

Name of Interviewee: Bill Mares  
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Name of Interviewer: Theresa McCulla  
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Theresa McCulla: It's November 28, 2018. This is Theresa McCulla of the National Museum of American History. I am interviewing Bill Mares, co-owner of, of The House of Fermentology blendery and author and journalist. We are meeting at the American History Museum in Washington, D.C. And this interview is part of the American Brewing History Initiative, a project to document and collect the history of beer and brewing in America. Um, so Bill, when and where were you born?

Bill Mares: I was born in St. Louis in, um, 1940. Um, my father was a chemist, uh, and my mother was a teacher. Um, I really grew up in Texas. I mean my parents moved to Texas when I was six. Um, and, um, um, my first experience with beer I think was probably drinking underage, uh, in Texas, Lone Star. Um, I don't think Budweiser was on the, on the menu. But, uh, Lone Star and Pearl were two of the most popular beers among my high school, uh, classmates.

TM: And do you remember what, what they tasted like?

BM: Well, it was, it was, uh, illicit, um, um, drinking. So, it, it, you know, it just, it, it, it was an alcohol. It was a, it was a, well, a little, in a way it's an acceptable drug. Uh, I didn't have any sense that they, of measuring, did they taste better or, or not. Some of the Mexican beers I think did taste better. I mean, it was, um, Carta Blanc, uh, and, um, uh, I think, um, Modelo was one and, um. But, I, I was not a, a beer, um, I was not knowledgeable about beer at that time.

00:01:45 TM: And, uh, what do you remember about, um, eating and drinking in your household growing up?

BM: Oh, well, I thought my parents were, you know, they got my first glass of wine. First alcohol I ever had was we were on a trip to Europe and I was thirteen and one brother was fifteen, and one brother was, um, seventeen. And, and, uh, when we had meals at, parents would say, "Well, you can, you can try this." Or one beer. And so, it was not forbidden fruit. It was much more, this is, this is what civilized behavior includes. I mean, they didn't say, "Well, you guys can go out and get drunk." But, I think that I certainly never had any, there was never any sense of a prohibition about drinking, um, as I was growing up.

00:02:35 TM: And there is a history of, of beer in your family. Um, your.

BM: Well, yes. My father brewed, uh, homebrewed during Prohibition. And, uh, and had, a, a famous story about having rented a, an apartment from the, I think it was his sister or the cousin of the sheriff of Akron County, Ohio. And he had a

batch of the beer, um, overflow, uh, and drip down into the, uh, woman's apartment. And, uh, she [chuckles] she said she called him at work and said, "Well, I'm not gonna report you to my brother as long as this all gets cleaned up." Which he did. And, um, but I, um, so it made, it made was really a, a good story. And, uh, I don't know whether that was what got me into homebrewing I think when, when my wife and I moved to Vermont, we lived out in the country for a couple years and we thought, "Well, let's do all these country things." And have a big garden and raise sheep and raise, uh, chickens and geese and, uh, I had a few couple of beehives. And someone said, "Someone gave us a copy of, I think of the Whole Earth catalog. And they, you could buy, uh, equipment from them." And it was pretty primitive stuff. Or, you know, there was, uh, I think Blue Ribbon had a hopped malt syrup. And my first batch had, uh, we used Fleischmann's bread yeast. Which is not, wasn't good. And, but it was kinda fun. And then the first batch blew up, um, with some [chuckles] some excitement.

TM: Can you describe the excitement?

00:04:29 BM: Well. [Chuckles] I had made this batch and put it down in the basement thinking, well, it's cool enough. And then, maybe three weeks later, the, there were these [chuckles] couple of explosions. And, and I went down and found that a couple of bottles had blown up. And glass was all around everywhere. And, so, I went back down, downstairs where the, some sort of a helmet, I don't know what, I think it was a skiing helmet and goggles. And took the rest of the bottles outside and left them, um, to go off by themselves. Um, and then finally I got around to reading a book or a booklet about it, saying you shouldn't use bread yeast, and you shouldn't use, uh, this and that. And, and, I think it was not until three or four years later that someone told me about a homebrewing, uh, shop down in Northampton, Mass. And, so, I drove down there and this guy had really good, I mean, at least decent stuff. He had Munton and [unknown] malt in both a powdered and a, um, liquid form. He had, uh, packets of yeast. He had packets of hops. And so, from then on, I, I had enough equipment where I could make decent beer. And gradually I liked it. Gradually my wife liked it. Um, gradually we got some of our friends to like it. And they weren't, you know, pouring it in the ferns and, and saying, "Thanks," but, you know, "just give me something else." And.

TM: And, can I ask, this, this first batch that blew up. What year was that?

BM: That was 1973.

TM: 1973. Okay.

BM: Yep.

00:06:16 TM: And I, before we get into the, the homebrewing, I want to back up a, a bit and ask about your school experience. Where did you go to school and what did you study?

BM: Oh, well, I went to Harvard. And studied Middle Eastern History, um, which you could say forms some of this, um, background because, uh, the, the great, uh, Ninkasi, the, the Syrian, or Sumerian, goddess of wheat and beer, uh, supposedly is there. But, I didn't know anything about her when I was an undergraduate. Um, and um, so I did drink, like, like, like everyone else, I drank a lot of beer at Harvard. And, but I did learn to drink Guinness. Which was probably my first real step into quality beer. And, um, Cronin's, which was not there when you were there. But Cronin's was a very famous bar, smoky bar. And they served Guinness on draft. Um, and then there was another place right in the square that, The Wurst House, I think it was called. And they had a range of German beers. So, I would say that probably I did get a beginning appreciation of, of decent beer when I was an undergraduate.

TM: And what years were those?

