



THE

# Northern Brewer

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GREAT NORTHERN BREWERS CLUB

## November 2021

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### Next Meeting

November 16, 2021  
49<sup>th</sup> State Barrel Room  
7:00pm

### GREAT NORTHERN BREWERS CLUB

#### GNBC WEBSITE

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## Guest Column: Reflections on Beer and Brewing at Home, Fifty Years On

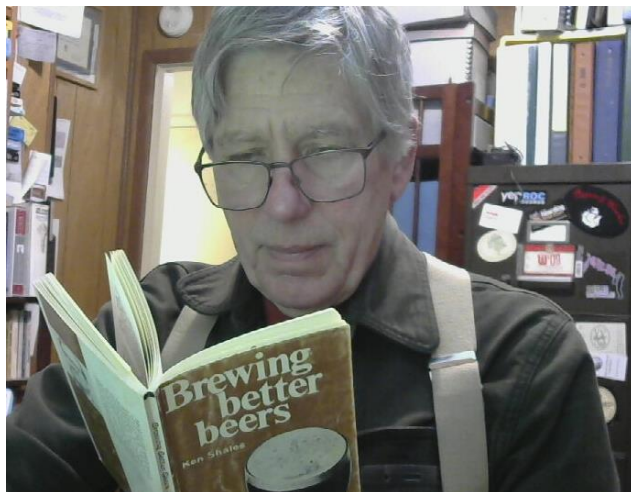
*By Steve Johnson*

Folks who began brewing beer as a hobby after the mid-nineteen eighties may not recall a time when an introduction to brewing at home began with a recipe like this one:

14 gallons water  
10 lbs sugar  
2 packages yeast  
2 cans malt syrup  
1 hydrometer

“Mix all these together thoroughly. Let stand. Skim off foam. When the hydrometer gets to the red beer line, bottle. That’s all there is to it. Jim”

That was the complete recipe my parents followed in 1970, the year I turned twenty one. (I was still living at home.) The recipe was provided by their friend Jim, a local high school teacher. I’ve seen the same directions for Prohibition style (pre-Craft?) homebrew in sources including a garden nursery catalog circa 1980, a Rotary Club newsletter from 1973, and The Impoverished Students Book of Cookery, Drinkery & House Keepery (Jay F. Rosenberg, Reed College Alumni Association, eight printings from 1965 to 1970). Friend Jim actually specified 10 gallons as the amount of water, as in other sources cited. My parents corrected the volume by four gallons, presumably to produce slightly weaker beer.



In any case: The taste was what one might expect. My brother Dave remembers the beer as “yeasty.” Others might say, “Tastes like homebrew.” Nonetheless, I somehow acquired a taste for that beer. It was definitely not American light lager.

Even then I searched the package stores for variations among light lagers and for the few oddball beers that fell outside that category: the seasonal bock from Pabst or, when I later lived in Madison, Wisconsin, the beer and ale from Huber, a local brewer still active in the mid-seventies.

As I became aware of the craft beer and home brewing movements in the eighties and early nineties, I could not have predicted a future in which I could bicycle two miles to a local craft brewery and taproom, one of ten or more in the town where I live. Or that owning a draft beer system at home was an unexceptional possession for a beer lover. Or that “all in one” electric brewing systems were widely available

for a thousand dollars. I haven't sprung for that last one and still do brew-in-a bag in a half-barrel pot on a propane burner in the backyard. (Thirty years ago I didn't have a backyard.)

In the heady days of the nineties, I also did not anticipate the here today, gone in a few years character of the evolving beer and brewing landscape. Craft breweries, large and small, came and disappeared, often after expansion, merger, or acquisition. Brewing supply outlets, local and online, prospered and then were gone. In the past few years, printed brew papers, once freely available in taprooms and package stores, have just about disappeared. You may remember The Celebrator and Northwest Brew News. More distant in my memory are two East Coast papers, Beer and Tavern Chronicle and its much longer-lived competitor, Ale Street News. Many of these papers carried brewing columns and recipes as well as listings of breweries and taprooms useful to beer tourists and other travelers.

