and many additives and procedures that are common in most Western wine making. The emphasis is on “honest wines” and keeping to tradition, and the arguments for organic wines are almost religious in their fervor; yielding to Western methods or technologies is at a minimum considered unpatriotic. Some of these attitudes undoubtedly derive from Ilia Chavchavadze, the nineteenth-century national hero of Georgia: “Our people disdain very much the addition of anything but grape juice into the wine. If now and then someone, somewhere has dared to do it, he should try very hard to hide it because all of us consider it a shame and a sin to profane the sacred juice of grapes that nature has given us with additions and interferences … [success] can only be achieved if we stand up to European fake wines by having [people] taste our true wine” (p. 129).

The volume is marred by a few careless errors and inconsistencies. On page 46, 1,000 square meters is claimed to be about half a hectare; in fact, a hectare is exactly 10,000 square meters. On page 92, the text states that “the east-facing window [of a church] seemed to look directly toward Jerusalem”; in fact, Israel is situated southwest of Georgia, and there is no way in which an east-looking window can look toward Jerusalem. There is also a claim that Georgian wines are served at the Noma restaurant in Copenhagen—arguably one of the finest in the world. I looked through the 41-page wine list of Noma online but could not find a Georgian wine. At one point, the author tastes a Muscat-Mtsvane blend and finds it pétillant, which she attributes to sloppy wine making; however, if you cannot do anything to the wine on principle, how can it be sloppy wine making? The worst offense—and this clearly betrays my academic background—is that there is no index or bibliography, which makes the volume less user friendly than it could have been. Nevertheless, it is chock-full of facts, and I welcomed the opportunity to learn about the wine industry in a country of which I had known nothing. The people are amiable and devoted, and their wine industry survived the Soviet regime, during which the number of permitted grape varieties was severely reduced.

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The beer industry has had a spate of informative books appear since the start of the new century. Several represent portrayals of particular firms. These include Dan Baum, Citizen Coors: An American Dynasty (2000); Julie MacIntosh, Dethroning the King: The Hostile Takeover of Anheuser-Busch, an American Icon (2011); Bill


For how beer is made, Charles Bamforth’s Beer: Tap into the Art and Science of Brewing (2003) provides a good tutorial that goes down smoothly. For how beer is consumed, Ken Wells’s Travels with Barley: A Journey through Beer Culture in America (2004) offers a spirited description.


For economists, the go-to book on the economics of the beer industry in the United States is Victor J. Tremblay and Carol Horton Tremblay’s The U.S. Brewing Industry: Data and Economic Analysis (2005). A more recent economic treatment, with an eclectic worldwide perspective, is Johan F.M. Swinnen’s (editor) The Economics of Beer (2011).

Maureen Ogle’s Ambitious Brew: The Story of American Beer (2006) offers a light but satisfying history of beer in the United States. In contrast, Jeff Alworth’s The Beer Bible (2015) provides a hale and hearty worldwide perspective on the industry. As the title suggests, Roger Protz’s World Beer Guide (2009) also has worldwide perspective. However, Protz’s guide is more like a catalog of information, whereas Alworth’s contribution, chock-full of pictures and interesting sidebar anecdotes, is the most full-bodied book about beer on this list.

For anyone whose opportunity cost is too high to read all or most of these new books about beer, but who wants to be informed about the industry, the optimal book may well be William Bostwick, The Brewer’s Tale: A History of the World According to Beer (2014). Bostwick, who is the beer critic for the Wall Street Journal, knows the science as well as the art of brewing. He also knows the history of the industry—and travelled to distant lands to draft this book.

The Brewer’s Tale: A History of the World According to Beer is not really a history of the world. However, the organization of the book, like the title, is both clever and substantive. Bostwick presents a history of the beer industry by hanging the story of beer on several human “pegs” that have shaped the history of the world.
The pegs are worth listing, if only because they draw in the reader: the Babylonian, the Shaman, the Monk, the Farmer, the Industrialist, the Patriot, the Immigrant, and the Advertiser. Each of these characters forms a chapter in the book. Bostwick argues that individuals in each of these categories have shaped the beer industry—and, in doing so, have shaped the world. How Bostwick substantiates his argument is what *The Brewer’s Tale* is all about. Readers can decide for themselves whether Bostwick pulls this off, though I believe he does.

Bostwick’s book is only 245 pages long (with a very good index); the book never drags because Bostwick can write. Here is how he describes himself: “I’m a beer critic. ... That means when I drink I’m on duty. My job is to translate flavor to prose, not to wonder why but to describe, clearly, what. ... My palate is sensitive, my thesaurus well thumbed. I can flag a dirty tap line, I can distinguish tropical Calypso hops from citrusy Cascades. To me, beer is more than dry or sweet, strong or light. Not simply dark, but smoky like a camp-fire in a eucalyptus grove. Not just fruity, but tropically spiced like a papaya ripening in pine boughs” (p. x). I would characterize Bostwick’s writing style as delicate, with very little bitterness, marked by lots of sugar and a hint of rum-soaked raisins. He could make the widget industry interesting.