00:07:31 BM: That was '60, well, '58 to '62. And then I went and studied in Germany for half a year. And I drank a lot of beer there. Um, and, uh, but again, I wouldn't, I wouldn't say that, that there's a long, um, trail of, of beer appreciation. I think it probably didn't grow with the, the, or begin with this, this effort in homebrewing. And, um, because to be around homebrewers and to be around homebrewing shops, and so, you know, people would come in and they'd talk about, you, you'd have books that, that say, I think one was called *Brewing Beers Like Those You Like To Drink*. By, maybe it was David Line. One of those guys. So, I tried to make Pilsner Urquell. And I tried to make, um, um, some of the English ales. And they never, you know, I, it was okay. I could drink it. But, it was tough. I mean, because the, you couldn't get really good yeast, and, you know, all those other problems. But, it was still inspired enough that I wanted to do this. And it was a way, it was something you could fit in to the rest of your life. So, it really wasn't until I started to write this book that I got really even more, um, energized about beer. And I remember one year I, I think I made a batch of beer every week. And probably, probably threw out about half of them. Um, and, uh, but I was making kind of two and three gallon batches, so, I didn't feel too bad. But it was, it was kind of fun to do that. And, and my justification was I'm doing my research for what, what will be [chuckles] a brewery sometime. But, of course, that didn't happen, which was okay.

00:09:23 TM: And this book you mentioned. What is the title of that?

BM: Title's called *Making Beer*.

TM: *Making Beer*.

BM: Yeah. Very pretentious.

TM: [Laughs]

BM: Well, it was no, it wasn't, it, well, it wasn't that pretentious at the time because when I started doing this research, there were really, under ten I think, microbreweries in the country. And the publisher wanted me to have, wanted a mix of my honesty plus how to do it on a very rudimentary level. So, I, asked me to put in three or four recipes. And I had to have a glossary with what dark malts were and different kinds of, of yeast. I mean, now you'd have a whole book of just a glossary with all the ingredients. So, it was, it was very elementary, but there was nothing else out there that had I think both the story and the how to stuff. And then the next version, we sort of compressed the, the how to stuff or, it got a little more sophisticated, but it also got a little more compressed. And then the third edition we did has none of that how to stuff, because it would be pretentious, I mean, to try to tell people how to make beer.

00:10:37 TM: Well, and so one of my bigger questions was about writing and making beer. And, and why write about making beer? How, how has that changed you as a brewer? Or, you know, how has that grown your community as a brewer or a writer, would you say?

BM: That's a good question. I don't, well, certainly hasn't made me any better a brewer. Um, I, I think I, and I've done books on all of my hobbies. And, and I think that, that there is a certain engagement in something that's not central to my life. And I think that that's the first one that I ever did that was an exploration of, of a hob-, a hob-, and, and it was, you know, if people think of a hobby as a, something you do in your, in your spare time, yes. But they, you do it. But this is, um, there's a definition in the Oxford Unabridged Dictionary of a hobby is something that you become engaged in in a manner that, something like it's, something like the, it's, it's a manner that is, that is, is, that is excessive that people looking at it would say, "You're really getting too much into this. It's becoming more of a, of a passion." And I think that with the beer, I, I wanted to, to write about the process that I thought most homebrewers would go through. And then I was able to reach the end and say, I don't wanna spend four hundred thousand dollars in all of. I'm not an engineer. I don't wanna push all this liquid through pipes and go out and have to sell it. Um, I'm gonna go home to homebrew. And so I did that. Book's done. And go off and do something else.

00:12:29 TM: Great. Well, and I, I find the first edition particularly interesting because you write about your failures and your successes. And it's interesting, you use the word odyssey because it is a kind of a, a winding path toward, you know, looking to people who have done it professionally and others who, you know, have not succeeded, necessarily. So, um, it's a different take than other books available at the time, I would say.

BM: Well, it's also, I mean, it was, I mean, the sense of odyssey is, is true because, I mean, and I was finding Xerxes and I was having the, meeting the Sirens and, and, I don't know about the Cyclops and, uh. But, going to meet some

of these, these really famous people. I mean, Fritz Maytag and Jack McAuliffe and Charlie Papazian and. I mean, they were. And it was a time when they were approachable. I mean, I could call them up and say I'm doing this and they'd say come on by. I mean, that would be hard, much harder to do that now. Um, so, it was a, it was a, it was kind of, it was pioneering in a sense. And I, dare I say, I don't think it was pretentious. I think it was just a good read on. And it was charming to have, after it was done, I'd get calls from people from Alaska or Arizona or Wyoming or Alabama and say, "Hey, how do I start a brewery?" I said, "Didn't you read the last chapter about going home to homebrew?" I mean, this is real, this is heavy duty stuff. This is real bus-, business. And you can't just make beer, drink your own beer, and think that it's really good stuff. Everyone else should buy it. Um, so, I, I, I enjoyed that. I mean, I, I enjoyed that part. And I, and I certainly think that I made the right decision just to shut that door and go and look for another house.

00:14:17 TM: Well, and, so you mentioned visiting people like Fritz Maytag and McAuliffe and others. And I'm, you know, those moments of you stepping into those breweries. That's something that's so interesting to people nowadays. To brewers and to beer enthusiasts. And so, if you, if you can elaborate a bit on that, that would be very welcome. You know, when you open the door to see Fritz or to see Jack, you know, what, what was that day like?

BM: Hmm. Well, you know, that's thirty-five years ago. I mean, um, but I do remember it was, it wasn't searingly hot, but it was pretty warm. And I think, I don't know, sometime in early summer. And he had this, um, I think he had a, it was a goat shed that he'd re-did. And he'd gotten these, this ex, um, set of several, uh, dairy, stainless steel dairy tanks.

TM: And this is Jack McAuliffe?

