

JACOB SCHMIDT BREWING COMPANY HISTORIC DISTRICT

Part 1

DISTRICT DESCRIPTION



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The Jacob Schmidt Brewing Company Historic District straddles West 7th Street 1.5 miles southwest of downtown St. Paul. It is roughly bounded by Jefferson Avenue on the north, Oneida and Erie Streets on the east, James Avenue on the south, and Toronto Street on the west, excluding a small triangle enclosed by West 7th Street, Palace Avenue, and Toronto Street. Fort Road, as West 7th Street was known through its first century, was the major artery connecting downtown St. Paul, the Upper Landing settlement, and Fort Snelling.

The historic district encompasses 54 acres of land in an area of mixed residential, commercial, and light industrial use. Extant buildings and structures historically involved in beer production and packaging are confined to the south side of West 7th Street (Numbers 1-4). Most important of these are four freestanding complexes: the Main Brewery Complex (property number 1, spanning from the boiler house on the north to the malt terminal on the south), the Bottling Plant (property number 2), the Office Building (property number 3), and the Keg House (property number 4). Four other contributing properties south of West 7th Street are: a concrete retaining wall and iron fence connected to the bottling complex (property number 5), a detached well house (property number 6), an advertising billboard (property number 7) and several railroad track spurs on-grade (not numbered). These are enumerated in order of construction of their first building component. After the period of historic significance, a handful of modern additions were made to the Main Brewery Complex, the Bottling Plant, and the Keg House. Two additional well houses were also built. Finally, the ethanol operation of the early 2000s added a scattering of structures to the sound end of the plat and one building addition to the Keg House.

Beneath and stretching both north and south of West 7th Street are the Underground Cellars (property number 8), comprised of the interconnecting fermentation and storage cellars and passageways of the Main Brewery Complex and its predecessor on West 7th Street.

North of West 7th Street are an additional seven historic properties: a sprawling Delivery Vehicle Complex (property number 11) and six residential properties originally owned by the brewery or its officials (property numbers 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, and 15). These also are enumerated in order of construction of their first building component. Modern, noncontributing accessory structures north of West 7th Street include private automotive garages, a utility building, and a gazebo.

The district contains 26 properties, of which 15 are contributing and 11 are noncontributing. It has a high degree of integrity, retaining all of its key buildings from the Schmidt-Bremer era of 1901-1955 and fragments of buildings from the Stahlmann era preceding Schmidt. Nearly all of the alterations and demolitions occurring within the period of significance were done in the course of improving or expanding the brewery and its thematically related buildings. Those occurring in recent times have not harmed the fundamental integrity of any of the historic structures. In addition, brewery architects within the period of significance showed an unusual degree of respect for the work of their predecessors, creating a complex of buildings and structures with a remarkable degree of homogeneity considering the numerous phases of construction.

DESIGNATION CRITERIA

The St. Paul Administrative Code establishes seven criteria for the designation of heritage preservation sites (§73.05). The Jacob Schmidt Brewing Company Historic District meets criteria 1, 5, and 7.

Designation Criterion 1 (§73.05(a)(1)) states that the Commission shall consider the following about the district:

Its character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City of St. Paul, the State of Minnesota, or the United States.

The brewery industry played a leading role in several facets of St. Paul's development as an urban center: the growth of neighborhoods remote from the city core, the attraction and employment of a large population of German immigrants, and the emergence of the city as a major producer of goods consumed by the expanding tier of northern states to the west. Numerous spurs from the brewery to a nearby line of the Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Omaha Railroad aided the growth of its western market.

As a mark of the brewery's economic importance to St. Paul, it led the way in the city's emergence from each of the major economic depressions between 1858 and 1935. Stahlmann's building campaigns of 1858 and 1880 were among the first entrepreneurial initiatives after the panics of 1857 and 1875, respectively. An even more severe depression swept the country with the Panic of 1893. Building activity and commercial enterprise entered a trough from which they were not to emerge until 1901. In that year, \$600,000 was expended in manufacturing plants, with all but \$100,000 of this sum going to brewery expansions and rebuilding at Schmidt's brewery and Hamm's brewery on the East Side. Finally, in the Great Depression of the 1930s, Schmidt Brewery's return to production at the end of Prohibition again was at the forefront of renewed growth and investment in St. Paul's commercial and industrial sector.

Designation Criterion 5 (§73.05(a)(5)) states that the Commission shall consider the following about the district:

Its identification as the work of an architect, engineer, or master builder whose individual work has influenced the development of the City of St. Paul.

The main brewery complex represents the masterwork of one of the nation's leading brewery architects, Bernard Barthel, which was carried forward by his local follower, Walter W. Magee, and leading St. Paul architect Charles A. Hausler.

Bernard Barthel designed and engineered the Jacob Schmidt Brewery at the beginning of an illustrious career. It was his first independent commission, and it remained the signature accomplishment of his career.

Barthel's signature as designer of Midwest breweries was a stylistically unified building mass recalling the Romanesque castles of the Rhineland. His breweries were also renowned for incorporating the latest technologies in ventilation and refrigeration, all developed from the innovations of his renowned mentor and former employer, Frederick W. Wolff.

Walter W. Magee, hired to remodel and expand the brewery the year of Barthel's death, followed

Barthel's lead as both designer and engineer before launching into a Moderne aesthetic to which he applied a distinctive industrial edge.

Designation Criterion 7 (§73.05(a)(7)) states that the Commission shall consider the following about the district:

Its unique location or singular physical characteristic representing an established familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or City of St. Paul.