*The Brewer’s Tale: A History of the World According to Beer* is more than telling the reader what a beer tastes like. As Bostwick puts it, his objective is to explain: “Why does beer taste the way it does? ... Where did those styles, those flavors – where did beer itself – come from in the first place?” (p. x). To do so, he encounters the Babylonian, the Shaman, the Monk, the Farmer, the Industrialist, the Patriot, the Immigrant, and the Advertiser.

In this review, I will only briefly touch on each of these pegs. To review them in detail would be like revealing the denouement of a mystery novel.

In the chapter “The Babylonian,” Bostwick travels to Egypt (along with Sam Calagione, of Dogfish Head craft brewing fame, and a film crew) to discover and re-create beer recipes from the geographic genesis of beer’s invention. More than a travelogue, the chapter is an account of potable archaeology and dogged determination to learn how the Babylonians turned grain into a malt beverage. In the narrative, one also gains insight into the creative juices of craft brewing in the United States.

The history of craft brewing in the United States is further fleshed out in “The Shaman”: personified today in Brian Hunt, the man behind Moonlight Brewing Company. From his encounter with Hunt, Bostwick takes the reader back to ancient Rome and the spread of beer through Europe. Here Bostwick explores the religious rites associated with beer in the Roman Empire and with nomadic tribes that settled Scotland and Scandinavia. In this chapter, we also learn what beer receives Bostwick’s imprimatur as the best beer in the world (today). I will not conceal this. Bostwick’s highest encomium goes to Moonlight Brewery’s Pliny the Younger, “often cited as the best American IPA, if not the best American beer, if not the best beer, period” (p. 28).
“The Monk,” as the title suggests, is about the history of religious orders and their contribution to the production of beer—and to improvements in the quality of the product. What Brian Hunt is to the chapter on the Shaman, Saint Sixtus Abbey is to the chapter on the Monk. Saint Sixtus brews the Westvleteren brand of Belgian beer. The marketing of “Westy” is a case study in price and nonprice allocation. Westy is available only at the abbey, prospective customers queue up to purchase a limit of four dozen bottles, and they must promise not to resell what they buy (not all these promises are kept).

Bostwick uses the chapter “The Monk” to explain the key role that monks played as innovators in the brewing process. Monks not only prayed for good beer; they worked at it. The beer they produced was not just good for the spirits; it was good for the health of its consumers: a form of liquid grain at a time when pure water and healthy food were in short supply for the masses. Economic historians will find fascinating Bostwick’s description of how the introduction of hops into the brewing process led to the production of beer outside the abbey and into the world of medieval commerce and trade. This chapter also has some of the best technical writing about beer production in the book.

“The Farmer” is about two kinds of farmers. One grows hops, and in this chapter, Bostwick uses a particular hop farmer in Newport, Oregon, to tell the tale of how hops changed the history of beer and, in Bostwick’s narrative, the history of the world. However, the farmer in this chapter also is someone who brews what Bostwick calls “farmhouse beer.” Farmhouse beer is based on what the farmer has available—as a by-product of his agricultural endeavors. It could be pumpkins or whatever grain might be around the farm at the time. Farmhouse beer was once the beer of colonial America. Each batch was different because the inputs differed depending on what crop was available.

Today, farmhouse beer is the domain of some craft brewers and home brewers. Bostwick compares this kind of brewing to fly-fishing: “wading into nature’s chaos to pluck one glimmering bit of perfection from under its roiling surface” (p. 112).

“The Industrialist” tells the story of beer crawling “out of the henhouse” (or small-scale production) into the world of mass production. Bostwick ties this to the spread of the British Empire as the Brits discovered the commercialization of porter and developed the scale and logistics to supply this malt beverage throughout the known world. From porter to India Pale Ale, Bostwick traces (again) the prominence of hops in the development of beer. Bostwick also puts a spotlight on the water. The sandstone strata west of Burton gave the water calcium sulfate–rich gypsum that led to Burton IPA becoming a “clear, sparkling, Champagne-like beer” (p. 143). British explorers took British IPA to the Artic, writing back home that it was “as nourishing as beefsteak” with “sustaining qualities … far greater than those of wine or spirits” (p. 145).

“The Patriot” initially is about George Washington, a founding father with a personal affinity for beer (or perhaps ale). Washington brewed beer at Mount Vernon
(as did Thomas Jefferson at Monticello). Bostwick uses the chapter’s description of home brewing in colonial America as a segue to craft brewing in the United States today. He describes attempts to use the recipe for beer that George Washington used at Mount Vernon to produce a refreshing malt beverage today. Bostwick cannot tell a lie: the attempts have not always been successful.

Bostwick’s penultimate chapter is “The Immigrant,” a paean to the Germans who brought the taste of lager beer to America—along with the requisite skills for its production. Busch, Schlitz, Pabst, Heileman, and others: these were Germans who found America a welcome place for their entrepreneurial endeavors and their talent at turning water and grain into beer.

