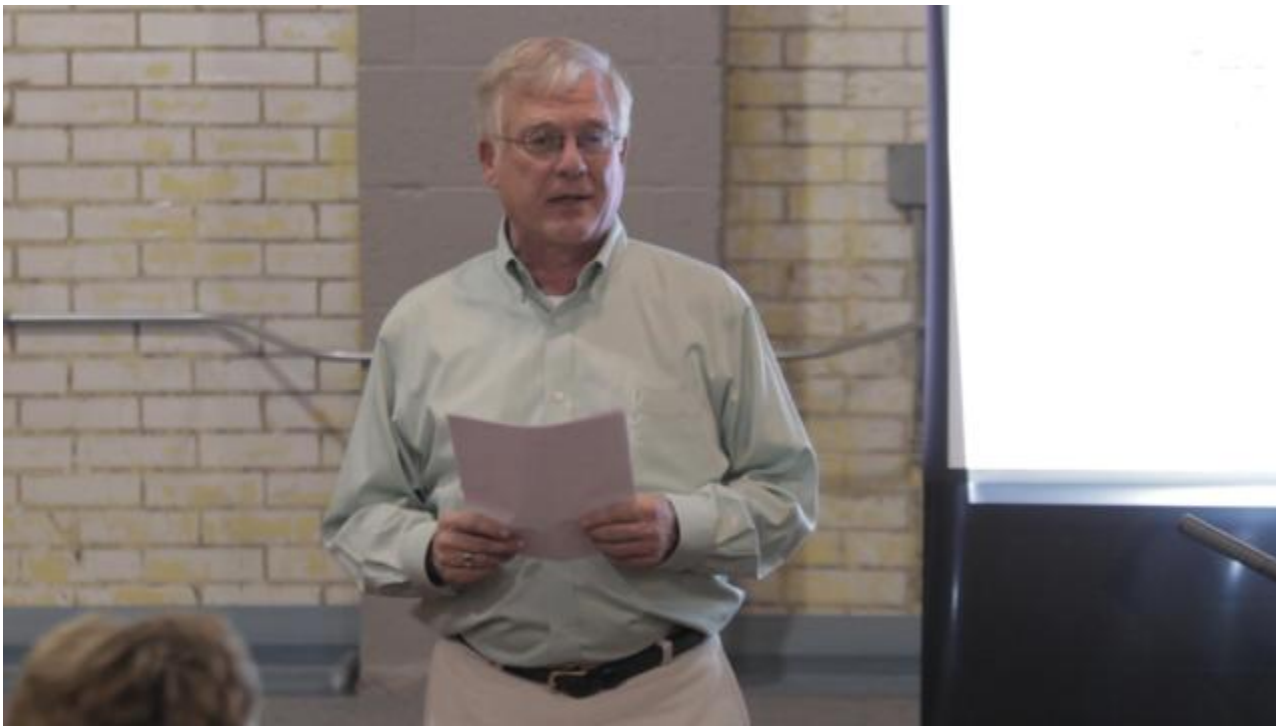


Older than Old Bakery: The history of breweries in Alton

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON - A packed house enjoyed a brief history of breweries in **Alton** during a Thursday evening presentation from **Alton Township Supervisor Don Huber at Old Bakery Beer Company**, Alton's most recent brewer.

The presentation was brought to Old Bakery by Huber, who described himself as an avid researcher. He worked with local historian, **Charlotte Stetson**, to chronicle the history of beer-making in Alton from 1842-1954.

"It wasn't a far stretch for me to do this research," Huber said after the presentation.

The story began in 1842 when **Phillip Yeakel** opened the first Alton Brewery. Called "**Union Brewery**," it was made using brewing skills Yeakel brought from Germany when he came to Alton in 1836 with his wife and two children. Huber said Alton was a popular destination for Germans fleeing from forced conscription into military service.

Yeakel partnered with fellow German, Jacob Haas to run Union Brewery. When Yeakel died in 1854, Haas partnered with his son, George Yeakel. That brewery was located between Union and Pearl Street. It was called **Shields Street** during those times. Huber said it was located "behind and beneath the cemetery."

A second brewery, called the Alton Brewery was owned by **John Fishbach and Jacob Hund**. It was located on "Plank Road." Plank Road was paved with tree planks. It was located on what is now Belle Street.

A third brewery was owned by **George Bauman and Bartholomew Runzie**. It was located on 16th Street near Alby, and called Western Brewery.

A fourth brewery opened in 1861 called the Cooper Brothers Cream Ale Brewery. In 1862, a boiler exploded and the brewery burned to the ground. The loss was estimated at \$16,000, a significant sum in those times.

Frederick Meisner, who worked for Union Brewery, started his own brewery near 6th Street at his home. He passed in 1867. The brewery was found in 2005 by workers who believed it was part of the Underground Railroad.

"Every time a hole opens up somewhere, people think it has to do with the Underground Railroad," Huber joked in his presentation. "The Underground Railroad didn't just mean it was under the ground."

The death of George Yeakel without any viable heirs in 1867 spelled the end of the Union Brewery. Western Brewery was sold in 1878 due to Runzie's outstanding debts. Alton Brewery burned in 1881, and then owner John Jehle moved to the Western brewery.



Union Brewery and Yeakel's plant was sold in 1882 and became Bluff City Brewery. Alton Brewery was bought by **Anton Reck** in 1890, and began selling ice as well. In 1909 Alton brewery made \$35,000 worth of improvements and became Anton Reck Brewing Co.

Prohibition and World War I spelled the end of Reck's brewery, but Bluff City survived selling ice and "near beer," which had much less alcoholic content.

In the 1950s, however, competition from national brands spelled the end to Bluff City Brewery. Huber said Alton did not have another successful brewing company, until the recent addition of Old Bakery.