

## Subterranean Brew by Dennis J. Polley

Caves: they crisscross much of subterranean St. Louis, especially Southside, holding historical secrets and the glorious past of St. Louis 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century beer brewers. That is where we are going exploring to do a little “beer spelunking.” These limestone caves were used by brewers to ferment and store beer in a consistently-cool environment (about 50-55 degrees) prior to the introduction of artificial refrigeration. Please note that all the caves below were explored or attempted to be explored by the husband-wife cave explorer team Hubert and Charlotte Rother.



The Lemp Brewery Cave was discovered by Adam Lemp around 1840, running along what is now South Broadway. Lemp needed this large cave for his expanding business, driven by his introduction of lager-style beer at his Western brewery by Cherokee St. Lemp actually decorated a portion of cave, erecting a small theater and swimming pool! The same cave ran below the Chatillon-DeMenil Mansion and was used for various cold-storage needs by Dr.

Nicholas DeMenil. The cave was further utilized by the Minnehaha Brewery. It was later renamed Cherokee Cave and used as a tourist attraction. The unfortunate intrusion of Highway 55 ended that and destroyed a section of the cave. A large portion of it still remains and is sometime professionally explored.

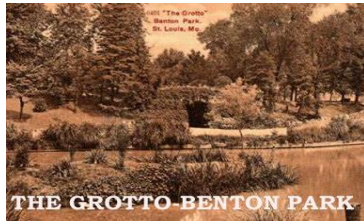


Uhrig's Cave, located around Locust St. and Washington Ave. was bought by the Uhrig brothers Ignatz and Andrew in 1852. Its actual address appears to have been Jefferson Ave. and Olive St. The brothers constructed their brewery there and physically enlarged the cave. At the cave's entrance, they laid out a huge beer garden that provided beer and music. The front of the cave was also

used on hot days for entertainment in a cool, comfortable environment. It was very popular. The Uhrigs operated the cave from the 1850s to the 1880s, then it was used by multiple owners for various purposes. By 1908, the cave was abandoned. In the 1920s, the cave saw bootleg beer activity and may have been a Prohibition-Era speakeasy! Jefferson Bank & Trust Co. began their building on the site of the cave, pretty much ending its existence. Parts of it still exist, sealed off.



The Cherokee Brewing Co. existed on Cherokee St. from 1866 to 1899. Its cave was rumored to be part of the Lemp Brewery Cave. In 1964, the Rothers entered the old Stock House to get in the cave. A trap door in the floor theoretically led to cave, but it was locked, ending that effort. In a happy turn of events, in 2014, Earthbound Beer rehabbed the old Stock House at 2724 Cherokee St. and excavated the original lagering cellars. The building is back to its original use and part of the revitalized Cherokee St. scene. A great site saved!



English Cave acquired its name when Ezra English began his brewery in the cave in the Benton Park neighborhood. It eventually became the St. Louis Brewery in 1839. It was used over the years as a winery and for growing mushroom before being sealed. The pond in Benton Park used to accidentally drain into the cave now and then. In 2020, an effort by the English Cave Steering Committee rediscovered the cave after being “lost” for more than 100 years!

After its discovery in the late 1850s, the Sidney St. Brewery Cave, located near the street bearing the same name, hosted multiple breweries. Some of those included Whittman & Rost Weis Beer Co, Theo. Schwer & Co. Brewery, Excelsior Brewery, Pittsburg Brewery, Jackson Brewer and Schlop Brewery. The Green Tree Brewery was the final building on the area, but it was demolished in 1956, and the debris was dumped into the cave which was then sealed off.

And, of course, there is the Anheuser-Busch Cave. It was initially discovered by German brewer George Schneider in the 1850s. The start-up brewery became the Bavarian Brewery when Eberhard Anheuser began financial backing. And of course, the Busch family got involved. Beyond using it for brewing purposes, it was used to safely store arms from the nearby Arsenal during the Civil War. When not sealed off, the cave was explored in the 1960s, again by Mr. and Mrs. Rother. It was found to contain steam pipes and mechanical systems. The cave itself had been modified with masonry arches and such. What’s left of it is still down there!

There are more local brewery caves and information which is beyond the available space in our Newsletter. For more data, check out the books mentioned below. Also, just for fun, look into “Wetter than the Mississippi-Prohibition in St. Louis and Beyond” by Robbi Courtaway. There is a huge amount of data on the internet, including a video of the rediscovery of English Cave.

(I am typed out—think I’ll have a beer! Too bad I don’t have a cave.)

(Most of the research done for this article was in the terrific book “Lost Caves of St. Louis” by Hubert & Charlotte Rother, publisher: Virginia Publishing Co. Another excellent source was “St. Louis Brews-The History of Brewing in the Gateway City” by Henry Herbst, Don Roussin, Kevin Kious, and Cameron Collins: publisher Reedy Press.)