



## Sebewaing Brewing Company Not just “A” brewery, it was “Their” brewery!

What remains at the intersection of 4<sup>th</sup> and East Main in the small town of Sebewaing today is much different than what it looked like in the mid 1800’s. This story starts with German immigrants coming to a new place to start over with high expectations. These hard working people risked everything to come here. They were farmers, miners and craftsman and they put blood, sweat and tears into all they did just to survive. What this town of hard working immigrants needed was a brewery. With the current supply of beer being brought in by the slow and costly rail system, a man named E.O. Braendle decided it was time for a brewery of their own.

As near as I can tell, sometime in the early 1870’s, with his own money, he was able to finance and build the 1<sup>st</sup> building, a wooden structure which would

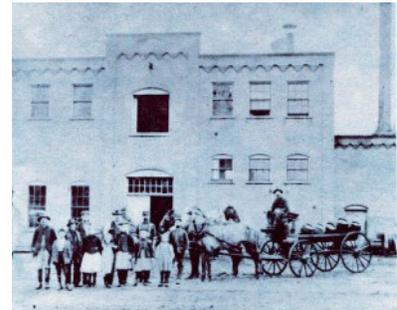


become the first brewery in Sebewaing. It was here on the large empty lot on 4<sup>th</sup> and Main on what they called the “high spot”. Braendle using the best ingredients began producing a fine German style beer, which of course was widely accepted in the community. At the time there were as many as 8 saloons in town. These saloons as well as other small outlying towns were all supplied by the brewery.

The brewery operated under several names the first 20 years or so, E.O. Braendle up to 1875, Sophia Braendle (1875-79), Veit and Graf (1879-80), Henry Graf (1880-84), Frederick Braendle (1884-91), and Eberlien and Sons (1891-93). The actual Sebewaing Brewing Company name was not introduced until 1893 and was used until 1896. This is when a spark from the breweries chimney was believed to have started a fire and burned the original wooden brewery structure to the ground.

The brewery, like a phoenix, rose from the ashes. Braendle with help from new partners, local businessman,

Leonard Eberlien and Fred Kroll, rebuilt the structure. This time with brick nearly three feet thick, thus making the building nearly fire proof.



Now called the Huron County Brewing Company, likely because of the larger market they were planning on supplying, the brewery would prosper. That was until April 1918 when the dreaded prohibition kicked into full swing.

Now while the production of beer and alcoholic beverages was prohibited during this time, the company resorted to produce products that were legal. They had experience making non alcoholic products in the past and now the Sebewaing name took hold as they made malt extract for home cooking and operated under the

Sebewaing Products Company name. We all know that this malt, which was made for the kitchen, actually was mostly used for the home brewing of beer and it allowed the company to withstand this dry time in American history.

1933 saw the end of prohibition and yet another owner. A new group took control and operated under the Sebewaing Brewing Company name. Their first product would be Old Style Beer (April 1934), and 18

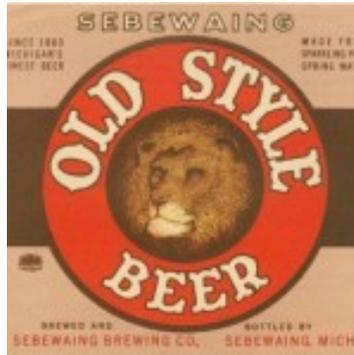


months later Old Stock Ale would follow. The Old Style label featured a flying goose. That was until 1940, when then brewery president J.E. Wurm bought 3 lion cubs from a traveling carnival/circus which came to town. A special trailer was constructed which would house the lions and also be used to transport them. They



became the mascots of the brewery and it was decided

that the goose was out and a lion's head would be used as the centerpiece of the new Old Style label. These lions



traveled throughout the state to parades and events. They were quite the attraction, the whole time helping build the brand of Sebewaing Brewing Company.

This side show continued until 1948 when the cost and care to feed and house the now 7-8 lions proved to be too much and it was decided that they needed to be put down. Brewery employee Otto Thede has been tied to the fate of the lions. It is likely that all were shot and buried, all but one, Queenie. This female lion was turned over to longtime brewery employee Frank Taschner, a practicing taxidermist, who stuffed the lion and kept her for himself.

In 1948 the brewery also began its relationship with A & P which began selling and marketing most of their beer. Bigger distribution meant lower advertising cost and lower sales price to the consumer. This proved to be a good move as they did very well from the late 1940's through

the 50's and ended with their most profitable year in 1960.



One label, "Brewer's Best" helped their profits. Though produced nationally by small local breweries, Sebewaing only produced this label from 1947-49.

