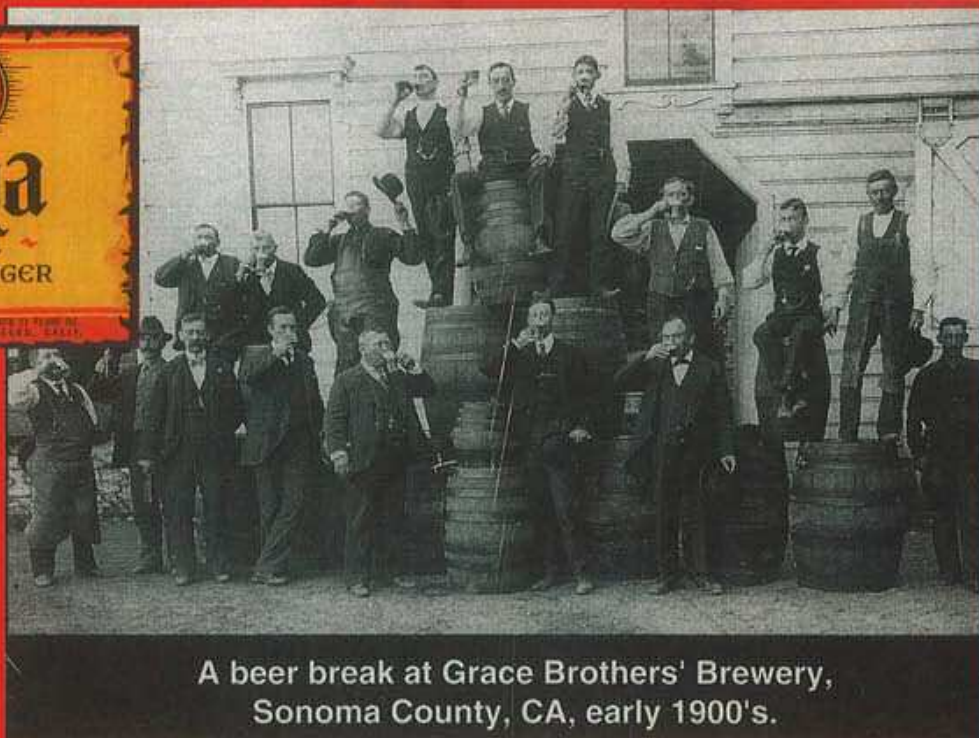


AMERICAN BREWERIANA

#124

July-August 2003

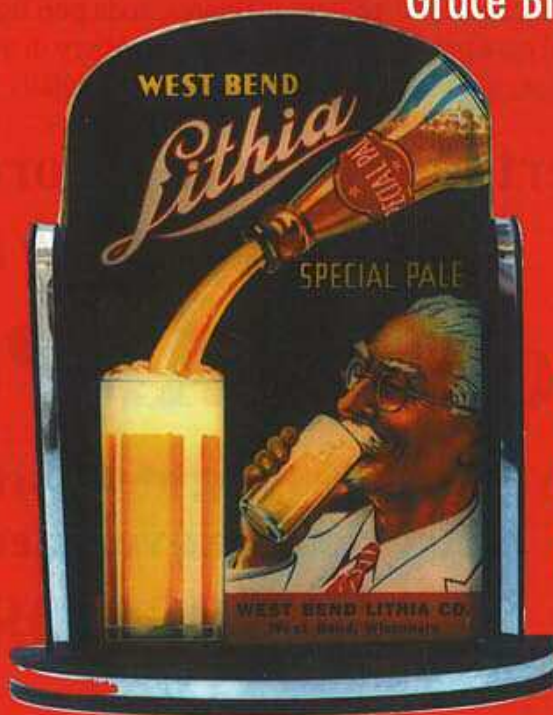


A beer break at Grace Brothers' Brewery, Sonoma County, CA, early 1900's.