Foreign tourists of the Upper Mississippi River Valley during the latter half of the 19th century often remarked on the resemblance of the massive stone outcroppings on its bluffs to Rhineland castles. Bernard Barthel took these musings one step further by constructing monumental brew houses in frank imitation of the complex contours and fortified towers of Rhenish medieval castles. His remaining brew houses in St. Paul, Burlington, Iowa, and Warsaw, Illinois all tower over the river. In addition, the location of the Schmidt brewery at the heart of the West 7th Street neighborhood gives it a powerful community presence. More generally, it is the single most prominent visual landmark in St. Paul west of the State Capitol and the Cathedral.

PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE (1858-1955)

The period of significance for the Jacob Schmidt Brewing Company (1858 to 1955) spans the ownership of the Stahlmann, Schmidt, and Bremer families, when the brewery's historic buildings were erected. The start date marks the beginning of Stahlmann's expansion into native-stone buildings and underground fermentation cellars, and the terminal date comes at the end of large scale, locally owned and managed brewing operations in the area. On January 1, 1955, the company, last held by the Bremer brothers, yielded to consolidation by the Pfeiffer Brewing Company of Detroit.

All of the residential properties within the historic district belong to the period of significance and are contributing properties to the district. However, many of the other properties within the district boundaries are non-contributing, in each case because of construction after the period of significance and in a manner incompatible with the architecture of the historic period.

ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER

The typological and stylistic character of the historic district shows great diversity. Most of the brew house complex, in both the Stahlmann and Schmidt incarnations, is of bearing wall masonry above a native limestone foundation. Floors are of reinforced concrete. In style the older parts of the brew house complex and bottling house have a strong medieval revival character. This is not shared by any other buildings in the historic district. Many of the brewery improvements of the post-Prohibition years are in a strong Moderne vein, which spread briefly across 7th Street with the construction of a large truck garage on Toronto Street. All of these buildings are of steel frame construction with brick and stone facings.

Outside of and aesthetically unrelated to the brewery complex itself, several of the contributing buildings have strong stylistic character. Stahlmann's three contributions to the surviving

members of the historic district are particularly noteworthy. His own house of native limestone is a fine example of the Italianate style, arguably the most complete and intact surviving example in the West End of the city. It is an industrialist's version of the Alexander Ramsey House (1872, NRHP) in Irvine Park built of the same materials just two years earlier. The Henry C. Stahlmann house next door (1878) is an equally intact wood frame version of the style in smaller scale and affixed to a side-hall plan that has multiple stylistic envelopes here and elsewhere. The city once abounded in houses of this latter character, but only a score remain in anything approaching original condition. Finally, Stahlmann's Brewery stable of 1881, located in the midst of the area of the district north of 7th Street, is a rare surviving secondary building in the Italianate style. Its roof replacement after a turn-of-the-century fire lacks the detail (e.g., brackets or modillions) of the original, but the small, arched window openings express a vernacular adaptation of the Italianate style to a horse barn.

Several turn-of-the-century houses and remodelings on the north side of West 7th Street lack the visual panache of the Stahlmann-era buildings but clearly attest to the brewery's continuing mark on the development of the neighborhood and city. All were owned at one time by the brewery or its officers. They also express the evolution of tastes and styles during the early years of the brewery under Schmidt ownership. Strong Craftsman elements mark the Leirich and Auberle houses on Palace Avenue, as they do the remodeling of the Stahlmann-Schmidt Bremer House on West 7th Street.

CHARACTER OF THE LANDSCAPE, STREETScape, AND SITE

The brewery and its neighborhood occupy a large parcel of fairly flat terrain diagonally split by West 7th Street. The land falls steeply away from the railroad that skirts the southern edge of the brewery, making it a prominent landmark from the river. The Main Brewery Complex is also highly visible from approaches both up and down West 7th Street and retains visibility from close approaches in all directions as well. On the brewery plats themselves, the brewery buildings in silhouette form a classic urban pyramid, with the tallest at the center and a fall-away to two story buildings on the front and both sides. An early fanciful rendering showed significant plantings on the brewery site but were never carried out. The railroad spurs and the constant need for trucking access to nearly all of the buildings likely rendered the maintenance of any kind of planting plan impracticable.

On the north side of West 7th Street, all the buildings are evenly scattered but for the large lot retained by the Stahlmann-Schmidt-Bremer House, a fraction of what it used to be but still the expansive grounds of a manorial residence. In the Stahlmann and Schmidt years the block was densely planted with trees, with orchards to the rear as well as boulevard plantings. The major alterations to the landscape that took place in the last century were the replacement of the beer garden and saloon by two quite typical residential lots and the filling of bare land at the northwest corner with a growing number of connected buildings and parking lots. These changes all took place within the period of significance and in fact were brought about by the brewery ownership.

The close relationship of the brewery to the Omaha Road is everywhere evident on the brewery site, particularly in the tracks imbedded on Oneida and swinging over to the Malt Elevator and the Keg House. These are a constitutive part of the site hardscape, just as the size and proportions of the Keg House doors are witness to their use to load rail cars.

The only historic fence on either side of West 7th Street was a simple iron-picket fence encircling the block once owned in its entirety by Christopher Stahlmann. That fence has been gone since at least 1960, although fragments of its limestone base survived until 2006. The present fence in front of the Stahlmann-Schmidt Bremer house and the Nicolin House is of unknown origin and was installed sometime after mid-century. A modern iron-picket security fence surrounds the brewery property.

The irregular shape of the blocks on either side of West 7th Street adds prominence to the gateways, the east gateway announced by a small green space on either side and the billboard on the south and the west gateway formed by a small park on the side of the Keg House. The absence of other signage or other forms of urban clutter along the street draws attention to the historic properties themselves.