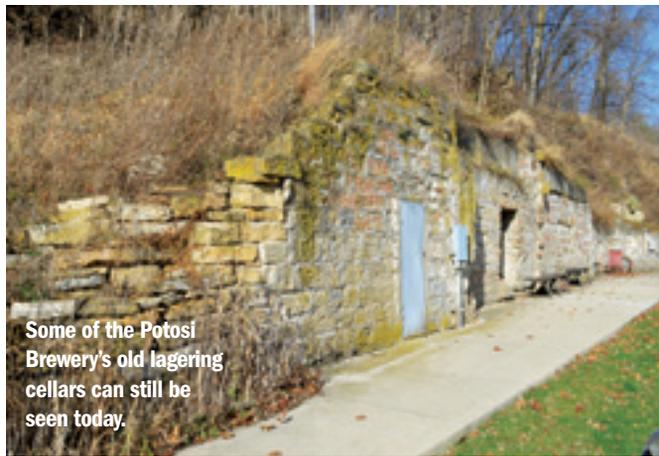


Traveler

Hops meet history at the Potosi Brewery.

Story and photos by Eric Verbeten



Some of the Potosi Brewery's old lagering cellars can still be seen today.



Brewmaster Steve McCoy stands at a Potosi Brewery brew kettle.

Carved into the hillside in the small town of Potosi, stands one of the state's oldest breweries. Located just off the main drag in the southwest Wisconsin town, the historic brewery building has been around for more than 160 years. Its weathered bricks have withstood the test of time, from construction in 1852, to near death in 1972, today the building has been revitalized as the Potosi Brewing Company.

story; stories of boom and bust, fierce competition and even sabotage in the industry.

Back to life

Since reopening in 2008, the Potosi Brewery and National Beer Museum attract more than

65,000 visitors each year. The road to recovery was a long haul, but was successful due to a large community effort that began in 1999 to bring the crumbling building back to life, after sitting empty for more than 40 years.

Stepping inside, old meets new in a modern brew pub that keeps its vintage vibe. Beer enthusiasts and history buffs alike can appreciate more than just a wide selection of taps, since the brew pub is also home to the American Breweriana Association's National Beer Museum, housing three stories of beer memorabilia and a rotating stock of more than three million artifacts dating back to the 1880s.

No need to travel to Milwaukee or the Budweiser headquarters in St. Louis, Missouri since all the nation's historic beer culture can be found in Potosi, less than a mile away from the Mississippi River. Visitors can take tours and learn about the many innovations in brewing tech and the brewing industry over the years. Behind every retro sign, bottle and coaster is a



The National Beer Museum is packed with historic artifacts dating back to the 1800s.



nation. The change was part strategy and part philanthropy. The nonprofit status helped the community secure additional grants to make the brewery into what it is today.

Annually, the Potosi Brewing Company gives back to the local community and others through charitable donations.

Today, the brewing is no longer done in the historic building, but just at the other end of the parking lot in a high-tech facility; complete with modern brew system, stainless storage tanks and bottling equipment. Brew Master Steve McCoy is in charge of brewery operations today and tries to keep the Potosi lineup balanced with traditional styles and more adventurous craft beers thrown into the mix.

On average, the brewery puts out around 7,500 barrels of beer each year, roughly 232,000 gallons or 1.8 million pints, with a maximum capacity of 12,000 barrels. Visitors can still get a taste of how things were done in the old days by checking out the historic lagering caves used in the days before refrigeration. Usually dug into the hillside, brewers relied on cellars for fermenting and storing beer

Frank Fiorenza is the village president of Potosi and helped lead the effort to bring the brewery back to life. For him, the key to the success was two-fold. The first being community teamwork to take on the task, and the second was partnering with local agencies like the Department of Natural Resources and other federal agencies. In doing so, the Potosi community secured a number of grants to help with the cleanup costs of the old building.

Site assessments were needed to find out what could be salvaged and whether the site was safe. Turns out it wasn't.

The brewery, like many old buildings had been constructed with toxic materials like asbestos and lead paint, that had to be removed if the building was to be reborn. In the year 2000, the Potosi Brewery Foundation was formed, turning the brewery into a nonprofit organization, the first of its kind in the

at a consistent and cool temperature. Historic photos lining the walls of the brewery today show the many transformations of the building as it changed hands several times.

