

# Brewery was pride of the Upper Thumb

At peak, produced 50,000 barrels annually

BY DEBBIE OGLENSKI  
Tribune Staff Writer

**SEBEWAING** — Pheasants are a familiar sight in Huron County. Sometimes the population flourishes; sometimes their numbers are scarce. It runs in cycles — like the business/industrial climate.

The pheasant was the symbol for the Sebewaing Brewing Co., which is now extinct.

The brewery was a community institution from 1933-66.

An April 1982 Detroit Free Press Magazine article by Christopher Stoddard and Lawrence J. Lobert outlined the history of the company and the facility, before the building was demolished.

The old red brick building on East Main Street was built by E.O. Braendle, a German immigrant, in 1880.

According to the article, during Prohibition the basement of the building was used as a storehouse for skins and furs. Upstairs, liquid malt was sold to individuals who made their own brew.

As the years went by, beer produced there drew the attention of much of Michigan.

The article said that in the brewery's peak — during the early 1950s — about 50,000 barrels of beer left the loading dock annually.

Bill Thede, son of a former co-owner, Otto Thede, said several

brands of beer were produced at the brewery.

These included the original Sebewaing Beer, Sport, Old Style, Old Stock Ale, Club, Golden Pheasant and the last label produced before the brewery's demise, Pride of Michigan, with the Mackinac Bridge pictured on the label.

Thede said his father, an avid hunter and fisherman, chose the symbol of the pheasant for a logo, and painted the pheasant on the building himself.

"He always said that if every hunter would buy a case of beer a year, the company would do OK," Thede said.

For a number of years, it did. During peak years, about 35 people worked there, including Bill and his brother. Thede worked at the brewery from 1960-65, and his brother John worked there a little longer.

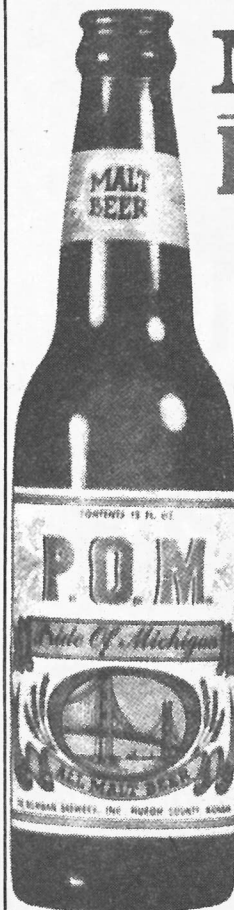
Little things stick in his memory. "Everything came in by train," Thede said. "Hops came from the state of Washington."

The beer was shipped out by truck.

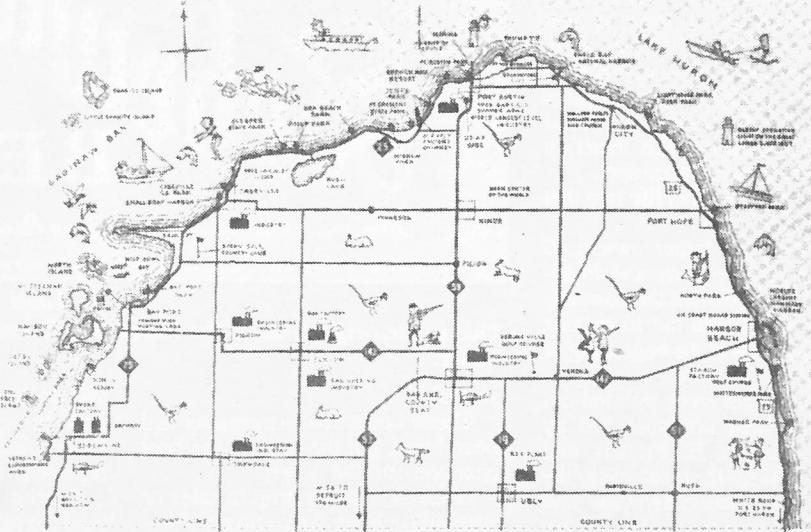
"The main contracts were A&P and later Hamady Brothers," Thede said.

Most taverns carried Sebewaing Beer, especially local bars.

Thede said live lions were used to promote Old Style Beer and Old Stock Ale. They were transported to



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— Label courtesy of Bill Thede

The Pride of Michigan was the last label under which beer was made by the Sebewaing Brewing Co.

promotional events in one of two specially-designed trailer units. The lions were permanently housed in a building located where McDonald's Restaurant now stands.