Out of this Germanic stock, four generations later, came Jim Koch, the founder of the Boston Brewing Company (brand name: Samuel Adams). Koch helped shape craft beer into big business. In 2014, he joined the Bloomberg billionaire list. When asked what is the “best beer,” Koch responded with the name of a familiar German lager: “Budweiser” (p. 194).

For Koch, Budweiser is not the best because it is the largest-selling brand. Rather, Budweiser is the largest-selling brand because it is the best. By best, Koch is referring to the taste and the consistency of Budweiser beer. Referring to Anheuser-Busch, Koch asserts: “Everybody jumps on them, but they’re great beers. They care just as much about their product as [craft brewers] and they have better brewing skills” (p. 194).

In “The Immigrant,” Bostwick provides a minihistory of the bar. The inn was important in “The Patriot.” However, it was the bar—or saloon—that for a later generation provided the retail outlet for the prodigious output of the German-produced lager beer. Bostwick reports that Milwaukee once had one bar for every 130 citizens; San Francisco, one for every 96 citizens.

Although much of Bostwick’s book is devoted to the varieties of beer, “The Immigrant” is primarily about lagers, which, he writes, “in one sense, represent beer’s crowning achievement” (p. 202). For millions of people, having a “cold one” means enjoying a lager beer. Craft beer receives an inordinate amount of attention from the business press. In the meantime, millions of consumers continue to drink MillCoorWeiser.

“The Advertiser” closes the book. Who is this particular character in A History of the World According to Beer? The Advertiser was the savior of the beer industry. When the United States emerged from Prohibition and World War II, “the bartender had been replaced by the grocery store clerk, the brewer by the ad man. And as drinking changed, the drink would too” (p. 229).

The last chapter of Bostwick’s history is, in part, an analysis of the major brewers’ discovery of Madison Avenue. As American consumers transitioned to sweeter soft drinks, they also turned to lighter beer. The inflection point in this transition was
Miller’s production of a low-calorie beer named “Lite” and the brilliance of Miller’s initial advertising campaign. Fueled by advertising dollars from its new parent, Philip Morris, Miller turned Lite into a sensational success. Unfortunately for Miller, the firm could not exploit a first-mover advantage. Bud Light and Coors Light enjoyed a second-mover advantage and challenged Miller’s leadership in the low-calorie beer segment.

As the mainstream brewers moved to lighter and lighter beers, this opened the door to craft brewers who offered an alternative taste signature. Bostwick describes the reaction of Anheuser-Busch InBev and MillerCoors to develop their own craft beer product lines, through acquisition and internal growth, in order to participate in the growth segment of the industry without losing the scale advantages of their megabreweries. How this plays out will in many ways determine the future structure of the beer industry in the United States.

Beer and wine can be substitutes in consumption; they also can be viewed as sibling industries (or at least first cousins). Both beer and wine involve a potable product, both have ancient histories, both share a common ingredient, both have a history of attracting taxation and government regulation, both can be cottage industries, both can take the form of large enterprise, and like most siblings, beer and wine have times when they both care for each other and times when they do not.

An important hypothesis that Bostwick explores, of interest among the readers of this journal, is the stark contrast he draws between beer and wine. Bostwick argues that beer is “made,” whereas wine “just happens.” He describes beer as the first engineered food. The sugar in a grape will ferment on its own, but the central ingredient in making beer—grain—needs a hand to “coax out its sugars and ferment them into alcohol. Brewing beer demands thought and skill. It demands, in a word, a creator” (p. xii). Beer consumers and beer producers will drink heartily to this contention by Bostwick. It would be idle to contend that oenophiles will be much persuaded.

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Craft beer is booming. From humble beginnings in 1970, when there were 49 macrobreweries and 2 craft breweries, to 2012, when there were 19 macrobreweries and 2,347 craft breweries, craft beer has grown by leaps and bounds (Elzinga, Tremblay, and Tremblay, 2015, p. 245). Craft beer started when Fritz Maytag, heir to the Maytag fortune, purchased the struggling Anchor Brewing Company in San Francisco—a brewery that made an odd style of beer, steam, which few outside of its limited distribution network within the city had ever tasted. Today, the industry generates millions of dollars and has reached every state and multiple countries.

Tom Acitelli, in his well-written, well-paced, and downright intriguing book, The Audacity of Hops, tells the complicated, fraternal, and heart-wrenching story of craft beer’s pioneers. Starting at the beginning, with Maytag’s purchase of Anchor, Acitelli walks through the development of the craft beer movement with an emphasis on the individual producer, “Big Beer’s” attempts to dominate the marketplace, and the cooperative nature that has allowed craft beer to proliferate. Several themes permeate both the book and the history of the craft beer movement: risk-taking, cooperation, competition, rule breaking, and consolidation. Without each of these elements, which roughly correspond to each phase of craft beer’s history, craft beer would not be as successful or as threatening to “Big Beer.”