Grace Bros. of California

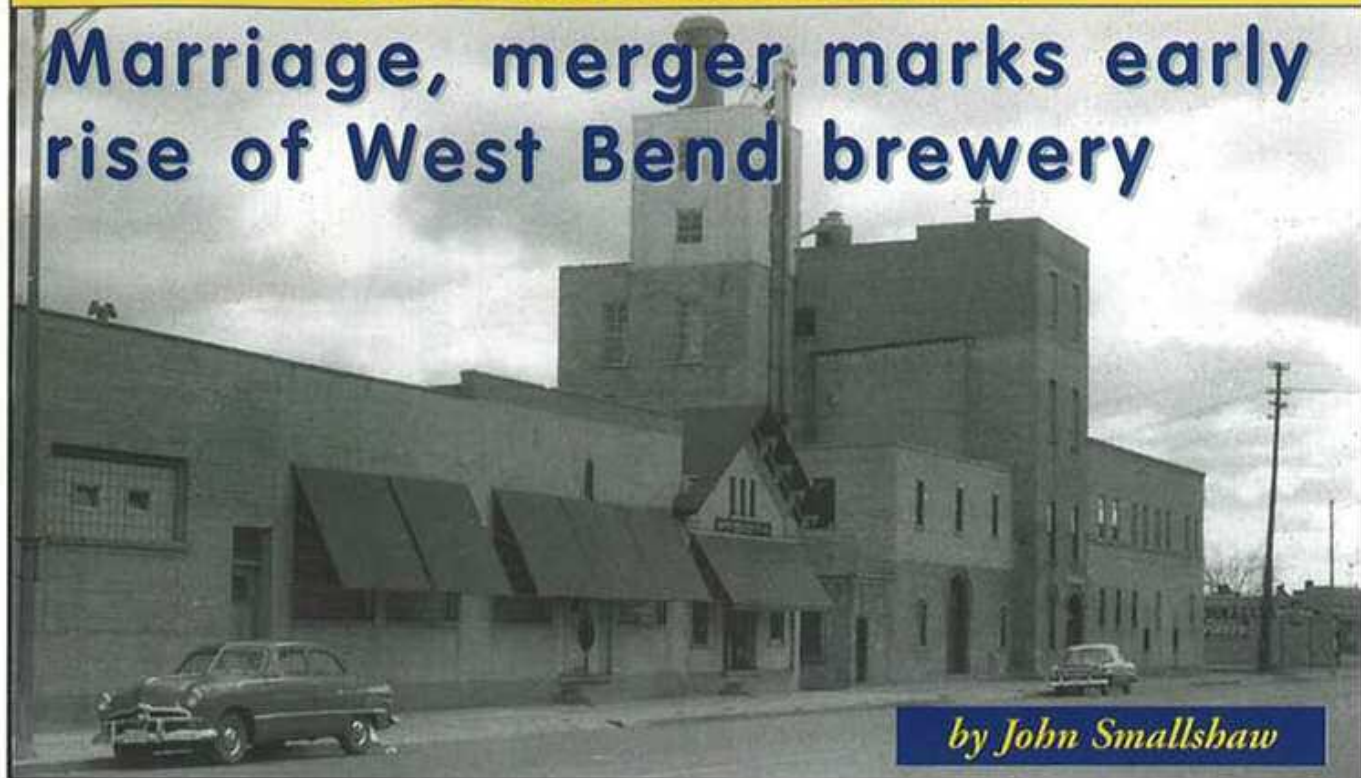


Bauernschmidt:
Brewers of Baltimore



West Bend-
Lithium was in
the water

Marriage, merger marks early rise of West Bend brewery



by John Smallshaw

Located just a short drive north of Milwaukee, the city of West Bend, Wisconsin, is probably best known for the range of consumer appliances which bear its name.

Brewing started early in this town of 28,000 inhabitants. The first brewery was built in 1848 by Balthasar Goetter, who ran the business for two years. Goetter had learned the coopers and brewing trade in his birthplace of Hesse, Germany. It was a small enterprise, being 24 x 36 feet on a two and one half story wood frame; and only the second brewery in Washington County. After suffering an accident when a wood splinter injured one eye, Goetter leased the brewery to Christopher Eckstein.

Goetter decided to leave the brewing business and went on to found a hotel, grain elevator, and mercantile exchange. His doctors had told him that brewing beer was just too dangerous for him as he might lose sight in the other eye.

A few years later, Goetter decided to sell the business to his two brothers-in-law, Charles and Stephen Mayer. Goetter had married their sister Elisabeth during a brief trip back to Germany in 1848.

Charles Mayer had been born in the Rhineland region of Prussia in 1826, and came to the U.S. twenty years later with his brother Stephen. He originally settled on government land and married Susannah Kastler in April of 1853.

They had three children; one of whom died in infancy. Mayer and his family left the farm and moved to West Bend in 1854 to enter the brewing business.

But times were hard and life expectancies short. Stephen Mayer passed away at the young age of 47 in 1867. The following year Charles decided to completely rebuild and enlarge the brewery.

The former wood frame building was now replaced by a brick structure. Mayer managed the company until his untimely death in August of 1871 when he was only 45 years old.

