



GOTTBERG BREWERY - FRESH ON TAP		ABV%
		(Alcohol by Volume)
ALL AMERICAN LAGER		4.0%
PLATTE RIVER PALE ALE		5.6%
TIN LIZZIE GERMAN WHEAT		4.6%
DARK STAR BROWN ALE		5.2%
OATMEAL STOUT		
BATCH 665 I.P.A.		5.2%

Gottberg Brew Pub resembles a Behlen Manufacturing grain bin.



NEBRASKA SIX PACK

HALF A DOZEN BREWERIES TAPPING INTO HISTORY

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALAN J. BARTELS

NEBRASKA CRAFT BEER drinkers must see their glasses as half full. There are more than 30 craft breweries across the state today. Each is different, but one thing many breweries share is a taste for tapping into history to make their new brews. Here's a sudsy sampling of six historic Nebraska breweries and their history-making beers.



SCRATCHTOWN BREWING, ORD

With plenty of Ogallala aquifer spring water bubbling up from the ground, there's no place like the Sandhills when it comes to wetting your whistle. That same sweet

Sandhills H2O filling the Loup River at Ord is the basis for the brews flowing from Scratchtown Brewing Co. This brewery on Ord's town square helps beer aficionados from far and wide to scratch their itch for tasty craft brews.

Like many breweries, this one began with a home brewer, a garage and some friends, but its inspiration dates back more than 140 years.

A crew led by General E.O.C. Ord in 1873 to survey a new town site were miserable after spring rains bolstered a plague of mosquitoes and biting flies. When asked what to name the community, the general replied, "Name it Scratchtown."

When Ord residents Mike Klimek, Jade Stunkel and Caleb Pollard decided

to open their brewery, they wanted the name and spirit of the place to connect to the people of Ord's past. "It took a lot of guts and gumption for the early settlers to come out here and create what we live in today," said Pollard, self-proclaimed "chief mover of units" for Scratchtown. "We resurrected the Scratchtown name to honor them."

Before the brewery kettles started boiling in October 2013, if Klimek wasn't at his bank job, his wife, Julie, could find him in the garage tweaking beer recipes or sharing his home brew with friends. She works at the brewery along with Stunkel's wife, Michelle, Pollard's wife, Christina, and three other staff. "Mike has been truly touched by the support the community of



“Sandhills Gold” and “Corncob,” a smoked cream ale, tap into area history, rural life-style and agricultural heritage.

From near the fire pit on the brewery’s patio, Pollard points to a flagstone across the street at the Valley County courthouse. It reads “Virtue Developed the Valley.”

“We want to honor that heritage and be new pioneers of the future,” Pollard said.

KINKAIDER BREWING, BROKEN BOW

Three decades after Ord was named for the general, the Kinkaid Act went into effect to settle the Sandhills. Broken Bow was inundated with people filing for land. They became known as Kinkaiders.

One hundred and ten years later, throngs of people are flowing to Custer County for a new Kinkaid era of sorts – Kinkaid Brewing Co. opened in late 2014. A black-and-white photo capturing that frenzied free land scene from the last century hangs on the wall and is only one way this pioneering brewery connects to history.

At the backlit bar in the tap room with plenty of rough sawn wood, wrought iron and hammered copper, tap handles made from century-old Kinkaid hedge posts dispense beers with names steeped in Nebraska history. “Hiram’s Bones” is a porter named for frontiersman Hiram Scott, who lent his moniker to Scotts Bluff after his remains were found nearby. “Frame the Butcher” honors Custer County photographer Solomon Butcher, best known for framing up and capturing scenes of the sod house era. “Devil’s Gap” is named for the Custer County spot where Mitchell and Ketchum were hanged and burned for supposedly stealing cattle from Print Olive.

Dan Hodges, Kinkaid’s brewmaster and part owner, spent a decade developing the devilishly good jalapeno ale while brewing

in his garage in Thedford. “I tweaked the recipe for 10 years and stuck with it until it turned out right,” Hodges said.

That pioneering spirit led Kinkaid to be the first Nebraska brewery to offer a “crawler” – an oversize aluminum can filled and sealed right in the taproom.

At the end of his shift, another of Kinkaid’s owners, Cody Schmick, pops the top on a tallboy of their “4 County Pale Ale” and settles in on Kinkaid’s large deck to take in the scenic view of farm fields, cattle and hills. It’s land that Kinkaiders made their living on a century ago.

“There’s really a strong spirit of entrepreneurship here,” Schmick said. “The people here have been building upon it since the Kinkaid days, and it’s one of the strongest elements making Custer County the great place to live and work that it is today.”

LOOP BREWING, MCCOOK

Dozens of trains loop along the Burlington line and through McCook each day, just as they have since the railroad founded the town in 1882. To patrons chilling inside Loop Brewing Co., the insulated walls of the century-old former railroad icehouse the brewery occupies are so thick that whistles from passing trains are barely noticeable.

