



93 Bottles of Beer on the Wall

A Lifetime of Collecting Breweriana with Stanley Summers

by Patrick Evans

Ed. Note: This article is part of a series of updates on the exciting new Cone Top Brewery Museum taking shape in Vicksburg, MI. NABA is partnering with Cone Top to assist in the development and on-going programming of the museum. Our mutual goal is to make Cone Top "NABA's front door," a place where NABA members can enjoy, explore and exhibit their collections for the education of others. Cone Top has been amassing a major collection of its own, in addition to planning space for NABA members to curate their own rotating exhibits. One of the newest additions to the museum is the collection of longtime NABA member Stanley Summers.

Stan Summers leaves an endearing trail wherever he goes. He has blazed countless paths during ventures from his Metro Detroit home to breweriana shows across the country, both for

pleasure and while traveling for work. An avid collector, Stan has amassed an impressive breweriana collection during his 93 years.

Looking to leave a definitive legacy with his Post-prohibition era collection, Stan made the decision to leave it in the fastidious hands of the

Cone Top Brewery Museum in Vicksburg, MI. Cone Top founder Chris Moore was invited to visit Stan to get a look at his collection, then after seeing it, decided the whole lot would be perfect to memorialize at the brewery museum.

"I could never ask for anything more than that," Stan said. "I'm extremely happy that my collection will be kept together. This is

exactly what I wanted. I'm getting up there in years and my children didn't really know what to do with it. I'm very fortunate Chris and I came in contact."



Stanley Summers enjoying a beverage at his local craft brewery, the Rochester Mills Beer Co. in Rochester, MI.

Stan added, "I think it's something that other breweriana collectors should think about as they get older. To have your collection housed in a museum is just great, and all the folks that Chris has working at Cone Top are just fantastic and will take the very best care of my collection."

Once a collector...

Stan was always a collector. As a young man, he collected matchbook covers. "I used to walk up and down Woodward Avenue [in Detroit] and pick them up. I ended up with crates of them," he laughed. "I was always collecting something. I didn't have money to buy anything, so I'd pick it up on the road."

Stan got his start collecting beer items in 1975 when he was in an antique store and pointed to an old Stroh's can—which was around 10 years old—asking if it should be thrown out.

"The lady in the store said, 'No, that's a collectible,'" he chuckled. "Well at that time, I could go out every Saturday and Sunday morning and pick up beer cans that were tossed out, but somebody said this can was special. So, from then on, when my wife went to an antique store, I'd go to a bar and get a can of beer."

A year or so later Stan joined the BCCA. A big help in collecting a variety of beer cans was his travel



Narragansett Beer, Narragansett Brewing Co., Cranston, RI, 41 x 28.5 in., c. 1950s.

for work. "I drank my fair share of beer," he noted. "And maybe a bit of someone else's share, too."

Signs of travel

But Stan's wife eventually tired of the growing amount of tin in their house, so he ended up selling the collection to a dealer in Iowa.

But soon, his collecting started up again—and this time it was signs. As he travelled for his job with General Motors in New England and the Midwest, he bought old beer signs at antique stores. "I'd go in and ask, 'What do you have that's old and is a beer sign?' I wasn't overly particular at the time," he said. If he saw a sign he liked, he'd buy it.

Eventually, Stan filled an old horse barn on his property with those signs and appropriately, created

a bar room to go with his breweriana decor. As the collection grew, his bar in the barn became more impressive. "It was a convenient place to have it. I didn't have to walk too far," Stan joked. "It turned out nicely, and we had a lot of parties out there drinking beer."

His most prolific collecting days were during the 1980s and 1990s, as he continued finding more room for signs, renewed his can collecting and added glassware, too. His travels led to friendships and more collecting. Rather than sitting in a bar or a hotel room during his work trips, he'd take his NABA roster with him and



Altes Beer, Tivoli Brewing Co., Detroit MI, 13 x 10.5 in. c. 1942-1945.

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Geo. Ehret's Extra Beer, George Ehret Brewing Co., NY, NY, 13.5 x 19 in., illustrated by C.F. McCurenton. Produced to announce the 1935 daylight savings time.



Ballantine Ale & Beer, P. Ballantine & Sons Brewing Co., Newark, NJ, 17 x 13.5 in., c. late 1940s.

call a collector in the area, pick up a six pack to share, and go check out the collection.

