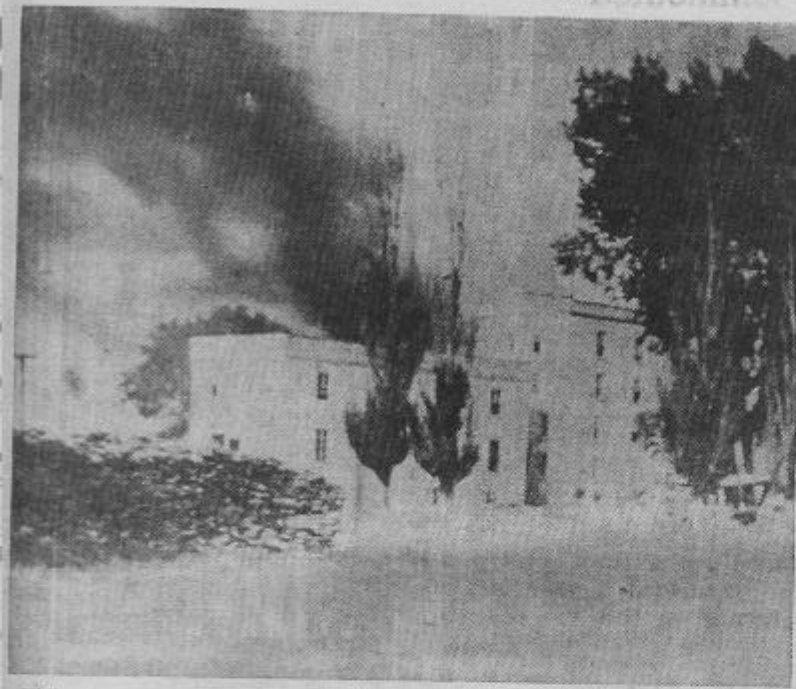


Knapstein Brewery



Fifty years ago, this was part of the Knapstein Brewery. The picture, taken by Edward Mouto, is of the portion of the building which now houses Verifine. We don't know what the smoke is from in the background.

Knapstein Brewing Company Has Been Family Enterprise Since 1869

The Knapstein Brewing Co., 505-511 E. Cook street, is a New London landmark. One of the oldest and most widely and better known of the city's industries, it has been almost exclusively a family enterprise since Theodore Knapstein, father of the present owner, purchased an interest in the small business which was the Joe Lechner brewery.

From that time on the Knapstein name has been synonymous with the brewing industry. For approximately 50 years Theodore Knapstein was connected with and guided the New London brewery, shifting the reins of management to his eldest son, Mathias W. Knapstein, only a few years before his retirement in 1917.

Born in Germany Nov. 12, 1848, he son of Mathias Knapstein, Theodore was six years old when his parents brought him to this country. He was reared on a farm in Greenville Township, Outagamie county, Wisconsin, securing his education in a log schoolhouse until he was 15 years old. He then helped on his father's farm until he reached his majority when he came to New London and with the Messrs. Becker and Beyer, purchased the small Lechner brewery, a small frame plant. He contributed \$1,000 of the purchase price of \$5,000 and the new business was known as Becker, Beyer and Company, with Theodore Knapstein as its directing head. Following the

death of Mr. Becker, Mr. Knapstein and his brother, Henry, took over the business and together they conducted it until 1908 when Henry withdrew. In the same year the Knapstein Brewing Co. was organized, Theodore taking his sons into the business with him. The business was incorporated at \$50,000 and officers were Theodore, president, Henry T., vice president, Mathias W. secretary and treasurer. William M. Knapstein present owner, a member of the board of directors was the brewmaster and contributed much to the popularity of the Knapstein brew. New buildings were constructed and modern equipment installed. The brewery's output was 60 barrels daily or 20,000 barrels annually.

Active in Politics

The members of the Knapstein family have always been active in politics. Theodore served as a member of the village board, later as a member of the common council and for two terms was mayor, winning commendation for his efficiency and ability in that office. He was elected on the Democratic ticket to the state legislature in 1889 and was re-elected in 1891. It is a singular fact that he should have been a member of the General Assembly when there were 29 Democratic members in the year of the Democratic landslide in Wisconsin, and also been one of the meager minority of Democrats when there were 29 Re-

publican members. He served as postmaster here during President Cleveland's second administration. His entire public service was characterized by faithful discharge of duty and honest and efficient handling of the affairs of his various offices.