For the next four years the company was run by trustees for the benefit of the heirs and, in 1875, the company was reorganized as S.F. Mayer & Company. Charles' eldest son, Stephen F. Mayer, who had been born in 1854, took over the helm of the company. Stephen had studied at Notre Dame University in Indiana and had returned to West Bend to join the family business. By this time, the brewery measured 200 x 40 feet and had a yearly capacity of 3,500 barrels. The company

boasted of "a 24-horsepower engine being used and employment of seven men". The brewery was further expanded at a cost of \$40,000 to add a new double kiln and additional floor space. In 1877, Mayer married Isadore Pick of Schleisingerville, Wisconsin.

Ice production was also an important business for West Bend Brewing. The ice loading platform was operated by water power and had a daily capacity of 60 freight cars. The Armour and Swift meat packing companies in Chicago were the primary consumers of the ice.



Having a Lithia at Kowaskum, Wisconsin, 1900.

LITHIUM SALTS WERE IN THE WATER



In 1889, S.F. Mayer & Company merged with the other brewery in West Bend, which was located just across the street. The Eagle Brewery had been started by Christian Artzbacher in 1850, passed to Jensen & Co., and was now in the hands of its third owner, the Kuehlthau family.

The two merged companies were reorganized as the West Bend Brewing Co. with S.F. Mayer as President and Adam Kuehlthau as Treasurer. Kuehlthau eventually sold his interest in the company in 1900, and went on to purchase an ice company in Silver Lake, WI. His replacement was Andrew Pick, who had married Mayer's sister Emma. The Pick and Mayer families had now been joined together by a second marriage!

West Bend Brewing reached a capacity of 15,000 barrels and had added a malting plant with a production of 250,000 bushels per year. The company had now grown to 40 employees.

The company decided to build new production facilities onto the site of the smaller Eagle Brewery. The original Mayer site was turned into a malting operation.



Double blue bubbler, reverse on glass: "Es Gibt Kein Kopfweh" on bottle translates to "it does not give you a headache".



Signs on the old brewery in 1976

Around this time, the company released its famous Lithia Beer, named for the lithium carbonate present in the artesian brewing water. The beer's slogan was "The Beer That Satisfies". They also marketed the Old Timer's Brand with the interesting handle "Es gibt kein Kopfweh" ("It doesn't give any headaches"). In 1893, the local paper noted "many families in the northern part of Washington County use little tea or coffee, for Lithia beer has taken its place".

local legend. He was so dependable and prompt he was nicknamed "Old Faithful" because people could set their watches as he passed by on his daily rounds.

There was a close relationship between the employees and management, and West Bend Brewing was noted for its annual picnic with musicians, food, beverages, and games. Brewing in West Bend was a family enterprise.



Reverse on glass mirror, c. 1950

In 1900, the firm purchased a York artificial ice machine which made year-round brewing possible. Horses delivered the product to local taverns until 1910, when a Kissel truck was purchased. One of the drivers, William Waechter, became a

In 1911, Stephen Mayer became ill and Andrew Pick died a year later, so the company was put up for sale. Martin Walter journeyed from Appleton, Wisconsin, to look over the assets. His father, George, had emigrated from Germany and worked at Miller Brewing in Milwaukee. George Walter had wanted to run a brewery himself, and finally purchased the former Fries Brewery in Appleton to produce his famous Adler Brau Beer. Martin was one of nine Walter children and, in 1905, had been elected President of the Appleton brewery. The deal was concluded, and Martin and his brother Charles moved to West Bend to run the brewery.



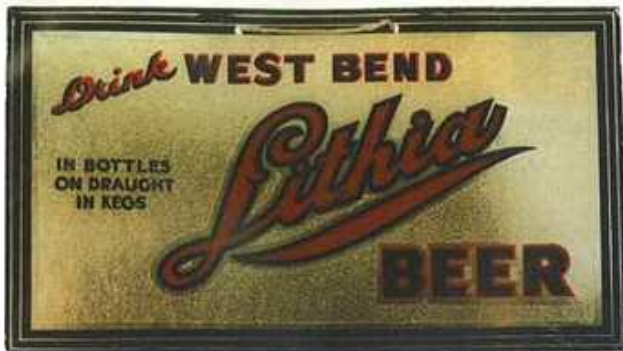
Milwaukee Valley, a contract beer for the Mutual Wholesale Liquor Co., of Los Angeles, CA.



Lighted shadow box reverse on glass, c. 1950



LITHIUM SALTS WERE IN THE WATER



After selling the business, Stephen Mayer's health recovered and he remained active in local enterprises. With another brother-in-law, Carl Pick, he organized the West Bend Malting Co. in 1911. He was later one of the founders of the West Bend Aluminum Company, which eventually evolved into the famous West Bend Corporation.