Fruit, vegetables, spices and beer shipping to and from Chicago chilled in this massive brick warehouse just feet from the tracks in McCook’s early days. Today Loop Brewing stores its own brews in an original cooler here with the year 1912 stamped on the door.

Restaurateur Adam Siegfried, who also owns Coppermill Steakhouse in McCook, teamed up with home brewers Tyler Ray Loop and his wife, Tyler Sue Loop, in the business



Craft beer enthusiasts find enjoyment all over Nebraska. At left, beer making is a hands-on occupation for Ralph Allen and the staff of Blue Blood Brewing in Lincoln.

Ord has given us,” Julie Klimek said. “He’s brewed more than 40 styles of beer in the last two years, and he is thrilled that so many locals are becoming craft beer fans.”

Scratchtown’s appeal goes beyond Nebraska state borders. Nearly 4,000 brews were entered in the 2015 U.S. Open Beer Championship. Scratchtown’s Black Eye Imperial Porter took top honors in the American Imperial Porter category.

Even before Scratchtown opened, nearly 130 fans forked over cash to become founding members of the brewery that has a biting sand fly for a logo and wild Loup River hops crawling up its street-side patio. That street is blocked off during weekly farmers markets and brewery-sponsored food drives and events like the Darkest Day Beer Festival in December and Scratchtoberfest each autumn.

Beers like “The General,” a wheat beer/pale ale cross, the Bohemian blonde ale



ROOT BEER BOYS OF ORD

WHEN THE ORD Farmers Market opens each summer Friday afternoon, the line forms first at the C&E’s Olde Tyme Root Beer booth.

The “C” in C&E’s is 11-year-old Calen Pollard. The “E” is his brother Elijah, age 8. When they asked about selling something at the market, the boys’ father, Caleb Pollard of Scratchtown Brewery, suggested they create a business plan. Root beer was their product of choice.

“We use cane sugar,” Calen said. “That’s what makes it old-timey.” They rent their father’s old home brew kit and pay 1-percent interest, learning how to run a real business along the way. “Once the keg is sanitized it only takes about an hour to make,” Elijah said. With plans for new bikes, cars and college, Ord’s root beer boys are already talking about expanding. “If we make enough money we could open a small shop and sell orange and grape pop and root beer,” Calen said.

“They put their own money in and purchased the booth, too, said their mother, Christina Pollard. “There’s a lot of good lessons being learned.”

Customers have learned to get in line. The 5 gallons the boys brew each week goes fast.

that specializes in the most classic of combinations – pizza and beer.

Cooking runs in the family for Siegfried. “I sort of stole the recipes from my grandmothers,” Siegfried said. “One of them measured everything and was very traditional. The other just tossed in whatever was available and didn’t measure a thing. I tweaked their recipes and made them my own.”

Loop’s brick-oven chicken alfredo pizza is its most popular. The “Irish Red” beer, with hints of burnt sugar and roasted grain, goes well with it. Cascade hops in “Pale Ale” give the beer a citrus quality making for perfect enjoyment on a hot

day. And when it's cold, drunken cheese-burger soup sells out quickly.

The brewery uses former dairy and winemaking equipment that it pieced together in a Frankenbrew setup and just finally started brewing with a kettle actually made for beer.

Tyler Ray and Tyler Sue have been training with traveling brewmaster Tom Hennessy of Colorado Boy Brewery, the man who literally wrote the book on setting up and operating commercial microbreweries.

Siegfried and the Loops have yet to discover exactly how old the historic ice-house building is. The only significant event they know about its history came from a 90-year-old woman who stopped in for beer and pizza. Her brother was killed in here in the 1920s when a block of ice fell on him.

"Other than that, we don't know much about the place," Siegfried said, "but we're making our own history now."



SCHILLING BRIDGE, PAWNEE CITY

While beer was chilling in that railroad ice house in McCook, the heat was rising in a circus train car on the Rock Island Railroad near Pawnee City. The fire that erupted when a zookeeper tripped killed three elephants, a bear, a zebra, two cows and a camel. The menagerie was buried near the tracks.

Two of the pachyderms were later exhumed and are displayed in Elephant Hall in Lincoln. Schilling Bridge Winery and Microbrewery is located near the scene of those animals' demise, and the brewery's "Zulu American Pale Ale" commemorates the tragic event of 1904.

The Zulu car was the first train car behind the locomotive. It was the most desirable place to sit because it experienced the least smoke. "Passengers would bribe the conductors with growlers of their finest home brew to get a seat in that car," said Schilling Bridge's Kelly Bletscher.

Her grandfather, John "Duggan" Kelley, was the inspiration for "Duggan's Roasted Wheat." Kelley was a politician and speech writer for President John F.