BM: This is Jack McAuliffe who, um, was, had been a, he learned, discovered good beer when he'd been a submariner in Scotland. I mean, American submariner in Scotland in the fifties or, no, seventies. And had come home and, and really decided to do this on his own with precious little money. And so, he cobbled together a, a brewery. His, um, hot water tank and his mash tun and his, his, um, cooker and. And, uh, I don't know where he got his, his malts and so forth, but I mean, there must have been some places out there. And, and he put it into this goat shed, um, that couldn't have been about the size of this, maybe about the size of this room. Uh, which is, what? Fifteen by forty? Um. Uh, but small. And, and, and what, where my memory isn't perfect is that he, when I saw him he was not, no longer brewing. And he was just being kind to me to let me, uh, interview him and, and hear his story. And he was then trying to raise some money to expand. And, um, so it was a, was a little bit, I won't say is like being in a graveyard. But it was, it was being in a, in a building that was, um, um, looked like it had, it had seen, it had seen happier times and, um. And I sort of remember him sort of leaning against one of these vessels. And I think he was, my memory

is that he was not, he was, he was sad. I don't think he was embittered, but I think he was, he was just, he was feeling not terribly hopeful at that time. And, uh, and then as I told you, uh, he had along this dusty shelf, window, he had a couple of bottles, empty bottles of, of beer and, uh, or labels. And I said, "Could I take one of those?" And he, he said, "Yeah, sure." So, that's the one that I've brought for you.

TM: Yes. Yes.

BM: Um.

00:17:41 TM: And, uh, and did you, you visited Fritz before Jack? Is that right? In San Francisco?

BM: I think so, but I'm not sure. But it was the same trip.

TM: Okay. And that was a very different operation, it sounds like. Uh, much more active.

BM: Well, yeah. Fritz is a, a, a, I mean, he was, he was very, uh, even though he went to Stanford, he was, he was very Ivy League. You know, he was all, he wore a tie, he was, uh, very formal. But, but still a friendly guy. And, and, um, obviously deeply cared about his operation. He was very proud of it. And my most vivid impression is that he had, when I came into his office, he had these pallets, or, pallets worth of labels for Anchor Steam. Had eight million of them. And he was turning up each leaf, or not every one of them, but enough so that he could look and see if it regis-, the color registration was correct all the way down. And I think it's that kind of detail that he was, um, noted for. And he, uh, and I, I never could remember whether it was he or, or the guy from Davis, who said, you know, "If you're gonna be a brewer, you gotta like to solve problems." And, you can't say, "I'm gonna be done at some point." It's always, you're always thinking ahead. And, and, I think he had a, a big influence on, on a lot of real brewers out there. So, it was fun to meet him in this kind of relaxed way. And even sit there at the bar and have an Anchor Steam with him. And, yeah, that was good. Yeah.

00:19:35 TM: At the time you visited these places, were there other visitors? Other brewers? Or no?

BM: No. No. I can't remember if we made a specific time. It wasn't more than a half an hour or forty-five minutes. But no, no one else came through except a couple people of his employees wanting to ask a question.

00:19:55 TM: And how did you learn about them in the first place?

BM: Oh. Well, Anchor Steam, they're, they're been, there are books or articles about the microbrewing business. And, you know, whenever any of them would

talked about this, or wrote about it, I was in the middle of writing two other books at the time. So, I was bouncing a lot of different ideas and, around. And, but I think in '80, '80, when I started to read, or maybe it was late seventies, um, he, his, the story of him buying that Anchor Steam was told everywhere. And, or, not everyone, but, but enough so that I knew he was gonna be one of the people I'd like to talk to. And so, I put together this trip where I went to Chico and I met, uh, Grossman and Kamusi. And I, I went to, um, Sonoma to meet, uh, Jack McAuliffe. And then I went to San Francisco to. And then I think I went up to, to Oregon, to talk to Fred Eckhart and, uh, guys at Cartwright, um, Brewing. It was a big trip. I did a lot of stuff up there. Um, so, yeah. But this was '81, something like that.

00:21:20 TM: So, Ken Grossman was just starting out.

BM: Yeah.

TM: At that point then, right?

BM: Yeah.

TM: And what do you remember of his operation at the time?

BM: Well, it was pretty, it was pretty decent size, as I remember. I mean, it wasn't a, it wasn't like, um [chuckles] Boulder Brewing out in the, um, cow shed. And it wasn't like Jack. No, it was a going operation. And, and I think they were, they must have been up to several thousand barrels by that time, 'cause, uh, I, I, I think I took them both out to dinner. But I, I got in a, so, when I went to the operation, there was this big building, but it was only the front office. And then I, um, then I, I got to see them, talk to them face to face over dinner. But I didn't get to walk through their operation.

00:22:15 TM: Well, I want to, um, back up and get a bit more of your story into this, too. And so, I'm gonna jump backwards again. So, you studied at Harvard. And then you started a career as a journalist. And so, um, I would love if you could talk a bit about just the general trajectory of your career and, and where you moved, and then we can bring the homebrewing into that.

BM: Oh gosh. It's a whole succession of failures. But.