Prohibition arrived in Wisconsin in 1920, and the West Bend Brewing Company scrambled to stay alive. The name was changed to the West Bend Lithia Company. Their first attempt at a non-alcoholic beverage was "Lithia BeSure", basically the same formula as their beer without the alcohol. Unfortunately, local beer drinkers were not impressed. The local newspaper noted on June 15, 1921, it had "severe critics at home who kicked because the beverage didn't kick

them". Fortunately "BeSure" found enough converts further south in Milwaukee to allow the company to hobble along.

This success with "BeSure" encouraged the company to build a new bottle house, which included a new automatic washing and filling line. Lithia added a root beer to their line of products, as well as "Muhlberger", another non-intoxicating malt beverage which promised to "surpass BeSure in deliciousness".

In 1921, a fire destroyed most of the original West Bend site across from the present brewery. It was eventually razed in 1937.

With the election of Franklin Roosevelt in 1932, came a promise to end Prohibition. West Bend Lithia was one of the first of 27 breweries in Wisconsin to apply for a license. On April 7, 1933, cars began to arrive in front of the brewery and, by 10 a.m., hundreds of people filled the streets. A treasury agent had been assigned to the plant to ensure that no beer was sold prior to the magic hour of midnight.

West Bend Lithia had 10,000 cases and 5,000 barrels ready for the thirsty citizens of the town. At midnight, happy cries filled the air, and no one minded that a major snow storm had also hit the town, as the first bottles of Lithia were opened in 13 years.

The forties and fifties were good to Lithia, and the plant underwent a major modernization in 1953.

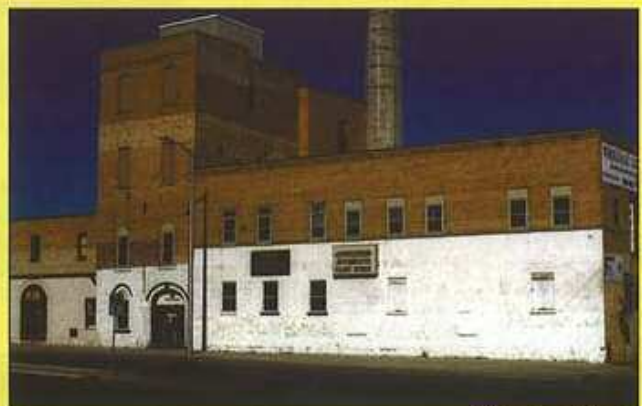


Aluminum serving tray c. 1940.

The brewery buildings today



Back view of the brewery



Lithia Brew House



Former Brewery Office



Bottling House

LITHIUM SALTS WERE IN THE WATER



The Charles M. Mayer house at 131 East Washington was built in 1875-76 and, at that time, was hailed as "one of the finest" in West Bend.

Production reached 45,000 barrels in the 1950s, and capacity was increased to 77,000 bbl. The presidency of the company passed from Charles Walter Sr. to his son, Charles Jr. Lithia aged their beer a long 10 weeks in 11 wooden tanks, each holding 240 barrels of beer.

But, the advent of mass marketing and television advertising was to prove devastating to the brewery in the 1960s. Sales began to fall and Lithia's customer base became older and older. As was the case with many local brewers, Lithia was simply unable to capture the imagination of younger drinkers.

In 1969, the company took a bold step when they signed a contract with Black Pride, Inc. of Chicago to contract brew 20,000 bbl per year. The brand, "Black Pride", was to be marketed on the south side of Chicago and was the brain child of Edward J McClellan, a senior director of the NAACP. Unfortunately, the brand never took hold, and could not extend the life of West Bend Lithia.

On June 1, 1972, the board of directors decided to dissolve the company. The brand names were sold to Walter Brewing of Eau Claire, where Charles Walter Jr. served on the board of directors. The Walter Brewery of Appleton, which Charles' grandfather had run, had closed only two months earlier.

There were 24 employees at the time of the closing of West Bend. It was devastating to the local economy. In the 25 years after Prohibition, Lithia had paid the city \$200,000 in real estate taxes, bought a million and a half dollars worth of barley from local farmers, had a three million dollar payroll, and paid nearly nine million dollars in state and federal taxes.

West Bend Old Timer's remained as a budget brand for Walter of Eau Claire until its closing in the early 90s.

While it was being brewed in Eau Claire, it won two medals at regional beer tasting contests. Charles Jr. eventually relocated to Eau Claire to run the Walter brewery until it was sold to Chicago businessman Michael Healy and operated as the Hibernia Brewery in its final years.

The West Bend Lithia buildings still stand on Main Street and are used by a variety of local businesses. Parts of the foundation of the original brewery which had burned are also still visible in the side of the hill across the street.