Thede said periodically the lions would get loose in the neighbor's

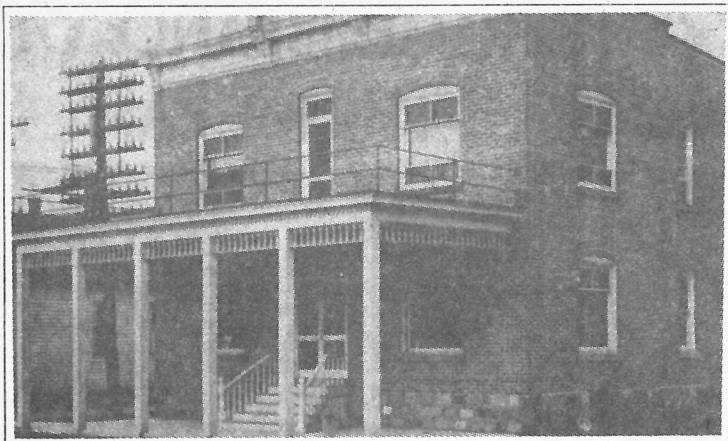
garden, creating a bit of attention.

Sally Taschner, whose husband Frank worked at the brewery from 1942 until it closed, said her late husband did taxidermy work and mounted one of the lions after it had to be destroyed.

"We sat with our feet against each other to stretch the hide to get it to its form," Taschner said.

She still has the lion in the attic.

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## Remember When?

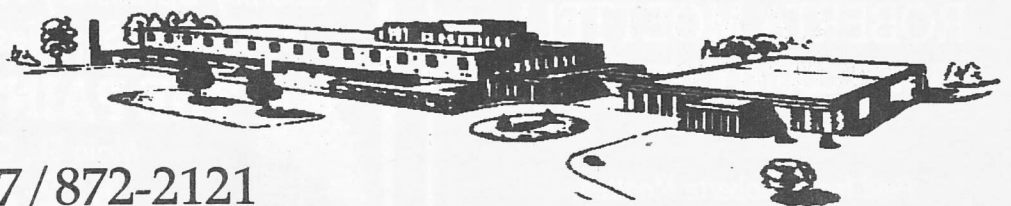
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and would like to donate it to a historical group. After eight children "riding" the lion, it shows wear, but it's intact.

Thede said there were fringe benefits to working for the company.

"Back then drinking on the job wasn't forbidden, as long as you could do your work," Thede said.

Otto Thede started his career with the brewery in 1933. In the 33 years that followed he served in several capacities: running the bottling house, brewmaster, president.

"He had put all of his life into that place," Thede said.

Thede said his father owned 40 percent of the company and President R.W. Mast owned the controlling interest, but sold out to outside investors. That was the beginning of the brewery's demise.

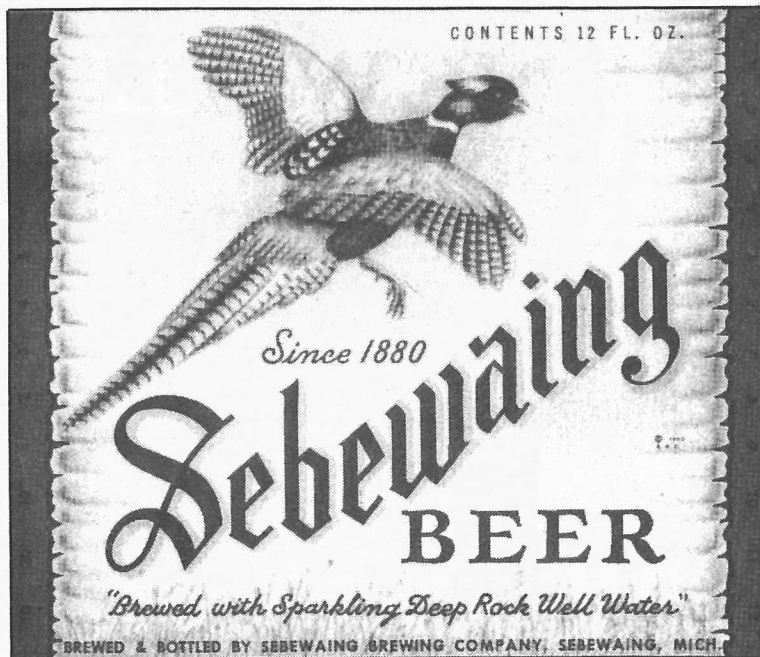
The Free Press story pointed out that Detroit area investors, led by attorney William E. Francis and Kenneth Chappell, took over the positions of board chairman and president, respectively. They renamed the company the Michigan Brewing Co. and the label on the beer became the Pride of Michigan.