Web based brewing resources have proved no more durable than other aspects of the Internet. Homebrew Digest, rec.crafts.brewing and other early, important services are now vanished or reduced to ghostly relics and collections of spam. Gone too are the recipe sites Hopville and BrewToad and no doubt others.

At my age I've become accustomed to substantial change in many aspects of life, my hobbies included. Nonetheless, I continue to look for continuity. In beer and brewing, there remains the timeless wonder of fermentation and methods of extracting sugars from grains and other sources.

In the mid-nineties, when I began brewing with cans of extract, and took classes at a homebrew shop, I occasionally mentioned the hobby in the workplace. In response, one acquaintance mentioned that she brewed from grain rather than malt extracts. Didn't that require a lot of equipment? I asked. No, she said, she brewed one-gallon batches in her Manhattan apartment kitchen using pots and colanders she already owned. At the time, I thought her method seemed impossibly complex, and for a minimal yield of beer. Twenty five years later, in our age of good beer abundance and small batch brewing at home, that approach seems contemporary.

In addition to an abundance of good beer, and tools for brewing, many folks now have easy access to an almost overwhelming abundance of reading about beer and brewing. Some brew papers and magazines and discussion groups may be gone, but other, digital resources have taken their place. Some are freely available, either directly from publishers who open access to back volumes, or via the Internet Archive collection of books and magazines in the public domain; and public libraries that make licensed books and magazines available to card holders. In my case, I've found that access to the current and digital backfiles of *Zymurgy* justified joining the American Homebrewers Association.

For the future, despite the almost bewildering abundance of good commercial beer, I intend to continue brewing at home and learning about what other home brewers have done and are doing. My sources include older manuals and magazines as well as contemporary practices. Some older works I read for amusement and inspiration, if not for technique.

Lately I have been brewing smaller batches and trying techniques described in books and magazines. In October, I did a second running from the brew-in-a-bag sack of grain from a batch of Belgian Dark Strong. For that second grew, I used English ale yeast and East Kent Goldings. I have not bottled either batch as yet. By February, they should be ready to taste and bring to a club meeting.

Steve Johnson

## **Call for Nominations and ONLINE ELECTION**

*By Mike Fisher*

Word has gone out a couple different ways, but now it's go time. **This is the final call for nominations for a 2022 officer or 2022-2023 board position.**

This club exists because of the work done by volunteers. We have a lot of potential vacancies this year, so your help is needed.

**Nominations will be accepted through November 7, 2021 via e-mail to [president@greatnorthernbrewers.org](mailto:president@greatnorthernbrewers.org). Our election will be held online, as it was last year. Watch for an e-mail with voting instructions around November 9-10! The election will be open from that date until 7:00pm on November 16, when our club meeting begins!**

# MEMBERSHIP

By Steve Johnson

**Renewal Time:** The GNBC membership year begins on October 1<sup>st</sup> and ends on September 30<sup>th</sup>. So far, 45 of last year's 84 annual individual/household members have renewed. With news that the The Alaska Craft Brew & Barley Wine Festival will again be held at the Dena'Ina Convention Center, January 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>, now is a good time to renew membership. A current GNBC membership card will be required for entry to the Industry Meeting prior to the Festival.

Of course, a current membership card is also required to obtain discounts from Arctic Brewing Supply, La Bodega, and Matson Gas.

The most convenient way to renew membership is by making a payment via Paypal. A credit card is required; a Paypal account is not required. The renewal form is on the GNBC website at <https://greatnorthernbrewers.org/membership/>.

For payment by check, request details on a physical mailing address by sending an email to [membership@greatnorthernbrewers.org](mailto:membership@greatnorthernbrewers.org). I will also accept checks at meetings. Printing and laminating the cards will take another day or two, unless arrangements are made in advance.

**MEETINGS:** In September, GNBC began monthly in person meetings again in the East Barrel Room at 49th St. Brewery. Attendance at the September and October meetings has been modest, though everyone seems to be having a good time seeing one another and sharing a variety of recent and vintage beer, commercial and homebrew. It would be great to encounter more bottles and growlers of homebrew at the November meeting.

Steve Johnson  
Membership Coordinator  
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