TM: [Chuckles]

BM: The, the short answer is, um, I. [Chuckles] I'd wanted to go in the foreign service after I graduated. And the foreign service said, we won't, we don't want you. And then I worked for Citibank for a year. And I decided I didn't want to be a banker. And then I went to law school for six weeks. And I said, I don't want to be a lawyer. So, then I was kind of stuck. I was out in Chicago. And, um, and

there's a, there's a great news agency then called the City News Bureau. It was very famous, 'cause it was this, they were the, the, the play "The Front Page" was written about a guy at the. And, but it was a great journalist training, uh, place. And, um, and so I went down and applied for a job. And, uh, I got a job as a police reporter. And so, I was, I was working nights and covering all kinds of societies, uh, trauma. And, uh, and I started, um, and I, I couldn't sleep during the day. So, I got a camera and I started going around taking pictures. And [unintelligible] I really liked that, 'cause it was sort of photojournalism. And I could do it alone. I could look through this lens at other things. And I didn't have to talk to anybody. And, um, then I, um, did that for a while. And, uh, I thought, well, how can I get some sort of instant cred? So, I, you can either write a book or you can, um, go work for a newspaper. Uh, or try, you know, work for a, as a jour-, photojournalist. So, I decided, what do I know about? And I did know something about Parris Island, 'cause I'd been in the Marine Corps. So, I wrote the Marines and I said, "I want to do a, I'd like to do a photo essay on Parris Island." And they wrote back. This is 1968. They wrote back in a week and said, "Yeah, you can do that. But we'd like to look at the photographs when you're done." I said, "That's alright. I'm not trying to expose the place." So, I went and spent three months with a one platoon. And, and then produced this book which, um, was published by Doubleday in, uh, '71. And, uh, um, and then I went to work for the Chicago Sun Times as a photographer. In the middle of that. [Chuckles] This goes back to the Middle East at Harvard. My junior tutor, um, came to me, I mean, we met in Chicago by chance. And he said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I'm a photographer." And he said, "Well, how would you like to go across Arabia on a camel?" I said, "Yeah, that'd be pretty cool." Thinking, well, he was half serious. But then we did in the, in the spring of '71, uh, we rode camels from Riyadh to Amman. It was about twelve hundred miles with four Bedouins. And from that came two books. Not just a, a book which was the original justification for the trip, which was a illustrated version of a pre-Islamic poem by a man named Libid, Abi Rabiah. But then when we got back, um, or we got to Beirut. Do you want all this stuff? [Laughs] Alright. We get to Beirut and we get, get interviewed by a reporter from the Christian Science Monitor about what we'd been doing. And he writes a story. It's on the front page of the Christian Science Monitor. So, we get back to the States. We get a call from an editor at Knopf Publishing, New York, saying, "You want to do a book about this trip?" So, we ended up doing two books about one trip. And then in, uh, so, then I went, then I, then my wife and I moved to Vermont and I worked for a couple newspapers there. And, um, and then I got, I got an, uh, I worked, uh, had another, another friend from Harvard who was a sociologist at U Mass, uh, Amherst. And he was interested in worker, uh, ownership. Workplace democracy. So, we went back to Knopf and proposed a book called Working Together, uh, which I was working on as I was working on this, began to work on the beer book, as I started to work on a book about Vermont humor. So I'm, I'm juggling all this stuff. And, um, and then I, uh, let's see, and then in seventy, '84 I went, I was elected, uh, politician in the Vermont legislature. And I did that for six years. Um, and then I got tired of politics and I



went to teach school. So, I went to teach history in high school until 2008, '09. And um, and, and sort of wove books into all of this all along different topics.

00:27:47 TM: And it seem, but it seems like brewing beer became a constant strain, a constant hobby throughout most of these years. Is that correct?

BM: Uh, yes. But once, um, uh, I think once we had, we got a real beer industry in Vermont, it was, it was silly to think that I could make beer as, as good as any of these that were coming to town. And, um, and, and, you know, I didn't, um, I had other things to do with my life. I didn't want to. And, I, I was not interested in joining a homebrew club, 'cause that, that's too serious. Um, I kept up with, with my beekeeping through all this period of time. And still have a lot of interest in that. But I just didn't feel making beer was nearly as much fun as drinking it. Uh, and uh, but I did do something. I mean, I did, one of the things I did as a politician was to get the Vermont, uh, law changed to have, to [unintelligible] brewpubs. And, before that, there were only I think two on the east coast. And then we got them. And, um, and we now got a, a number of them. So.

TM: What year was that? What?

BM: Hmm?

TM: What year was that?

BM: '88.

TM: '88.

BM: '88. And, uh, yeah, so they, the Vermont Pub and Brewery was the first of the brewpubs and they still have a picture of me cutting their ribbon. Um, so, I felt, you know, as, I still get introduced between brewers from Vermont. "Oh, he's the guy that got the brewpub law passed."

00:29:31 TM: Well and, you know, I speak to so many brewers who cite the date when that law arrived in their state and say that it's just, it's a watershed. It changes everything. You know, it allows for beer culture to grow.

BM: Yeah.

TM: Where there really wasn't one before.

BM: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Um, no, I, I felt quite pride, uh, proud of my little small scale accomplishment.

00:29:51 TM: So, as you were starting out as a homebrewer, this is pre-internet, and so, what kinds of resources were available to you to learn about brewing? To buy ingredients?

BM: Well, the first were the things suggested by things like Mother Earth, uh, News and, um. There was, there were a few little pamphlets and stuff like, I can't remember who published them. Uh, you'd go into health food stores, and they'd have a rack of how do you do, how do you do your own beer, or something. And they were real primitive. And the directions were prescriptions for disaster, in retrospect. But there just wasn't very much until a couple of these English books came in. Uh, David Line and, and I think that was the first, or, like him, I, and I bought, um, at this, at this homebrewing shop down in, uh, Northampton. Because there wasn't anything in, in Vermont except, um, a place called, not Gardner's Supply, Gardner's, Gardner's, Garden Way. Garden Way. And they had, um, one of their people did a book. It was okay. It was a bit. He was, even he was limited by the number of the quality of ingredients that were available. And then there was the English group. And, um. But I didn't, I didn't lose a lot of sleep over it. I mean, it wasn't, no one really liked my, my. It wasn't as if I was bursting with desire to make such great beer. It, but it kind of got better and better almost in spite of my efforts, as the ingredients got better. And then when I did have one of these nightmares of thinking, I, you know, what it'd be like to do a brewery? I very, I think quickly I said, well, let's, let's go do the book instead and if, and really, if it still is valid at the end, okay, you can do it. But I think I really sensed at the beginning that this was gonna be more literary than, than brewing. Um, but, I thought it was a book that, that would fill a niche. That wasn't there. Because none of these other how to books had any pizzazz to them. Any, any literary merit. And I thought, well, maybe I can have some literary merit if I can't have a lot of brewing expertise.