Change wasn't well accepted.

Taschner said her late husband, who had been an engineer, controlling the hop sacks and the temperatures for brewing at the facility, felt that the little people had been "eaten up" by the big people.

Others might agree with that description.

The brewery's financial footings



— Label courtesy of Bill Thede

This is the original label the Sebewaing Brewing Co. marketed beer under.

shifted.

Thede said a new brewmaster had been hired, but the taste of the beer changed for the worse.

Whether it was a drop in sales or mismanagement, the company's stability was lost.

The Free Press article said that on March 17, 1965, Francis and Chappell sent a letter to the stockholders stating that management had failed to find a solution for operating the brewery in a profitable manner.

A proposal was made for the sale of the brewery to the Buckeye Brewing Co. of Toledo, Ohio. A meeting was called for March 20.

The meeting wasn't what the investors expected. The residents

and stockholders had quickly organized to save the brewery, hiring Detroit attorney Alfred E. May to represent them.

During the meeting, Chappell read the sale proposal and supported it with management's 10,000 shares.

But they were in for a shock.

The Free Press article said:

"Moments later, to cheers and shouts, May presented proxy cards for 42,000 shares that residents had turned over to him. He offered those shares against the sale, and another 1,092 no votes were cast personally by stockholders."

After the vote, the article stated that May called for resignations from Francis, Chappell and the

board.

Chappell ruled that out of order, and the board moved to close the brewery indefinitely.

At the April annual meeting there was a turnaround. Shareholders voted out the president and board and elected Otto Thede the new president and general manager.

But it was too late. Although the brewery reopened in June, buyers had already turned elsewhere.

In July 1966 the Sebewaing Brewing Co. filed for bankruptcy.

"When they changed the label and the taste of that beer, all hell broke loose and that was the end," Thede said.

Taschner said her husband enjoyed his job and regretted the closing.

"I know he wasn't too happy about it," Taschner said.

Thede's father died in 1983.

Both Otto Thede and Frank Taschner lived to see the brewery demolished in 1981.

Bill Thede lives next door to the vacant lot that once was home to the old brewery. He can no longer look out and see the old building from his kitchen window, but he has plenty of memorabilia to help recall the brewery's better days.

Tapper heads, labels, pencil containers, cigarette lighters, openers and shot glasses with the old labeling are among his collection. There also is a one-of-a-kind item Thede has tucked away — the whistle that blew at 7 a.m., noon and 5:30 p.m. each day.

Down at the village park is a monument dedicated to the old brewery, made possible by a joint effort of service clubs in the village. Its presence will keep the old brewery's history alive.

## The times sure have changed

BY SANDRA SUTTON

Tribune Staff Writer

A lot has changed since the late 19th century — here in the Upper Thumb and everywhere else. Just take a look through old editions of the newspaper to find out how.

In July 1881, women could buy hosiery for as little as a nickel. In April 1939, the price had risen to 58 cents. Today, the cost is about \$3.50 a pair of pantyhose and they still snag and run.

For \$1.60, a man could walk out of J. Aldrich Holmes' store in Caseville 113 years ago with a pair of the best plow shoes in the place. Today, that man would be looking at a price tag of about \$90 for a pair of steel-toed men's work boots.

Been to the grocery store lately?

A can of Burt Olney brand sweet peas cost 20 cents in January 1922. Today, a can of peas costs 69 cents.

A 2-pound pail of creamy peanut butter cost 23 cents in March 1922. An 18-ounce jar of creamy Jif costs \$2.29 today.

Shoppers could get three 24-ounce loaves of bread for a quarter in February 1939. One loaf of bread will run a shopper about \$1.19 today.

Fifty-five years ago, a 16-ounce bag of potato chips cost 29 cents.