Theodore Knapstein was married in September 1879 to Miss Frances Werner, a native of Wisconsin. They had 12 children, Margaret, who married Joachim Poepke; Mathias, who married Eleanor Ostermeier; Magdalane who married John Croak; Frances, now deceased, who was married to Frank Hetzer; Irene A., now deceased; Henrietta who was married to Leonard Heuer; Henry who married Josephine Simon of Green Bay; William M., who married Evelyn Kitowski; John, married to Mary Polzin; Theodore Jr.; Raymond who married Stella Brown of Woodruff and Loraine, now Mrs. Walter Kadell of Birmingham, Mich. There are 34 grandchildren and 66 great grandchildren. The Knapsteins are members of the Roman Catholic church of Most Precious Blood congregation and one of Theodore Knapstein's brothers, William, was a Catholic priest.

Several years before his retirement, Mr. Knapstein gave over active management of the brewery to his eldest son Mathias, who had prepared himself for a business career at a business college in Milwaukee following his grade school education here. Like his father he has been active in politics, serving four years as city treasurer, four years as mayor, becoming known as "the kid mayor" because of his extreme youth, later serving again as city treasurer and alderman. He became active in local politics again three years ago when he was appointed first ward alderman to fill a vacancy created by the resignation of Theodore Thomas. When his terms expired in the spring of 1950 and 1952, he sought and won re-election.

Prohibition

The brewery continued operations until the advent of prohibition in 1919 and for eight years the buildings were unused, except for the building which was the bottling house during brewery operations, which was sold in 1922 to the Wolf River Ice Cream Co., now the Verifine Dairy Products Company, and converted by that company into an ice cream plant. Five years later, William M. Knapstein, his cousin, William H. Knapstein of Greenville, and John Haug of Appleton, purchased the remaining brewery property, land and buildings, and forming a partnership, began the manufacture of wort, a malt extract, in the old brewery building. After three years, Mr. Haug withdrew and the Knapstein cousins continued the manufacture of wort until the repeal of the 18th amendment in 1932, legalizing the manufacture of fermented malt

beverages. The two Knapsteins immediately began readying the buildings for the manufacture of beer and in May, 1933 formed the Knapstein Brewing Co., a closed corporation with capital stock of \$100,000, the shares distributed between them and their wives. Officers elected were William H. Knapstein, president, Floney Knapstein, secretary and treasurer. In June of 1933 M. W. Knapstein returned to New London from Chicago to become office manager for the corporation, and Knapstein's beer was again on sale July 14, 1933.

In October, 1944, William M. Knapstein acquired all the stock of the company, making it a family affair, with his wife and three children, Mrs. Fred Hammang, Fond du Lac, Paul E. Knapstein, New London, and Mrs. Roy Wettstein, Fond du Lac, sharing in stock. William, elected president of the corporation, assumed the management of the business, and his daughter, Maxine, now Mrs. Hammang, secretary and treasurer, took a position in the office. Other officers elected were Paul, first vice president, and Evelyn E., second vice president.

After acquiring full control of the corporation Mr. Knapstein began an extensive program of improvements, including installation of new bottling equipment, brewing equipment and refrigeration, and the construction of a five stall garage.

The present output of the brewery is being sold within a radius of 100 miles.

The present owner attended grade school in New London and later studied brewing at the Hanke Brewers Academy in Milwaukee, graduating in 1909. He returned to New London to become brewmaster in his father's brewery and worked in that capacity until 1916 when he purchased the Schantz farm on Highway 45 north of the city and farmed until 1921. He then was employed at the E. H. Ramm Hardware store until he entered the wort business. He is a member of Most Precious Blood Catholic church and the Knights of Columbus and is a director of the Catholic Cemetery association. He has three children and ten grandchildren. His son, Paul, affiliated with his father, is brewmaster and manager of the brewery. Paul is married to Marie Garrow and has four children, Sharon, Thomas, James and Billy.

Present officers of the company are William, president, Paul, vice president and Evelyn E., secretary and treasurer.

In the spring of 1848 J. G. Nordman made a claim two miles south of New London and entered the land by a soldier's land warrant of the Mexican war.