

Old Spring & Braun Brewery

–Col. Matthew W. Nahorn, New Indian Ridge Museum, Amherst [revised 3/2014]

Although the large sandstone Braun Brewery building is long gone, its beautiful arched sandstone cellars still remain today. Most residents had no idea that only a shallow layer of dirt covered these unique structures, but on March 22, 2013 during construction activities for a City storm sewer project, workers uncovered one of the cellars that had been sealed for around 80 years. I soon learned of this find, and research began. Only a week before, I was down at the Old Spring, working to unplug the drain and preparing to restore the Spring site once the City project was completed. My work on the Spring however was abruptly halted, and my research shifted to the Braun family.

William (“Wilhelm”) Braun (1834-1904), the son of Justus (1806-1862) and Emilie Braun, emigrated from Bremen, Germany and arrived at port in New York on August 2, 1852, with his parents, three brothers, and one sister. Genealogical documents reveal his destination was Ohio, and it looks as if the family initially settled in Brownhelm. He was only 18 at the time, and his occupation was listed as “brewer.” William first appears in Amherst tax records in 1860.

A 1954 newspaper article in the Amherst Historical Society’s files provides some insight, stating that Braun leased water from the Old Spring from Mr. Beesing, who lived directly across the street. (The Fred Beesing house, built c. 1862, was later moved to near the corner of Cleveland Ave. and Jackson St. and still stands today at 818 Cleveland Ave.) This was before Milan Avenue was filled and raised (c. early 1890s when the railroads were being raised), when the Spring was at road-level. (Interestingly, a portion of the original cobblestoned Milan Ave. roadbed can still be walked on today, to enter the Old Spring area.) It is believed that at this time, the Spring was tapped on the north side of the road, and later, this giant seep spring, or unconfined aquifer, was tapped on the south side, the present location of the “Old Spring.” But during Braun’s early years, it looks as if the water was piped to the south side of the road for use in his brewery. In 1914 a backdrop of fieldstones was constructed to beautify the spot for Old Home Week. During the Great Depression years, August Nabakowski, who operated his Nabakowski Roofing & Sheet Metal business across from the Old Spring, employed workers to construct two stone arches – one at the Milan Ave. entrance and one above the Spring basin.

The Spring itself is as old as Beaver Creek, and its history with the City flows directly from the beginnings of Amherst as a town. Of course we all recognize the Spring site as one of the most historic spots in town – where Judge Josiah Harris settled (1818) and where our town’s first Fourth of July was celebrated between Harris and Amherst’s founding father Jacob Shupe. Josiah Harris, whom I would call the founder of the “downtown” Amherst area, a philanthropist and pillar of our early town, donated land for the schools and town hall, was a brick yard owner, a tavern owner, the first sheriff of Lorain County, an Ohio state representative, and an Ohio state senator. “Ye Old Spring” as it was known, soon became the “place to go” for many Lorain County families, where they would bring their empty jugs to be filled with the fresh, cool spring water for many years until it was deemed unsafe for human consumption. My grandmother’s family

would travel from Lorain to gather water, and they would make a day trip out of this adventure. In later years, my mother and her siblings fondly remember stopping at the Spring on their way home from school.

Located in the Beaver Creek valley, behind the Braun House, was a large stone building, which served as Braun's brewery. A 1963 newspaper article provides more of the story, as we learn directly from Phillip Braun, William Braun's son, that there are two arched sandstone cellars parallel to each other (perpendicular to Beaver Creek) and a third located just to the east. These structures, along with Braun's house, still exist today. The house has been restored by the Timko family as Five Corners Bed & Breakfast. We are still working to determine the age of the house, but it does appear on an 1874 plat map of the downtown area, along with a notation of "Brewery" denoting the large building nearby, to the west. The sandstone brewery was demolished after Braun disbanded his brewery sometime between 1892-94, when the railroad acquired part of Braun's property, but the cellars were not sealed until the Depression years.

The 1954 newspaper article we found in files at the Amherst Historical Society states, "...the old cellars are still there. One wonders what people will say years from now if they ever uncover these cellars and try to determine what they were used for."

The area around the Town Hall, encompassing Beaver Court and Milan Avenue, is steeped in history. Having begun to delve into the history of the Braun Brewery, it is clear that a small volume could be written just on the history of this little section of our town. My file folder of information on this topic is now quite large.

Pictures and documents at the Amherst Historical Society and New Indian Ridge Museum served as invaluable sources of information to piece together the shreds of this story. I have been compiling a document on the history of this important story, which at present is over 60 pages long. Once the research on this immediate project is completed, I will donate the document to the Society for our records. Restoration of the arch that was located above the Old Spring continues. In July, the Lorain County Preservation Network, an arm of the Lorain County Historical Society, voted to designate the Old Spring site and Braun Homestead (today 5 Corners Bed & Breakfast) a Lorain County Historic Landmark.

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