00:32:39 TM: Well, and, you know, when most people think about the early years of homebrewing or even of microbrewing, they think of the West. But clearly it was happening in New England as well. And so, do you feel like access to ingredients or, or good brewing literature, was it different in New England at the time? Or would it have been similar in the West?

BM: Oh gosh. Um, I, well I don't know. I mean, I, I think, I think it wasn't the Whole Earth Catalog was nationwide. Right? And, um, um. [Long Pause] Gosh, I don't know. I don't know how. I don't know how to answer that. I could only surmise that among, among my, I didn't have many friends who were homebrewers until, um, there was a, a couple of people who moved up from Massachusetts. Um, Greg Noonan was the guy who founded the pub and brewery. And he was a, he was a winner of that, that famous award, um, what's it called? The guy's, he has a name begins with "S", uh, he. Anyway, he, and he had written a book on lager beers. And there was another guy named Tom Ayers who would come from Massachusetts. And he helped to start a homebrewing club. And they immediately were, I would say, the, the most sophisticated homebrewers in

Vermont. And they were making bigger batches. They were buying stuff in bulk. The little group I belonged to, really you couldn't even call them a, a club. It was just an excuse to get together every month or six, six weeks, and taste beers and just see what they were like. Um, and I, but obviously within the, the atmosphere of, of Vermont, there were guys who were like the Catamount guys who started off as homebrewers. Um, uh, the guy, one of the guys who founded Magic Hat had started as a homebrewer. Um, oh gosh, what was his name? Johnson. Tom Johnson. Mark? Mike? Johnson was his last name. Um, then, um, there were, but it was almost, it wasn't, it wasn't as if they were all graduating from homebrewing clubs. I think a number of them just came up with the idea themselves, or had their own individual path that took them, uh, into. And some people started breweries who hadn't been homebrewers. Um, but I can't remember any kind of swelling of the beer, of beer expertise coming out of a, a landscape of clubs. It, it just, it struck me as they were more individuals. And deciding in their own way with their own level of education that they were gonna do a brewery.

00:36:01 TM: In, in general are we talking about the late seventies, or early eighties, or?

BM: Oh, this would be the, this would be, well, it'd be the eighties. And, and into the nineties. And, um, 'cause the first, see, there'd be the, the first was, um, Catamount, or one was Catamount. Then there was a couple, couple down in, gosh, South Tunbridge, maybe. Uh, and then, then there was, oh, oh what's his name? Very smart guy from Reed College. Um, Larry, Lawrence Miller started Otter Creek. And he did this really by himself. Uh, and made a, quite a successful operation. And then he sold it to this group from California. [Unknown]. And then [unknown] got bought by Long Trail. But then there was Long Trail. It was another one of those early ones. Um, and, um, hmm. Gosh, you'd have to look at the, the list. But I'm, you know, I'm, this is, this is eighties. And then into the nineties. And I'm by that time, I'm sort of out of the, I'm out of the swim. I'm still drinking beer, but I'm not hanging out with those guys.

00:37:20 TM: But you men-, so you came to brewing, your, your path was through things, companion things like beekeeping and, and, you know, your, the rest of your lifestyle in Vermont. Um.

BM: Well, yeah. I mean, I think, I mean that's what my whole life has been like. Being a, trying to do a number of different things slightly better than average. But ne-, nothing ever really ex-, I'm not an expert in anything. Um, and so, I guess the, the beer for me was, um, a, a fun discipline. But one that I didn't become, um, enslaved to.

00:38:03 TM: You mention in your book, um, the quote, "Emotional investment of homebrewing."

BM: Did I say I had emotional? Or not much? [Chuckles]

TM: [Chuckles] I think you observed that that is, that happens. That one gets an emotional investment.

BM: Well, yes. I mean, but of course then you, you, at least I felt that, you know, once, that was this whole discussion about hobbies, is, is how far do you let your hobby take over your life? And really make you so emotionally invested that you. [Chuckles] You make a fool of yourself. You know, I, I think, you know it's a fine line because you wanna be, you wanna be good enough not to embarrass yourself. But you also want to realize you're not gonna get too much farther than a certain level. I mean, and, because it's, it's presumptuous to do that. If you're, and, and the sort of my way I do with my bees. I, I, I'm a competent beekeeper. And I'm, you know, maybe slightly better than average. But I'm not a great beekeeper. And I got to be, oh, a competent brewer. Um, but now I'm, I'm getting my satisfaction of being a part-owner, where all the, all the real work is being done by my partner. [Chuckles]

TM: Sounds like a good arrangement.

BM: Oh sure. [Chuckles]

TM: What, um, you've mentioned beekeeping several times. What, um, what appeals to you about beekeeping?

BM: Oh gosh. I wrote a book about beekeeping, too. So, uh, well I, I think that the, the bees are, um, it's terrific citizen science, first of all. And you never learn all there is to know. So, you're humbled by that. You have a chance to work with a creature right on the cusp between domestic and, and wild. I mean, that that's what they are. And then they're not gonna survive really without humans today, because of the globalization of pests and the globalization of the markets. And, um, and so, you really have a, a certain responsibility as well as intellectual engagement. And, and they do, they do reach you on all, with all five sense, senses. I mean, you got, you got touch and you got smell and you got taste. You got hearing. You got sight. And, and uh, they're, they're really a, just a wonderful creature with, that has a incredible pedigree of literary and philosophical and scientific engagement throughout thousands of years. Um, you know, Emily Dickinson called them the Buccaneers of Buzz. Uh, and, uh, so, they're, they're just a wonderful way of, of keeping calm and having some engagement with nature and, and feeling that you're doing something for the world in this very quiet way. And, um, so, I, you know, I started the same year I started beer. Started keeping bees. And then since then there's only one year when I didn't have bees. And, uh, and I, and I, I just soon drop dead in the middle of, in the middle of an apiary somewhere. That'd be, that'd be great.

