

Henry Weinhard (1830-1904)

By Unknown

Best known for his internationally renowned lager, Henry Weinhard was among the most successful businessmen in the early years of Portland. His influential role in developing Portland's economy and international visibility was commemorated in the eulogy that appeared on the front page of the Oregonian:

Mr. Weinhard was a typical Western man, with all the social qualities of the Western man and German. He succeeded by close application to a business which he made one of the largest industries of the city with a fame extending beyond the bounds of the United States. He was ready to lend to the city and state for the promotion of the success of the community the energy and ability which had made his own success, and he readily contributed to every charitable and public enterprise.

His philanthropy and prominence as a businessman made him one of the most well-known figures in Portland's early history.

Weinhard was born on February 18, 1830, in the town of Lindenbronn in the Württemberg region of what is now Germany. When he came of age, Weinhard moved to Stuttgart, the capitol city of Württemberg, where he became an apprentice to a brewer.

Weinhard immigrated to the United States in 1852. The prospect of less competition in the States most likely motivated him to make the journey. Arriving in New York, he made his way to Cincinnati, Ohio, which offered a large German population. There Weinhard was employed in a brewery for four years during which time he worked on perfecting his own recipes.

Weinhard's motivations for moving to Oregon are unclear. It is believed, however, that the region's lack of brewing competition and its thirsty market of day laborers, lumberjacks, fisherman, dockworkers, and soldiers may have provided a lure. In 1855, Weinhard made his way to Portland by ship. Upon arrival, he found work in John Meunich's Fort Vancouver brewery which catered primarily to the soldiers garrisoned there. Weinhard remained at the Meunich brewery for six months before moving to Portland and establishing a brewery with George Bottler. Unfortunately, the brewery did not expand at a satisfactory rate for Weinhard, so he sold his portion of the business to Bottler and moved back to Fort Vancouver to work for the Muenich brewery, which he purchased six months later and renamed the Vancouver Brewery. Weinhard sold the brewery in 1862 and moved his small family to Portland.

Through a series of business transactions with Bottler and Henry Saxer, Weinhard was able to purchase both men's breweries and eventually move his whole operation to Northwest Portland on Eleventh and Twelfth streets between Burnside and Couch. The Brewery quickly expanded and Weinhard purchased the Liberty Brewery that had been Portland's oldest brewery at the time. In due course, the expansion of the brewery warranted the construction of a large brick building to house the brewing operation. The City Brewery, as it came to be called, was the most modern brewery in the Northwest and remained in the same location until 1999.

The expansion of his brewery was accompanied by Weinhard's reputation for commitment to maintaining high standards and honorable business practices. By 1875, Weinhard was shipping his beer to ports in Asia and across the United States. Aside from being active in several local organizations, Weinhard was also instrumental in organizing local business interests to donate large sums of money to the Westside Railroad to keep railroad competitors from bypassing Portland as a major railroad hub in the Northwest, which would have severely harmed Portland businesses' ability to compete in national and international markets.

Weinhard's contributions to the Portland community included co-founding the Portland German Aid Society to help German immigrants through tough times, donating to the construction of the Portland Hotel, and funding the construction of a Lutheran church next to his brewery to serve his German speaking workers. Weinhard treated his workers well and abided by the 1891 United

Brewery Workmen Contract that stated brewery workers should work nine hours daily, six days per week. In addition, Weinhard's employees were also compensated with free beer during their shifts.

The most well-known story of Weinhard's generosity to the Portland community came with the unveiling of the Skidmore fountain in 1887. When speaking to C.E.S. Wood, Weinhard offered to pay for the additional hose length that it would take to link the fountain to his largest lager tank in order to have the fountain spout free beer on its first day of operation. Although the offer was declined, it still remains part of Portland's collective memory.

Henry Weinhard died on September 20, 1904.

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