Thus ended 124 years of brewing history in West Bend, Wisconsin.



Chalk and particle board wall sign



Chuckies, a brand used only in 1954 when Charles Walter, Jr., was born. He is now a Catholic priest.



Reverse painted wall lighted wall sign c. 1960.



Note the prices on this early menu board



1950s bubbler sign

See related story on West Bend labels, page 32

John Smallshaw, ABA #0712, is a *Journal* staff writer whose major interest is the history and breweriana of Falstaff. You can visit his website at www.jadetech.com/~smallsha. The *Journal* is grateful to Tony Geiger, ABA #3815, of West Bend, Wisconsin, for providing photos from his collection of West Bend breweriana for this article. The author would like to thank the Washington County Historical Society for their kind assistance.

The Labels of West Bend

...with Bob Kay



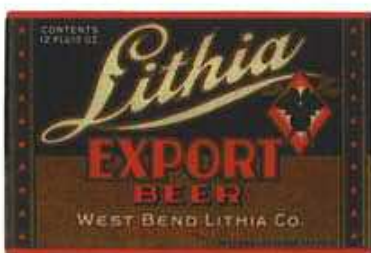
Pre-1911 "West Bend Brewing Co."



c. 1928 "West Bend Lithia Co."



c. 1933-38 "4.266 part Lithium"



c. 1938-50 "Export"



c. 1938-50 "Munchener"



c. 1970



c. 1950-60



c. 1938-50 Quart label



c. 1938-50

About Lithium

I'm not sure of the pros and cons of Lithium Carbonate in water. Obviously, the West Bend water had it, and the brewery decided to exploit it. Their Lithia brand name soon became dominate and, by 1911, the company name was changed from West Bend Brewing Co. to West Bend Lithia Co. Prepro and early prohibition era labels boasted "The Water used for this brew contains 7.027 parts Lithium Carbonate." Curiously, the lithium content seemed to drop to 4.266 ppm by the mid 1920's and by 1936 mention of the lithium content was dropped from labels. However, the flagship brand, as well as the company name stuck, with Lithia until closing in 1972. Several label design changes are pictured.

Old Timer's

Old Timer's Lager Beer was developed as a second, probably premium brand. My earliest label suggests the brand was introduced in the late 1930's. The label graphics feature four gentleman with lidded steins of beer. Obviously, they are enjoying the moment. The German wording under the graphic in early labels translated to, "It doesn't give a headache". This wording was later changed to English, consistent with wartime efforts to de-Germanize their image, with a new message, "The Best of the Better Beer." This theme seemed to be a winner, as the brand endured to the end with several color changes, but without changing the basic graphic. One gets the impression, from labels from the 1960-70s, that Old Timer's eventually surpassed Lithia in popularity and as the mainstay brand. West Bend's brands passed to Walter Brewing Company, Eau Claire upon closing, but only Old Timer's got serious play. Of course, Walters had to change the name from West Bend Old Timer's to Wisconsin Old Timer's but the identifying graphic was retained.



Late 1930s - German wording

Old Timer's



c. 1940-50 English slogan, blue border



IRTTP statement gone; yellow border



c. 1950s brown border



West Bend redesigned label 1970s



c. 1972 Wisconsin Old Timers after name acquired by Walters at Eau Claire

Seasonal Beers

In addition to Lithia and Old Timer's, West Bend went in for 'seasonals' in a big way. Christmas Holiday and Springtime Bock brews seemed to have been annual offerings. During the late 1920's, specialty brews for Easter and the Fourth of July were tried. This was likely an unsuccessful effort to broaden the product line during the dark days of prohibition. Later on, the seasonals served to spice-up the product line with bright and colorful label graphics - - a pleasing change of pace for the customer.



c. 1928 Prohibition Holiday Brew



c. 1933-36 Christmas



c. 1945-50 Christmas



c. 1960-70 Christmas



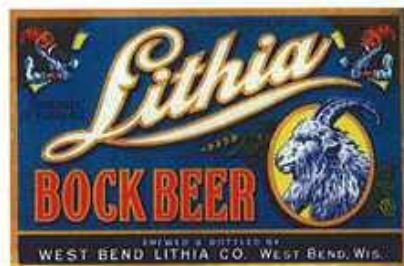
c. 1928 Fourth of July



c. 1928 Prohibition Easter Brew



c. 1933-36 Bock



c. 1945-50 Bock



c. 1938-45 Christmas Dark

Bob Kay, ABA #1383, is a leading expert on beer labels and their history, and a valuable asset to the *Journal* and hobby. Bob resides in Batavia, Illinois.

