

Archaeologists explore craft beer’s roots

By **TOM BANSE**
Northwest News Network

The Pacific Northwest is rightfully proud of its thriving microbrewery scene. Most beer lovers probably consider the rise of craft brewing a phenomenon of the past few decades. But the first brewpubs in the Northwest date so far back that archaeologists were called in to excavate the remnants of one in Jacksonville.

The archaeological dig wrapped up last weekend on property co-owned by Ken Gregg and Frank De Luca. The partners live in a tastefully-renovated former saloon, which once had a brewery and assorted out-buildings located behind it, according to 19th century fire insurance records. The pioneer microbrewery was established during southern Oregon’s gold rush era more than a century and a half ago. Today, a garden and a meadow favored by the neighborhood deer, plus a mysterious rock pile, overlie the historic brewery footprint.

“From the very beginning, I think we had some sense we were not just property owners, but also stewards of this property because it hasn’t been divided up in all of these years,” De Luca said.

De Luca and Gregg are now getting ready to subdivide their almost 2.5 acre parcel. The ex-Californians are aware the Eagle Brewery operated on the site from the mid-1850s to around 1890. Those dates make the brewery one of the oldest in the Northwest, coming right on the heels of the circa 1854 opening of the first known commercial brewery in the territory in Portland.

“We thought we would get ahead of the game so that people would know exactly if there was something here or not, if there would be mitigation, where we could



Research archaeologist Chelsea Rose of Southern Oregon University led the excavation of the historic Eagle Brewery in Jacksonville.

place houses, so that a new buyer would be informed and not have a surprise,” De Luca said.

“We just felt that was the right thing to do so that we would know what is here that might be archaeologically sensitive,” Gregg added.

Gregg and De Luca hired the Southern Oregon University Laboratory of Anthropology, who arrived with a brigade of volunteers and all of the expected tools of archaeology — trowels, buckets, sifting trays, grid markers, a GPS mapper, breaker bars and so forth.

It didn’t take long to find detritus of 19th century brewing and distilling. Leaning over a freshly dug pit, archaeological tech Keoni Diacamos pointed out a rusted barrel hoop, teeth and a rib bone from a pig, charcoal and historic brick.

“A barrel hoop is about one of the most quintessential brewery artifacts that you can think of, so that is excit-

‘THERE IS A REAL POWER OF WALKING WHERE SOMEBODY WALKED, THAT TIE TO PLACE. TO THINK SHE LOOKED AT THIS LAND. SHE WALKED DOWNTOWN AND SHE WALKED BY THE SAME BUILDINGS. IT’S IMPACTFUL TO BE WHERE SOMEBODY THAT YOU SPEND SO MUCH TIME THINKING ABOUT WOULD HAVE BEEN.’

Tiah Edmunson-Morton | Oregon State University archivist and curator of the Oregon Hops and Brewing Archives

ing,” said Southern Oregon University’s Chelsea Rose, the lead archaeologist at the Eagle Brewery dig.

She said beer bottles turned up right away, too.

“When I was approached with the opportunity to excavate one of the oldest breweries in town, of course that is the dream. That is a really

fun way to investigate this Wild West moment in Jacksonville’s mining camp history,” Rose said. “But then once I started digging into the archives before we even put a shovel in the ground, I found out the story is way more fascinating.”

Rose explained her interest in taking on the brew-

ery project increased tenfold when she learned there was a woman at the historical center of it.

“When you think about mining camps and breweries and saloons, it’s always this male-dominated narrative,” Rose continued. “You don’t see the women because they are not in the documentary record.”

The proprietress in this case was a German immigrant named Fredericka Wetterer. Her story had previously caught the eye of Oregon State University archivist Tiah Edmunson-Morton, curator of the Oregon Hops and Brewing Archives.

“A lot of women were recorded in the census as ‘keeping house.’ Everyone was keeping house,” Edmunson-Morton said. “So, the fact that she for a time was recorded in the brewing business operational records — the fact that she was listed as a propri-

etress — that is unique at a certain level.”

Edmunson-Morton said Wetterer married into the brewing business in 1861. The alewife kept the Eagle Brewery and Saloon going after her first husband died. Wetterer later remarried and ran the operation many more years with her second husband.

Literally digging into the old Eagle Brewery site was an “intense” experience for Edmunson-Morton, who is writing a book about early women brewers in Oregon. She said the archaeological project added nuance to the standard facts and figures about a person’s life.

“There is a real power of walking where somebody walked, that tie to place,” Edmunson-Morton said. “To think she looked at this land. She walked downtown and she walked by the same buildings. It’s impactful to be where somebody that you spend so much time thinking about would have been.”

Besides beer bottles and barrel hoops, the archaeologists found broken ceramics, buttons and construction parts. Rose said it may be possible to connect the household items to the pioneer brewster if upon closer examination the artifacts date to the 19th century.

The excavation pits were all filled in after a four-day dig. The brewery property is not open to the public, although history buffs can walk by the front of the surviving old saloon. It’s a couple blocks off Jacksonville’s well-preserved main street.

As for the property owners and their plans to partition their land, Rose said the archaeological investigation produced options that could protect the buried history.

“We were able to come up with a plan that will allow them to do what they want to do,” Rose said. “They can design around the obvious hot spots.”

GET TO THE POINT.
Expert Service. Guaranteed.

Trust your vehicle safety to the professionals at
DEL’S O.K. TIRE
point S
TIRE and AUTO SERVICE

Nokian Tire Special
Offer valid from October 11th through November 6th, 2021



\$1
INSTALLATION
on any Nokian Tires!
UP TO
\$101
SAVINGS!

nokian
TYRES

YOUR #1 SOURCE FOR TIRES
CUSTOM WHEELS • AUTOMOTIVE SERVICES

Hours:
Mon-Fri 8-5
Sat 8-4

503-325-2861
For emergencies
503-325-0233

35359 Business
Hwy 101
(Miles Crossing)
Astoria, OR



Food Drive
Now Through Dec 31st
Bring in 10 Cans of Food
Get 10% off
on all furniture & mattresses



Hours:
M-F: 8-6pm
SAT: 9-5pm
SUN: 10-4pm

Appliance & Home Furnishings
“We Service What We Sell”

**503-861-0929**
529 SE MARLIN AVE • WARRENTON • OR