

ECHOES OF CANNERIES PAST

Local breweries, once fish canneries, are canning once again

BY WILLIAM DEAN

Listen closely and you can almost hear the clamor of the canning lines from a century ago.

Along Astoria's waterfront, where hundreds of workers once toiled in salmon and tuna canneries, there has been a revival of sorts. Canning has returned, this time under the roofs of craft breweries.

"It's certainly an interesting turn of events to see that transition," local historian John Goodenberger said. "It speaks to the beauty of an industrial building in that it's adaptable. They've been repurposed for a new cause, a new product. Now they're canning beer," Goodenberger added.

Nearly all of the city's brewhouses are canning now, in part due to shifting economics. Canning is cheaper than bottling, and while draught beer brings the highest profit, the lingering pandemic has dampened sales in taprooms and pubs.

In the past year alone, several of Astoria's breweries have invested in sophisticated and speedy canning machines, including Fort George Brewery, Buoy Beer Co., Astoria Brewing and Reach Break Brewing. When Obelisk Beer Co. launches this spring, the brewery's owners plan to start canning immediately. All of the breweries believe canning is here to stay.

What's striking about the trend are the echoes from Astoria's once robust fish canning era. Buoy Beer opened on the waterfront nearly a decade ago in a former fish processing house and cannery. Now the brewery is doing canning of its own.

Further down the banks of the Columbia, toward the Astoria Bridge, workers at Fort George's processing facility are now guiding cans along conveyor belts, destined for bottle shops and markets throughout the region. It's happening in a space that was once used to make cans and labels for the tons of fish harvested from local waters. "The building was literally made for can-

Brews & News

Brace yourself for Reach Break Brewing's special Oyster Stout, an Irish-style brew made with Pacific northwest oysters, fittingly slated for release on St. Patrick's Day.

The Oregon Otter Beer Festival, scheduled for March 12 in Portland, quickly sold out. It's a fundraiser for the Elakha Alliance, a nonprofit dedicated to restoring sea otters to the Oregon Coast. Thirteen breweries, including Fort George, are participating. You can't go, but you can still donate!

Obelisk Beer Co. remains on track to open its Astoria brewery this spring. A custom brewing facility has been ordered and remodeling is underway at the former Columbia Fruit & Produce building on Bond Street, including a concrete ramp leading to a new entrance that will open into a taproom.

ning. Now it's continuing that tradition with a different ingredient," head production brewer Michal Frankowicz said.

But the high-tech operations run by breweries today with just a handful of employees bear little resemblance to the gritty fish canneries of old, where workers flanked the lines for grueling shifts.

There were once dozens of salmon canneries in the Columbia-Pacific, but as salmon stocks declined, the number of riverside processing plants dwindled. By 1970, there were only six. Ten years later, Bumble Bee Seafoods, the city's last major cannery, closed on Pier 39.

Today, the heritage of canning is deeply ingrained in Astoria, chronicled in museums and by old salts on bar stools. It's even reflected in the label art decorating downtown trash containers.

The dawn of beer-canning on the waterfront is a good thing, according to Goodenberger. Breweries could have demolished



Hanthorn Cannery Museum

Women can fish in Astoria.



Photos by William Dean

ABOVE: Chris Lamb, assistant packaging manager, monitors the packing of Fort George's City of Dreams hazy IPA. **RIGHT:** Canning beer the modern way at Fort George's waterfront facility. The system can produce 100 cases in 10 minutes.



the historic industrial buildings and gone modern. Instead, they're giving the old structures new life. "It's nice to see a legacy continued," Goodenberger said. "We've gone from tuna and salmon to beer."

William Dean is an author with a passion for craft beer. His suspense novels, "The Ghosts We Know" and "Dangerous

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