



★ American Brewing History Initiative ★

Background: Using Beer to Study American History

The history of brewing is an effective and engaging lens through which to explore our nation's most important stories. Beer sheds light on histories of immigration, urbanization, business innovation, advertising, evolving consumer tastes, changing gender roles and much more.

Beer and brewing have been central to American culture since before the nation's founding. Archaeological evidence indicates that Native Americans were the first to brew in North America. Women and enslaved people brewed beer in the Colonial home, and in the mid-1800s immigrant German entrepreneurs transformed brewing into a major American industry. But Prohibition and industry consolidation in the early to mid-1900s reduced the stylistic diversity of American beer. Adventurous homebrewers brought the first hints of change in the 1960s. Microbreweries, then "craft" breweries, followed. The craft beer revolution would reshape the global beer industry and consumers' palates alike.

Project Overview

The **American Brewing History Initiative** at the National Museum of American History documents and collects the story of beer and brewing in America, with a special focus on home brewing and craft beer. Made possible by a gift from the Brewers Association, the initiative allows the Museum to build an archive of American brewing history benefiting scholars and the public.

Previously, the Museum held rich, yet limited, collections related to American brewing technology and advertising from the late 1800s and early 1900s. The Museum's initiative, led by curator Theresa McCulla, builds on these collections through research and collecting trips throughout the country. In addition, recorded oral histories preserve the voices of those who have shaped the course of American brewing in recent decades. Along the way, McCulla shares the project's findings with the public via the Museum's social media platforms, exhibitions and public events, including the annual Smithsonian Food History Weekend.



The goal of the initiative is to create a permanent, prominent role for the story of American beer and brewing in the Museum’s archival collections, public programming and exhibitions.

Collecting Efforts

The Museum invites donations of objects, documents and stories that tell a comprehensive history of beer and brewing in America, in every region of the country.

The people whose stories we wish to preserve include:

- Professional brewers, homebrewers, brewery employees and managers
- Agricultural producers, maltsters and those in related industries supporting brewers
- Leaders responsible for shaping consumer tastes, e.g. brew pub owners, chefs and advertisers
- Industry members who are diverse in terms of gender, race, orientation, ability and age.
- Consumers and members of collectors’ associations
- Teachers, writers, media members covering beer; historians and archivists preserving the history of brewing

While the Museum is focused on collecting home and craft brewing history — movements dating from the 1960s to the present — we are also interested in

exceptional items from earlier historical eras. Donated items must tell a story. Some represent everyday life; others represent extraordinary experiences. Examples of potential object donations include:

- Recipes, brewing logs or brewing equipment of brewmasters and homebrewers
- Newsletters/communications of home brewing clubs, especially pre-internet
- Business plans and advertising material
- Innovative ideas, e.g. patents/object prototypes, significant to production and marketing advances
- Objects demonstrating the transition from home to craft brewing

Join Us

Be a part of this exciting and important initiative. If you are interested in donating an item or would like additional information, please contact Theresa McCulla by writing to mccullat@si.edu. To stay up to date on the progress of the American Brewing History Initiative, visit s.si.edu/BrewHistory and follow [@theresamccu](https://twitter.com/theresamccu), [#BeerHistory](https://twitter.com/BeerHistory) and [#SmithsonianFood](https://twitter.com/SmithsonianFood) on social media.

About Us: The Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History, which opened in 1964, preserves and protects an unparalleled collection of more than 1.8 million treasures. It holds iconic objects such as the Star-Spangled Banner, President Abraham Lincoln’s top hat and Dorothy’s ruby slippers from *The Wizard of Oz*. Through incomparable collections, rigorous research and dynamic public outreach, the Museum explores the infinite richness of American history, helping approximately 4 million annual visitors understand the past in order to make sense of the present and shape a more humane future.

Below: American brewery sign; wooden spoon of homebrewer Charlie Papazian; hops growing in the Museum’s Victory Garden; Sierra Nevada Pale Ale label

