meetings. Now the Membership Coordinator role gives me incentive to attend as many in person monthly meetings as possible.

Being able to relate names to faces and opinions is particularly stimulative for me. Month to month, my main activity in the club is receiving and recording dues payments; adding names and addresses to the member database and e-mail list; printing, laminating and mailing membership cards; and resolving problems related to membership payments and cards. I also count and list our members in two different ways for two different purposes.

At each GNBC Board meeting, the Membership Coordinator reports on the number of new and renewing members. Once a year, the Membership Coordinator makes a separate count as part of the process of obtaining the club's liability insurance.

For the purpose of the annual club officers and board election, one vote is associated with each paid membership, so the number of members is the sum of life memberships plus the number of current annual membership households. For the election in the membership year starting October 1, 2021, 50 annual member households and 22 life member households were eligible to vote in the online election that concluded at the start of the club's November meeting. President Mike Fisher reported that 46 per cent of our member households participated in the annual election. That is an impressive level of participation.

Each July, the club's liability insurance carrier requires a listing of all individuals in the club, rather than a count of household memberships. Each life membership and each annual membership may be associated with one or two individuals in the same household. When the club's liability insurance was renewed in the summer of 2021, the Membership Coordinator reported 178 names for insurance purposes. That number represented individuals in 81 annual member households and 22 life member households.

The club's capacity to pay for meeting room rental, liability insurance, and special functions depends largely on the number of annual memberships, supplemented by donations and proceeds of auctions. Membership numbers are predictably lowest in the first quarter of the membership year and highest in the last quarter of the year. In the past, membership numbers usually increased just before the club's January meeting.

As the deadline for the January 2022 newsletter approaches, the number of annual member households is 52, down from 60 annual member households reported in December 2020. Life Membership numbers are unchanged at 22.

I look forward to meeting many more GNBC members in the New Year.

## **Beer Research: Mike Royko and The First Newspaper-Sponsored Beer Taste Test**

*by Rick Levinson*

During a recent family visit, my son-in-law who is a journalist and beer enthusiast from the Chicago area, spoke of Mike Royko who was an inspiration and influence to him. Mike Royko was a life-long native of Chicago, born to immigrant parents, and raised in an apartment above a bar. He became one of the most prolific and highly regarded newspaper columnists and a Pulitzer Prize winner. During his 30+ year career, he wrote over 7500 columns while working for the *Chicago Daily News*, the *Chicago Sun-Times*, and the *Chicago Tribune*, and his columns became syndicated nationally. He was a beer enthusiast and he conducted what was likely the first beer taste-test ever sponsored by a major American newspaper.

In a *Chicago Daily News* column published May 23, 1973, Royko complained about taste and quality of American beers of the day. Mike informed his readers that he had conducted much beer research and had drunk liberally of American-made beer. And yet, "regardless of what label or slogan you use, it all tastes as if the secret brewing process involved running it through a horse".

His suggestion that “American-made beer tasted like horse piss” offended many people and drove an immediate and terrible backlash at the newspaper. There were many reader comments suggesting “American beer: love it or leave it”. Some readers thought he was being subversive by praising foreign beers. One reader suggested that Mike should “Go to hell because the beer there might taste better to him”.

The newspaper insisted on a retraction, so in a follow-up, Mike apologized to American beer drinkers, the American breweries, and finally to America’s horses.

Royko came up with the idea of an objective beer taste test and convinced the *Chicago Daily News* to sponsor the test and publish the results, which it did on July 9, 1973.

The test encompassed 22 popular beers of the day and included domestically-produced national and local beers, and a number of foreign import beers. Royko assembled a judging panel of both men and women. The competition was judged blind. Tasters drank from unmarked glasses and rated each beer on a point scale from 1 (barely drinkable) to 5 (great). The total awarded points were scaled to a maximum score of 55 and a minimum score of 11. Judges could also provide comments, but were asked to refrain from comparisons to animals or their effluents. Here are the results.

Place	Brewery/Beer	Location	Score
1	Wurzburger	Germany	46.5
2	Bass Ale	England	45
2	Point Special	Stevens Point, Wisconsin	45
4	Heineken’s	Holland	36.5
5	Old Timer’s	Eau Claire, Wisconsin	35.5
6	Zywiec	Poland	34.5
7	Lowenbrau	Germany	29.5
7	Huber Premium	Monroe, Wisconsin	29.5
9	Kirin	Japan	29
10	Stroh’s	USA	26
10	Barrel Of Beer	Monroe, Wisconsin	26
10	Miller’s	USA	26
13	Meister Brau	USA	25.5
13	Hamm’s	USA	25.5
15	Ringnes	Norway	23.5
16	Pilsner Urquell	Czechoslovakia	23
17	Pickett’s	Dubuque, Iowa	22.5
17	Old Chicago	Chicago, Illinois	22.5
19	Carta Blanca	Mexico	21.5
20	Old Milwaukee	USA	20.5
21	Schlitz	USA	18.5
22	Budweiser	USA	13

Wurzberger, a German pilsner, was the top-scoring beer. Second place was a tie between England’s Bass Ale and Point Special from the (then) 116-year brewery from Stevens Point, Wisconsin, which was awarded the highest rated American brewery. Comments for Point Special included “Great beer flavor”, “great aroma”, and “light and lovely”. Comments were much less complimentary for Budweiser, which placed dead last in the taste test. Bud’s comments included “lousy”, “a picnic beer smell”, “ycccch”, and “Alka Seltzer”.