Early 1950 brought the introduction of Sebewaing beer to the can era. They would start putting



their beer in a flat top style can which was yellow and had a flying

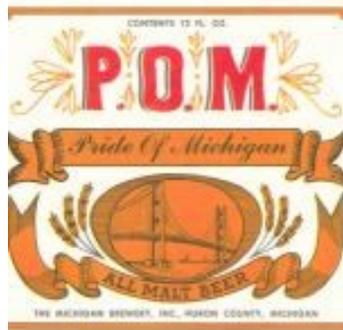


pheasant on the label. The can switched to a blue label in 1959 and in early 1960 the can lid had changed to the new zip/pull tab type opening style. This



proved to be the high point for the town and its beloved brewery. They employed 30 full time people and the breweries sales reached 1.1 million+.

Many changes were in store for the brewery over the next four years. Key people were replaced, excise taxes were raised, new returnable bottles as well as non returnable bottles were being used to package beer and the company once again changed its name, this time to The Michigan Brewing Company. Their new marketing campaign was to produce a new label, "Pride of Michigan". The hope was



that this product would be known throughout Michigan and neighboring states. What really happened was that the new product was lower in quality, some of the new personnel were less experienced and the company lost its loyal consumers. In turn sales declined, thus putting the brewery in jeopardy.

March 1965 saw an attempt to sell the company to Buckeye Brewing Company in Toledo. They wished to close the brewery and continue to produce the

Sebewaing brand from their brewery in Ohio. Stockholders, many of which were local would have none of it and called for a proxy vote which they won by nearly 30,000 votes. The local stockholders managed to curtail the sale but the damage was done to the pride of Sebewaing. During the time of the lawsuit the brewery sat inactive and due to the lack of product they lost much of their distribution market and shelf space was lost to larger national brands. After a year trying to rebuild its brand, the Sebewaing Brewing Company closed for the last time in May 1966. Thousands of gallons of beer ready to be bottled and sold were just dumped into the Sebewaing River by the light of the moon. Equipment was sold or scraped out to offset some of the remaining \$100,000 debts.

The proud city had witnessed the end of the longest lasting industry in town, their emblem and their label of achievement. The building stood vacant for the next 15 years, only a shell of the past and a sad reminder to



all that lived here and all that would pass. In 1981 demolition began on some of the buildings and by 1984 the final pieces were gone. All that remains today is a small 10 x 20 wooden structure that was used as the sales and brewmasters office. Engulfed in overgrowth it stands in shambles and also soon will be gone like the rest. If you walk the vacant



lot partially covered with trees north towards the river you will see remnants of the old foundation that were moved and buried, now poking through the soil.



Questions linger about what could have been "if", questions that will never be answered. Today the town carries on, many things have come and gone since, but there is one thing that can't be demolished and taken away. Those are the memories of what was once the pride of Sebewaing.

I would like to credit Scott Thede and his website [sebewaingbrewingcompany.com](http://sebewaingbrewingcompany.com) for much of the historical references to this story. This is a very in depth site which he dedicated to his grandfather and past brewery president and employee Otto Thede. It is worth the time to read through the history, especially the articles section link at the bottom of the site. Also Don Beers of the Sebewaing Historical Society, for his time spent with me. They have many artifacts and documents in the Town Hall museum from the brewery.

Below are some of the Sebewaing labels that were produced and some interesting photos of the things that made this such a special place. Also at the bottom are some of the pieces left from Mid-Michigan member Wes Rundell's collection.



## Random facts you might not know about the Sebewaing Brewing Company

Did you know that;

-the brewery first paid dividends in 1945. They got a whopping \$.03 a share. 1956 it was \$.06 and \$.08 in 58-59.



-some of the ingredients for the Sebewaing Brewing company were corn flakes, soybean flakes, hops, sugar and malt.

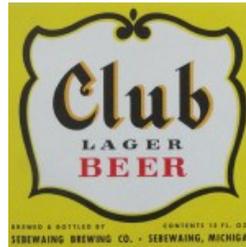
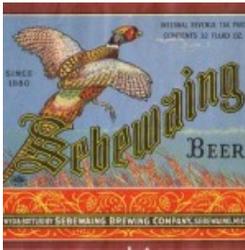
-some of the best Sebewaing Brewing collections were held by Wes Rundell MMC #95 and long time police chief Dale Koehler.

They have since sold most of their collections.

-Queenie, the lion that was mounted was stored away in the attic of Dale Kohler's house until it was freed from captivity by Bill Fournier and now reside above the arch way at his antique store at 1020 N. Water Street in Bay City.



-Sebewaing Beer, Golden Pheasant and Club were actually the same beer, just with a different packaging label.



-the brewery had a softball team that competed against other teams from the surrounding area.

- in a last ditch effort to save the brewery, they purposed trying to find 150 people to pay \$1000 to pay the debt which led to getting 1000 people to give \$150, but as we know those efforts proved fruitless.



-in 1963 William Thede, with orders from Otto, brought 3 stainless steel buckets to the Geyer Brothers Brewery in Frankenmuth which they used to restart their brewing operation and was used in what would become Geyers Brothers Beer.

- you can find the door from one of the Sebewaing Brewing Companies trucks on the ceiling of Shooter's Grill in Pigeon Michigan.