Pizzas and beer go together at Loop Brewing in McCook. Friends toast the good life at Scratchtown Brewing in Ord. Brewing at Schilling Bridge in Pawnee City is a family affair.

The cave was eventually sealed... but curious party-goers shimmied in at will.

Kennedy. He wasn't a beer maker, "just a great Irishman who lived up to drinking," Bletscher said.

Her parents, Mike and Sharon Schilling, made history when they added the brewery to their winery in 2007, becoming the first combination farm winery and microbrewery in the United States. The business is a family affair with Bletscher's brother, Dallas Schilling, working in sales and brewing the family's beer.

"My three girls love to come out here and pick grapes and be part of this," Bletscher said. "We're working hard to build our family legacy and then hand it off to them one day. That makes all of the unpaid extra hours worth it."



GOTTBERG BREW PUB, COLUMBUS

More than a few burgeoning beer enthusiasts sneaked their first illicit sip of bitter beer while peering out from inside a grain bin. For those longing for that nostalgic feel but with better beer, there's Gottberg Brew Pub in Columbus.

Family connections for owner Gordon "Mac" Hull are the reason the pub inside the Gottberg Building on 13th Street looks and feels like one of Behlen Manufacturing's giant grain bins. Dusters restaurant, also owned by Hull, is in the same building.

Fascinated by machinery, Max Gottberg

became an auto mechanic. He was the third person in Columbus to own an automobile and was a friend of Henry Ford. After Gottberg built his stately two-story automobile plant in Columbus in 1920, Ford began sending the parts for his Model T cars to Columbus for assembly.

The same elevator that lifted cars to the upper level now hauls grain to the top floor where the three-tier brewing process begins. The brews are later pumped into brite tanks in the basement before being kegged and served in the restaurant and grain bin pub on the main floor.

A Model T grill and headlights hanging behind the bar, and beers like "Rumble Seat Stout" and "Tin Lizzie," the nickname for the Model T, preserve the memory of the Gottberg era.

"From the cornices atop the building to the offices of Dorothy Lynch Homestyle Dressing that is also on the top floor, there is history throughout the building," said Eryn Roberts, general manager of Dusters. "This may have been a Ford plant, but today this is the Cadillac of breweries."



BLUE BLOOD BREWING, LINCOLN

Cops have chased robbers since Lincoln's first days. Former capital city policeman turned brewer Brian Podwinski is working with outlaws in a new business endeavor, but this is no case of a good cop gone bad.

Podwinski started his Blue Blood Brewing Co. in 2012 in east-central Lincoln, and he's about to take the business underground, literally.

Legends say Robber's Cave, the sandstone labyrinth under present day 10th and Van Dorn streets, was sacred to the Pawnee. Other tales tell of settlers sheltering there during Indian raids and that the cave was a stop for slaves on the Underground Railroad. An on-the-run Jesse James supposedly eluded capture in the cavern, but there is no proof. One piece of history that is fact is that Lincoln Brewery expanded

THE ART OF BEER & vice versa



BEER AFICIONADOS LOOK forward to Oktoberfest, that annual celebration of artistic brews. Now, those beer nuts can join artists and art lovers for the cleverly named art show with a hoppy twist: Hoptober Pressed.

Porridge Papers of Lincoln gets the best beer-themed designs from artists statewide. Favorites are printed on paper pressed from the spent grain of local breweries. On the first Friday of October – while the Bolzen Beer Band plays, beer brats sizzle and local

breweries serve their brews – the beer-paper letterpress prints are shown and sold.

"I enjoy craft beer," said the paper company's owner, Christopher James. "It's fun to collaborate with Nebraska artists and our local breweries. This event celebrates beer and art."

Enthusiasts of both now have an artful fall event they can all look forward to.

THE 'GOOD LIFE'

"I tweaked the recipe for 10 years and stuck with it until it turned out right." – Dan Hodges, Kinkaider Brewing



the cave in the late 1860s and stored barrels of beer down there.

The cave was eventually sealed, but vandals, trespassers and curious party-goers shimmied in at will.

After being sealed for years, engineers have deemed the once-condemned property safe for patrons. Podwinski is building a new taproom, brewery and restaurant on top of the cave.

Ralph Allen is in sales for Blue Blood and remembers that party scene of old.

Sort of. "Every time I'd find out about a party in the cave it would just be getting busted as I'd get there," Allen said. "Now, I'll be able to drink down there whenever I want." Patrons will join the subterranean party during special events.

With a nearly constant year-round temperature of 50-55 degrees, Blue Blood plans to age a line of specialty beers down there, too. What's that name of the new brew? "Outlaw," of course. How's that for tapping into history? 🍷

Eryn Roberts of Gottberg Brew Pub helps carry on Columbus' long history of beer making.



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