00:41:34

TM: Would you say this similar sense of a kind of history and philosophical background, um, does that lead you to beer, too? At least?

BM: Oh, I don't wanna dry, die in a bar. I mean, I, um. Well, I think, yeah, I trained as a historian. I, you know, I, I like to think of things in historical terms. Um, and I wrote a book about running and singing and, and. So, they're all sort of narratives. They're, they're stories. And, um, and, and I do, you know, I love beer. And I love the sheer explosion of, of not just breweries, but experimentation and different tastes. I think it, they, there is some excess in, uh, I don't like pumpkin beers and I don't like beers with coconut in 'em and, uh, and, and I don't really think an ale lager or, are, is a, is a legitimate style. But I'm not gonna get up on the soap box and say that. I just, I don't know, I think there's a lot of stuff out there that's really cool. And, and being around Todd, 'cause he knows beer, and people come in to the brewery, in [unknown] beer. There was a couple from Quebec who sort of do a blog, and they go around different breweries around. And they came and visited us three, or, three weeks ago. And they brought three bottles of beer from breweries up in Canada. And so, but, so we sat around, drank a couple of bottles of, of, House of Fermentology, but talked about beer. And it was just terrific. So we, and we were, um, so, it was, it was really a great mixture of intellectual engagement and sensory delight. Uh, and appreciating this marvelous substance that, you know. Michael Jackson used to write that the greatest beers in the world are in Belgium. And I thought, oh no, it can't be possibly true. But it's true. I mean, there, there are, it's a, it's the greatest range, uh, that, that they, by, by letting the beer just work itself, um, for five hundred years. That style is, it really is infinitely variable. I mean, granted the Seine Valley is, you know. [Unintelligible]. But, the way what we're doing, we make a different beer every batch. And, and, um, but we still call 'em different dots and, and it's, it's some of the differences in ingredients are a little bit, they're marginal. But, it's always gonna be different. It's not like McDonald's or Budweiser, which is what you go for. You want it to taste like Budweiser and you want the hamburger to taste like a McDonald's. But we're saying, we're gonna give you something that's really good, but we like to say, this, this is one of our advert-, my advertising pitch. It says, when you drink this beer, you're three sips to enlightenment. The first sip is, "Jesus Christ, this stuff is taking the enamel off my teeth!" And the second sip is, "Hmm, this is a veritable Rubik Cube of flavors." And then the third sip is, "Where can I get more?"

TM: [Chuckles] Right. That works. [Chuckles]

BM: [Chuckles]

00:45:06 TM: And so, I, could you talk a bit about, um, opening of the brewery? Since this House of Fermentology, you, you had a longtime dream of opening a brewery. And you discarded it, at least at the end of your first book. And so, what, what brought you back around to?

BM: Oh, it was Todd. It was all. It was completely Todd's. I mean, I wouldn't have done it alone. And it was the chance to help him do this. And, you know, in a way that's manageable for both of us. Um, while he keeps his, in effect, keeps

his day job. And I keep doing all these other things. I got two other books to write. And so. And the nice thing is we don't have to be there, um, every day. Maybe one day a week we're there. So, it, it kind of runs itself. I mean, that's the idea of having this blendery and, and it's in a place that's manageable. Um, we're gonna run out of space. We've, we now have barrels up to the ceiling and, but, that's a good problem to have. Um.

00:46:05 TM: And, and what is a blendery exactly?

BM: Blendery is where we are, um, buying the wort from Foam Brewers and putting it into our oak barrels with our yeast. First, the first yeast is a Brettanomyces. And then over the course of its one to two years in the barrels, in these oak barrels, there is different fruits or other, um, flavors introduced. And then, uh, some, um, um, Lactobacillus, um. And, uh, some bacteria to make it a little more sour, a little more tart. And then another strain of yeast at the end with a little bit more sugar. And so, then half goes into the kegs, which we can then serve the next day at Foam. And the other half goes into bottles. And it is kept for a month. Then we take it to Foam and sell it and, in bottles. So, our, our dream has been, and we've, or our intention has been that we would release two batches a month with one being the, the newly kegged batch, and the other one being the bottle batch from the previous month. And we've done that maybe three or four times. Um, we just can't get quite in sync. But it sells out. And, um, we're happy. Uh, and, and, uh, so, yeah, so formally we are, we blend beers, um, both between barrels and by putting in these several yeasts. But, we're bringing in the wort into our space, and then adding our, the yeast there.

TM: And, um, it, just to, for the benefit of the tape, Todd is Todd Hayne?

BM: Todd Haire.

TM: Todd Haire.

BM: Yep.

TM: Um, from Foam?

BM: From Foam. From Foam and The House of Fermentology.

TM: Yes.

BM: Yep.

TM: And uh, what year did you open?

BM: We opened, well, we sold our first beer in 2016. So, we opened, we started putting beer in the, in the kegs, in um, 2015.

00:48:28 TM: And in general, how does your recipe development work? How, how do you, um, your inspirations for?

BM: Oh, Todd, Todd tests and tried these all. He had a, fifteen or twenty carboys at his house in one of the suburbs. And he was trying different things. And he'd keep them, oh, I think some he kept for up to a year. And he'd, he'd keep tasting them and see how they. And he's a meticulous note keeper. So, he, he knew exactly what, what the measurements were. And, and, um, so, we, it was all really a matter of scaling up. And from a carboy to, um, well, our first size barrel, we had two-barrel barrels, which is sixty, sixty gallons. Then we've got some four-barrel barrels. And we've got some ten-barrel barrels. And a twenty-barrel barrel. And a thirty-barrel barrel. Which for us is big, but not for the big guys. And so, he, he was, we just scaled up. And I think of all, we had one batch that didn't carbonate. And I think that was it out of maybe thirty batches. Uh, and, uh, so, yeah. So, we felt, felt good. Yeah.