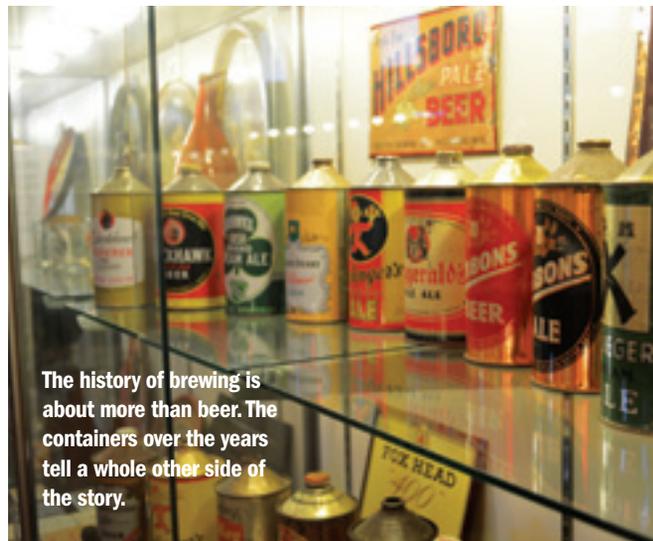
According to Fiorenza, there were approximately 2,800-3,000 breweries in the country in the late 1890s, after Prohibition ended in 1933 only 133 of those survived, Potosi being one of the survivors.

It got by selling ice, coal, root beer and bottling milk from the nearby dairy farm. Brewing kept up in a way, with a steady production of their Supreme

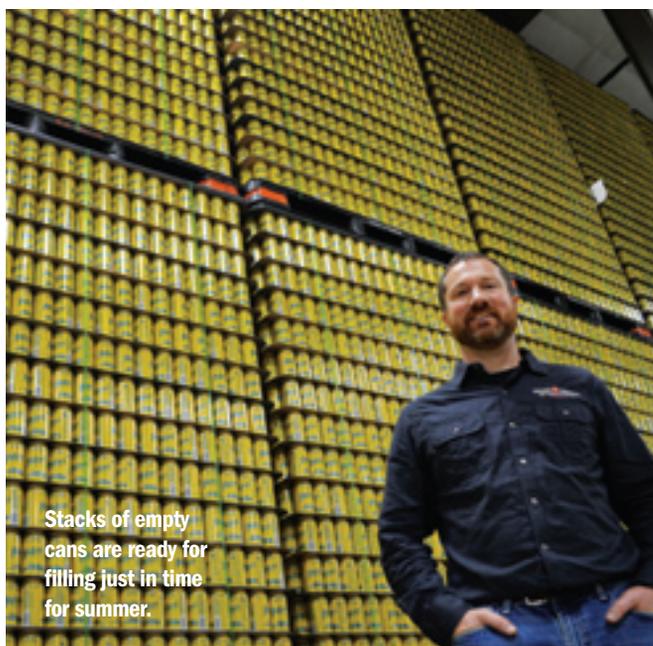
Lager, a low alcohol beer that was legal to brew throughout the Prohibition era.

The Potosi Brewing Company and National Beer Museum are packed with history and are a must to visit for anyone interested in breweries and their history. With its combination of modern brews and respect for the past, the Potosi Brewery is a unique experience that's sure to please the palette.

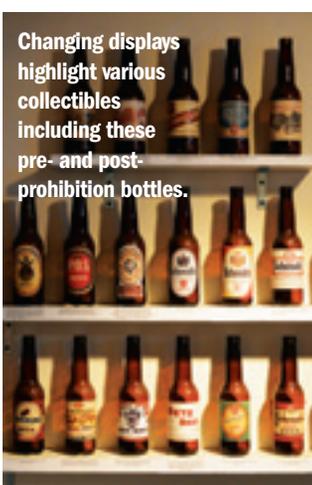
Eric Verbeten is a communications specialist and writes about science issues for the Department of Natural Resources.



The history of brewing is about more than beer. The containers over the years tell a whole other side of the story.



Stacks of empty cans are ready for filling just in time for summer.



Changing displays highlight various collectibles including these pre- and post-prohibition bottles.

>>> FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about brewery tours and events, visit potosibrewery.com/.

The brewery is located at 209 S. Main Street in Potosi.

Want to know more? Check out "Beans and Brew," a video all about how Potosi Brewery was brought back to life. Visit dnr.wi.gov and search keyword "Brownfield success."