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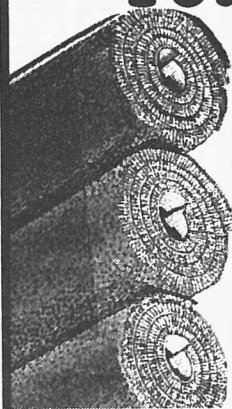
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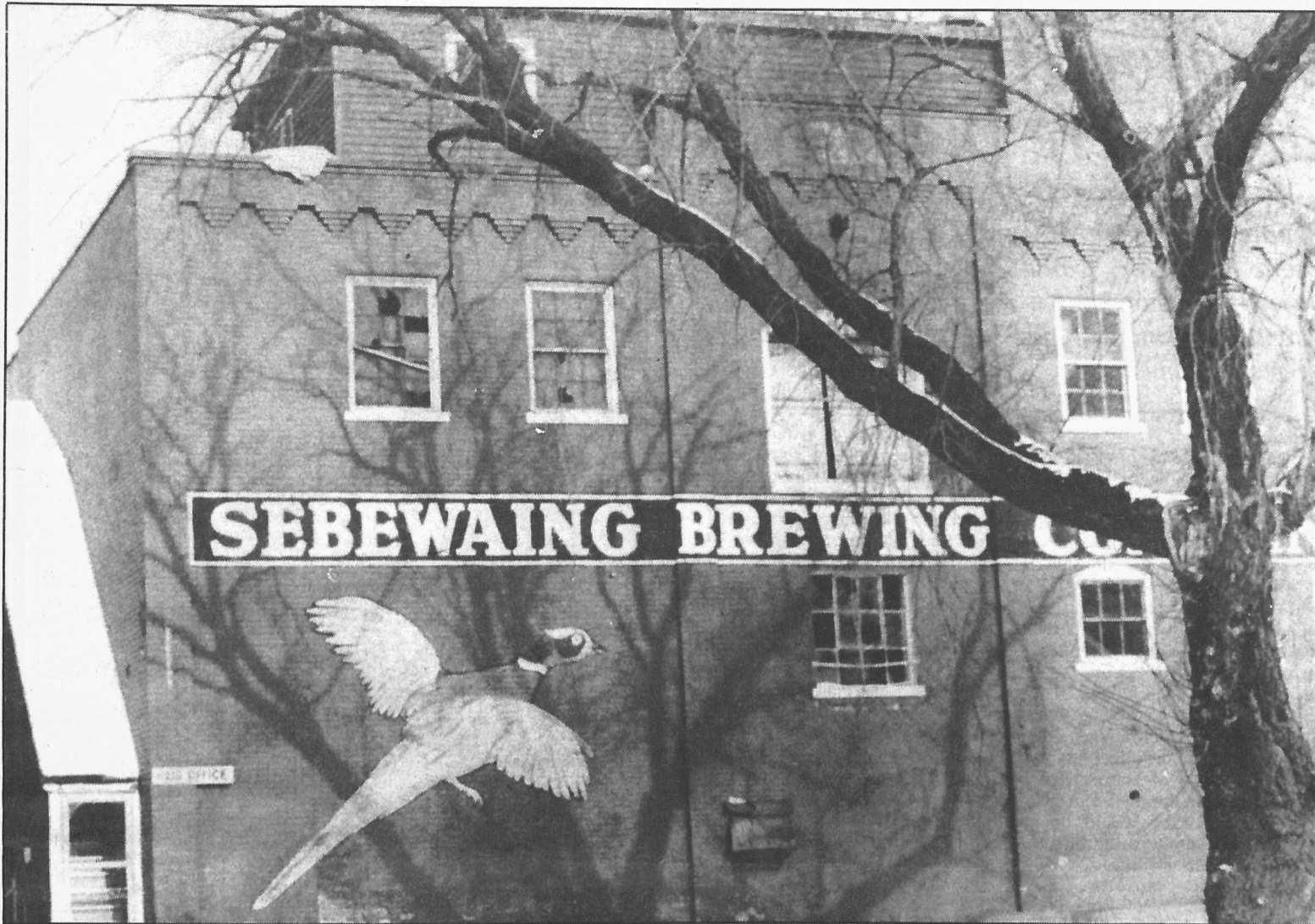
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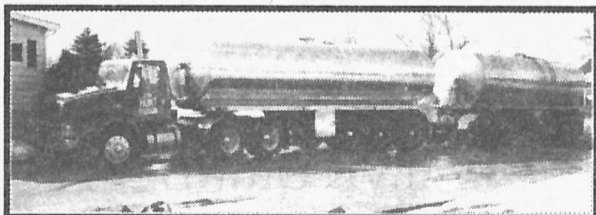
This is the old Sebewaing Brewing Co. on East Main Street, before it was demolished in 1981.

— Photo courtesy of Bill Thede

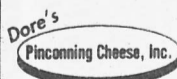
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