



FOX POINT

files by Douglas H. Frazer

Fox Point Beer Gardens – Then and Now



Beer gardens were once a big part of Milwaukee life. Fox Point, then in the Town of Milwaukee, was no exception. As reported in the booklet, *Fox Point, A Planned Village* (1976), our first beer garden appeared in the “gay 90s” with the creation of Stabelfeldt Park.

The Stabelfeldt family had purchased land in Fox Point before 1860. The original stake extended from Green Tree Road at the railroad tracks some 780 feet north, then directly east to Lake Michigan and south along the lake, and finally west along the Green Tree Road line back to the railroad tracks.

By 1905, the Stabelfeldts also owned the property from Yates Road along Green Tree Road going east to the intersection of Green Tree Road and Lake Drive, then in roughly quarter mile segments south and then west, and finally north back along Yates Road to Green Tree Road. This area now includes the Fox Point Shops.

Around 1880, Fred Stabelfeldt helped plant trees on the original stake—later known as The Grove—and within a few years it became a favorite picnic area. About two acres at the top of the bluff were used for hitching the horses and parking the cars. The park area was about six acres situated down the bluff.

A small winding road (an extension of Green Tree Road at the bluff) led down the hill to the beach. This road existed until 1997 when portions of the bluff in this area collapsed. When dry, the road could be navigated by a Ford Model T, but when wet, a team of horses was needed to pull the cars up the hill. There was a baseball diamond to the north end of the park and down the lane to the lake stood a large, open-air pavilion where 150 people could be seated for dining.

Adjacent to the pavilion was a small building used as a kitchen, along with a soda and beer bar. Another part of the building was used by bathers as a changing area. Built into the hill was an open dance area covered with a roof and surrounded with benches built along the sides of the floor. There were also hiking trails and a good

beach. This was Fox Point’s first beer garden and for years was a popular destination for family picnics and church activities.



About 1925, the year before the Village incorporated, the park was closed and the land subdivided for home sites. No trace has remained except for bottles uncovered by former owners at the south end of Beach Drive.

A beer garden next appeared in Fox Point in 2015 in Doctors Park as part of two traveling caravans sponsored by the Milwaukee County Parks and Sprecher Brewery. The return of beer gardens in Milwaukee is an interesting story. Hans Weissgerber III, whose company owns and operates the Old German Beer Hall on Old World Third Street, seized upon the idea (that he shared with the county) to operate a classic, Bavarian-styled beer garden in a public park. In 2012, after six years of Weissgerber’s persistence, then Parks Director Sue Black decided to try the idea. It was an instant success. Estabrook Park was the first (operated by Weissgerber’s company and now listed by at least



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one critic as one of the top ten beer gardens in the world) followed by the Landing at Hoyt Park, Humboldt Park, and South Shore Terrace.

Weissgerber also came up with the idea of a traveling beer garden. The county said yes and found Sprecher Brewery as a sponsor.

The Sprecher traveling beer gardens appear for between two and four weeks at various county parks including the Fox Point side of Doctors Park by Picnic Area 3.

Sprecher provides the vehicles and equipment, which are repurposed emergency vehicles with converted beer pumps. The beer gardens serve craft beer, gourmet sodas, hard root beer, hard ginger beer, wine, and various beer-garden-appropriate food items. County employees staff the activities. There is live music many nights. The county keeps a certain percentage of food and beverage sales—between 10-20 percent.

The Parks Department is happy with the arrangement—it netted nearly one million dollars from the beer gardens in 2015. A busy

park is a safe park and vandalism and other incidents have decreased with the traffic the beer gardens draw.

The traveling beer garden will be back in Doctors Park in 2017. Bring the family and a picnic. What an excellent way to spend a summer afternoon and evening.

You'll also want to check out the many improvements courtesy of the hard work of the County Parks and the Doctors Park Friends, including the new pavilion near Picnic Area 3, picnic tables, new directional signage, invasive plant removal, and newly planted native flora.

Suds, fun, and many other great things are happening at Doctors Park—the host to Fox Point's first beer garden in 90 years.

Douglas H. Frazer is a Fox Point resident and neighborhood contributor. The views expressed are his own and not necessarily those of Best Version Media, LLC.

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