00:49:48 TM: Um, your, the design is quite beautiful on the labels that you produce on your bottles. Could you describe what, what they look like? And, and the, the dot, um?

BM: Oh yeah. Okay. Um. Well, I, I take a little credit, uh. Well, Todd takes the credit, right? Himself, for the dots. He, he said, "All good things begin with a dot." And, so, then we said, well, why don't we just use that and have different color dots for the different beers. That we'd have a ex-, a description of the beer, brief description on the bottom of the label. So, we went through the normal colors. Purple and red and blue and yellow and, uh, uh, green. And, and then we took Flights of Fancy. Then we had one called Crushed Dot, which was made with Merlot grapes. And we had another one called, in honor of the great Impressionist, George Seurat. We have one Seurat Dot. And, uh, but they, and so, we maybe had fifteen or so before we started making new batches. And the, the house, I take some credit for that, uh, because we have a friend who's, who had a, a studio. He's an artist and had a studio next door. And we asked him if he would come up with some ideas on, on, uh, what the label could look like. And so, he did a number of line, very, line drawings of the house, a house. And, uh, and we picked the one that was like, how would you say, is like boxes, uh, in, you know, there are about six houses with a, how would you say? How would you describe where you got an outline and then the same outline is in the smaller focus. And then there's another. I mean it's. [Chuckles] You have to describe. It's.

TM: It looks [unintelligible] a Russian nesting doll.

BM: Well that's. Yeah. Nest. Yes. Nesting. Exactly. It's nested, you know, about six house frames, same frame, nesting. Then there's a chimney. And out the top comes Brettanomyces yeast, uh, as smoke. Uh, and the little phrase is "Fermented Wild." And it's been, we're really, we're really proud of it. It's been, uh, uh. And I

think. [Laughs] The thing I'm most proud of, it's when show people this, but of course you never, you, you know the, you know the, um, website, um, is it Untappd? If you scroll down the best breweries in the world, we're number thirteen.

TM: Oh, well, congratulations. [Chuckles]

BM: [Chuckles] According to their logarithm. I mean, we've only got seventy-five-hundred, uh, judgements accor-, uh, but compared to Tree House or, or, uh, Alchemist, they've got seven hundred, eight-hundred-thousand. Uh, but our number is higher than people like Hill Farmstead and, and, uh. So, we're. [Chuckles] I, I, I don't tell people, the, I mean, the beer people I tell. That look, this is probably some squirrely thing with the logarithm. But my friends, who don't know about beer, I say, "Look at this. Thirteenth best brewery in the world." [Chuckles]

TM: No, that's amazing. It's a mathematical feat.

BM: Mathematical feat. Yup.

00:53:16

TM: Well, and, uh, you know, I have to ask, the time when you opened the brewery, it's, uh, um, a moment of flux in the brewing industry nationally to, to open a brewery. And so, what was your, what were your thoughts in terms of strategy of, you know, the size of your brewery? You know, choosing to brew sour, or blend sour beers?

BM: Well, I, I, um, I think it was, uh, it was, um, how should I say it? The safe bet in the sense that neither of us were investing huge amount in this. It was a blendery, not a brewery. He had his day job with Foam. And I had the rest of my life going. So, and I don't think we ever said this, but I, I probably felt it in retrospect, if, if the thing had, had bombed, we would've gone on. And, uh, and, uh, um, and I think at the other end, um, I think we're gonna merge in some, um, in some form. Probably in the next year, uh, and, and it's, I think it's a matter of [unintelligible] well what, what's the relative value of this? Of the, of the two operation? 'Cause Foam is big. I mean, it's, you know, their turnover, uh, is significant. I mean, it's in the millions of dollars. And we're, our turnover is, you know, a small fraction of that. So, how do you merge the two? You can't say that, you know, that, or, I mean, I guess you could, you could say that our, we have, uh, on one level a, a broader cache. But, you know, how do you value that? So, I, I think we're, we're very happy that it has hit the right wave of interest in sour beers. And, um, there's only one other blendery in Vermont, and they make just one kind of, of beer. Um, and, uh, then there are of course the other ones in the Side Project, in Rare Barrel, and, I don't know, twenty, thirty other ones with, that are much bigger. And we're, I mean, we're just relatively small. But, I think, I think we have a, a, a cache. And, um, and we've never sold a bad batch. I mean, at least no one has ever come and said, you know, this is terrible stuff and sent it out



on social media. Uh, so, I think we're, we're content. I think, and I, now I say we, it's just probably when Todd wears his House of Fermentology hat and I'm wearing it, that's we. And then he's got four partners at Foam. And they're all, I think they're certainly happy to have this extra, um, offering, uh, on their taps because that gives them the full range of beers that other people want, 'cause they can go from lagers to, to stouts. And then beyond that, they can, they can do the sours. So, I think it's, it's been nice. I bet it'll, to me it'll be nicer if eventually we do merge in some fashion, so that it becomes a, you know, subsidiary. Well, not a subsidiary. But part of Foam.

00:56:51 TM: Would you say that the, um, consumers who come to your, um, taproom, are they sour enthusiasts? Or curious beer drinkers of all kinds? Or, um, do, do you have a niche audience?