Mike Royko’s reputation was redeemed by the beer taste test. Among the U.S. breweries that produced the majority of the beer American’s drank back in 1973, no brands from the five biggest producers finished near the top third of the results. Budweiser, the flagship of Anheuser-Busch, the nation’s largest brewery, finished last, and Schlitz, then the no. 2 brewery, finished just ahead of it.

Many of the top scoring beers enjoyed a sales bump as a result of Mike Royko’s beer taste test. Publication of the blind taste test was a cultural watershed in American beer and brewing. At a time when American beer production was becoming homogenized taste-wise, and breweries were being bought up and consolidated, Royko’s taste-test showed there were Americans looking for more flavorful beers and variety. As a result of the *Chicago Daily News* publication of the taste test, many readers inundated the newspaper with suggestions of lesser-known, more localized brews and other imports that were well worth drinking.

Unfortunately, the largest American beer producers didn’t get it. Instead, they introduced a tidal wave of “light” beer. This delayed introduction of flavorful quality craft beers for nearly a decade until Fritz Maytag galvanized the craft beer revolution with his revival of Anchor Steam beer at his new Potrero Hill brewery in the San Francisco area in 1979. Mike Royko’s beer taste test showed there was a large audience out there, waiting.

Mike Royko died of heart failure in 1997 at the young age of 64. He lived long enough to appreciate that the craft beer revolution had taken hold.

The author is grateful to *All About Beer* for information on Mike Royko’s beer taste test.

# Reading about Beer and Brewing: H. L. Mencken, Remembered in Brief

By Steve Johnson

Among writings on beer and brewing in which I find amusement and historical interest, I include essays and memoirs of H.L. Mencken (1880-1956) relating to beer and to the prohibition era in the United States. Judging from his Wikipedia entry, Mencken the writer is now probably best known for social opinions that have fallen from favor. The Wikipedia entry does not mention either beer or prohibition. I think Mencken's writings on beer and brewing remain worthy of the attention of readers who share those specific interests.

Anticipating the start of prohibition, Mencken prepared a well stocked cellar of beer, wine and spirits. He also turned to home brewing and wrote about the hobby in diaries and essays published much later. "The Noble Experiment", chapter 17 of his book *Heathen Days*, describes his activity as "the first man south of the Mason and Dixon line to brew a drinkable home-brew." First published in book form 1939, *Heathen Days* is included in *The Days Trilogy Expanded Edition* (Library of America, 2014). Notes to this chapter, included only in the Expanded Edition, include several entries from his early brewing log. Though some brand names may be unfamiliar, the formula is familiar to anyone who has brewed from prohibition style recipes.

1. One can German light malt; one can German dark; one can Guilford; a pound and a half white sugar; two ounces American hops. Brewed March 9; bottled March 19.
2. Three cans German dark; a pound and a half corn sugar; two ounces Bohemian hops; corn sugar in bottles. Brewed April 20; bottled April 23. Bottled too soon. On opening the first bottle the beer boiled out, and I threw out the whole batch.
3. Five pounds Brohmeyer malt; five ounces German hops; a pound and a half corn sugar; one ounce hops in crock at the end of fermentation; Chattolane water. Fleischmann's yeast. Brewed May 28; bottled June 1. A light, somewhat flabby brew.
4. Five pounds Brohmeyer malt; five ounces German hops; two pounds corn sugar; one ounce hops in crock; Chattolane water; Fleischmann's yeast. Brewed June 1; bottled June 5. Good flavor. [. . .]

A portion of the notes on Chapter 17 are freely accessible on the Baltimore Sun City Paper website at this address: <https://www.baltimoresun.com/citypaper/bcp-hl-mencken-on-brewing-a-drinkable-home-brew-20140909-story.html>

Mencken's activities in brewing at home included not only obtaining ingredients, from sources which became more accessible as prohibition continued, but also teaching classes. As Mencken told it, he taught ten in his brewing class, and those ten each taught another ten. He also noted that some folks did not learn to brew regardless of how many times they might take the class.

The Consortium Library at University of Alaska Anchorage owns a copy of *The Days Trilogy Expanded Edition*. Anchorage Public Library card holders may borrow the book by placing a hold in the shared catalog at [AnchorageLibrary.org](http://AnchorageLibrary.org), with delivery at the branch of choice.

Browsing the Internet for references to Mencken, I chanced upon beer writer Roger Baylor's February 2021 Hip Hops column in *Food and Dining* magazine, published in Louisville, Kentucky. Rather than paraphrase, I will quote:

"Here is a brief beer-related excerpt from Mencken's seminal *The American Language: An Inquiry into the Development of English in the United States* (Fourth Edition, 1937).

An English saloon-keeper is officially a licensed victualler. His saloon is a public house, or, colloquially, a pub. He does not sell beer by the bucket, can, growler, shell, seidel, stein or schooner, but by the pint, half-pint or glass. He and his brethren, taken together, are the licensed trade, or simply the trade. He may divide his establishment into a public-bar, a saloon-bar and a private-bar, the last being the toniest, or he may call his back room a parlour, snug or tap-room. If he has a few upholstered benches in his place he may call it a lounge. He employs no bartenders. Barmaids do the work, with maybe a barman, potman or cellarman to help."

Quoted at <https://foodanddine.com/hip-hops-on-old-books-new-beer-labels-and-timeless-bung-starters/>

Additional quotations from Mencken I leave as a web searching exercise for readers so inclined.

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