First-hand experience

Stan's brewery knowledge came from exploring during his business travels, beginning in the late 1950s. "When I was working at General Motors in the late 50s and early 60s, we used to tour all of the Detroit breweries like Stroh's, Goebel, Pfeiffer, E&B, and Altes, and maybe have a couple of beers."

And when his business travels took him to New England and the Midwest, he would try to take time to sample their local brews. "There were still breweries out there, especially in the predominately German areas," he said. "I learned about them through their advertising. Pennsylvania and Wisconsin had many breweries and I would taste a beer if I was in the area."

Although he knows that Pre-prohibition items are sometimes considered more valuable by collectors, Stan never collected with the idea that what he was buying was an investment.

Living history

Instead, his attraction has been more to items created during

what many consider to be the advertising heyday for American breweries – from the time of Repeal in 1933 through the 1960s. He feels more of a connection to the pieces from this era—because he lived through that period of history. His collecting journey has been more sentimental than commercial, driven by memories and not money. "It's something I can relate to," he said. "It might be from a brewery that I can remember, whereas some of the other older ones, I never had a sip of their suds."

That's why Stan's collection specializes in Post-prohibition era breweriana. His expansive collection features hundreds of die-cut cardboard signs with colorful graphics depicting life from the 1930s through the 1960s. "I like the cardboards the most. I also like the signs with a little bit of action. And of

course, I like to see the pretty girls on them," he said with a smile.

Future inspiration

Stan has watched the breweriana hobby grow since his early days of collecting in the 1970s. He hopes that seeing his collection at the Cone Top



NABA members Stan Summers, Chris Moore and Jim Kaiser stand in front of one of the storefronts in Downtown Vicksburg, MI that will host a display of Stan's impressive collection on June 10-11. NABA members are invited to a private reception to celebrate this event on June 10, with a breweriana buy/sell/trade show being held on June 11.



E and B Special Beer, Eckhardt & Becker Brewing Co., Detroit, MI, 19 x 16 in., c. 1940.



PON Beer (Pride of Newark), Christian Feigenspan Brewing Co., Newark, NJ., c. 1940. Die-cut cardboard with wooden inserts.

Brewery Museum will inspire a younger generation of collectors. “There seems to be renewed focus on preserving the history of the brewing industry, and that’s why I encourage newer collectors,” he said. “I remember when I was a novice collector, some of those old ‘expert’ Pre-pro collectors didn’t want to talk to me because I didn’t have anything that interested them.”

But what was newer then is not now. Indeed, the items from the 1930s are now over 80 years old and some are 50 years older than when Stan first acquired them. In fact, some contemporary craft breweries use “retro” looking graphics in their advertising similar to what was first created in the pieces of Stan’s collection.

Jim Kaiser, NABA Treasurer and Stan’s long-time friend, echoes this sentiment: “You’re starting to see more younger people collecting the types of items that Stan is entrusting to the Cone Top Museum. I think it’s because they are both graphically interesting and sometimes more affordable (than Pre-prohibition breweriana).”

Making new stories

Today, Stan still travels, but now business doesn’t get in the way of breweriana. He is often accompanied on these adventures by his buddy, Jim Kaiser. They take trips across the country for shows like the NABA conventions, making new stories along the way. “He has a great attitude about life,” Jim admirably said of Stan.

Stan is still a vibrant supporter of the beer industry, regularly hitting his local craft brewery,

the Rochester Mills Beer Company in Rochester, MI, for lunches and conversation. He’s never one to turn down a beer and a good story. Pieces of his collection even found their way into the Rochester Mills taproom, where he loaned out hundreds of items when it opened in 1997. It speaks to who Stan is. The type of person who wanted to share his collection with others and have it in the appropriate environment for viewing—the taproom of a brewery!

So what is Stan’s favorite beer to drink? “The best one is the one that’s in front of me at the time,” he said, with his ever-present grin and jolly personality.

Note: Stan Summers and his collection will be celebrated in Vicksburg on June 10 – 11,



2022 at the Cone Top Brewery Museum and throughout several other historic buildings in downtown Vicksburg. Appropriately coined Eternal Summers—the show is a celebration that will include both private and public events to view and celebrate Stan and his collection. There also will be a NABA-sponsored trade show in conjunction with this event, on June 11. The private events are free to NABA members who RSVP to events@millmuseums.com before May 26. For more information, go to www.conetopmuseum.com or look for the ad on the inside cover of this magazine.