BM: Oh, well, I might have said that two years ago or even a year ago. But I think what's, what's happening is, you know, the, the gap, the, the, not the abyss, but the gap between sour and traditional beers is narrowing. And you, with the, with people doing Saisons and people doing, um, they're doing, Foam is doing a beer they call Papillon, which is pretty darn close to a, to a, a House of Fermentology kind of beer, even though it's, it's not with, um, bread, yeast. And I think the public is more and more comfortable with sour, more astringent beers than they were three or four or five years ago. And, uh, so, you know, it's, yeah, we're still a niche. I mean, we're still, I like to be thought of in that category with, with Rare Barrel and Side Project and Casey's. But, um, I think broadly speaking, the, the general public is, is, uh, I think they're surprised to find that they, they like sour beer. At least the craft beer drinking public.

00:58:27 TM: Where do you see American beer tastes going in the future?

BM: [Chuckles]

TM: You have your head in your hands right now. [Chuckles]

BM: When Magic Hat, when Todd was the head, the head brewer there, when they came out with #9, which is this apricot flavored beer, I swore I would never drink another Magic Hat beer. They had one good beer. One good IPA called, called Blind Faith, which, uh, they. And then they got rid of that because they're. But, #9 became the most popular beer they sold. It was thirty-five, forty percent of their sales was this apricot flavored beer. So. [Chuckles] You know, what is, what did H.L. Mencken say? Nev-, never, you know, never lose money betting against taste in the, in, in the American, um, human being. Um, I, I don't know. I, I've been wrong so, so much on this one that, um, I'd hesitate to say. I mean, I, I suppose you could say logically there are, there are gonna be ever more experimentations with different herbs and, um, spices, um. I, I, I could certainly imagine the clove, maybe it's already been done. But I can imagine clove taste beer, cinnamon taste beer. I don't know about the cumin, uh, I mean, the, the

sweeter spices. I can see, I mean, I can imagine someone buying those. I wouldn't wanna do it. But, I, I think people are in. And, I think paradoxically, I don't know, you probably think about this more than I do, is at some point the bubble's gonna burst. I mean, you can't have twenty thousand breweries in this country. And, and everybody in, at, at certain gradient in the, the number of breweries is thinking about how do I, how do we separate ourselves from the pack as we get squeezed by bigger ones and smaller? And, so there's a lot of push for finding their own niche. Um, but is there, is there a niche? Do people, to find a niche as a temporary place setting? Um, or is it a niche where they're really gonna stay and just do that? Um, I would say we're more in the second category than the first. We're not trying to make, uh, five thousand barrels of sour beers. Or a thousand barrels of sour beer. So, I, I think there's a, probably a lot of drive for further, further experimentation. And kind of seeing throwing stuff up against the wall and see what sticks. Um, but beyond the playing around with some of these spices, I don't know, I mean, I don't like pumpkin beer. I mean, you gonna have zucchini beer? You gonna have? [Chuckles] No.

TM: We'll see. [Chuckles]

BM: [Chuckles]

TM: I have a, um, a few kind of bigger ques-, questions as we wrap up.

BM: Sure.

01:01:39 TM: So, one question is about this amazing quantity and variety and, and skill in professional brewing today. Uh, what do you feel are the reasons to still be a homebrewer today? If you have access to such great beer you could buy?

BM: Well, I guess one analogy would be why are there still people with, um, CB radios? And, um, and what's the predecessor to CB radios? Those, um, another kind of radio. People had them back when I was growing up. Uh, I mean, when you can have all this stuff. So, I think there's a, there's a, a, a self, uh, I mean, you, you are engaged in this. And you, you've got an incredible, now you've got a wonderful range of, of tools where you can make, uh, beers that really are pretty close to what you drink out there. And, to be able to do that and say that you're making a, a real Pils, which I never could do. I was always, really the hardest thing. There's no place to hide. And, um, uh, but even if you, and you probably can't make Guinness. Um, but, I think you, so there's, one strain would be try to match what you can buy. And the other is to say, look, I can do it better. I can, my double IPA is better than Alchemist. Or my, my, uh, porter is better than Anchor Steam's. Um, and, because I've got the, this is how I'm doing it. And if my audience is only my family and other homebrewers, whom I respect, that's a pretty good sense of satisfaction. So, I, I think there are always gonna be, you know, this is sort of beer tinkerers. Yeah. Um, I'd hope there wouldn't be. Because I think you've still got, I think the homebrewing crowd is still throwing up some

of these producing, uh, future, um, brewers. But I also just don't know where it all, where it all, or where's it, at least the next bubble. I mean, I just, it just flabbergasts me that there's so many breweries out there.

01:04:18 TM: Along these lines, one of, one component of this enormous growth over the last several decades has been the arrival of the internet and how it's changed how homebrewers brew, but also the work of professional brewers. And in, now you've experienced both sides of things as a homebrewer and, and a co-owner. And, uh, so, what would you say are the, are the, the benefits, but also the negatives of this new online component to appreciating beer and making beer?

BM: Hmm. That's a good question, because I, I mean it sort of brings up, you know, some of my old, I mean, I don't want to judge the internet based on this question, but I, I'm trying to think whether, whether, you know, likening it to the, to the bees. Uh, I'm very cautious about what I use from the internet. Why, why, and, um, because I think that beekeepers, maybe, maybe, and maybe brewers, are like lawyers. You know, six beekeepers and seven opinions. And so, it's dangerous. Or it's, it's, um, you, you can, you can get a lot of wrong advice by the sheer availability of this stuff, because this is not like going to a, a vetted science book and getting your information. This is just getting Joe Blow and his opinion. Um, and so, to have. [Long Pause] I just, you know, I don't know, because I'm, if, if it's like beekeeping, then I would say, I'd be very cautious to, to rely just on the, on the web as a source of my information. I think you gotta, you gotta have some, some face to face, you gotta have some feedback, you gotta be drinking this stuff with someone else. It's not enough just to have someone show you how they built this, um, ten-gallon, uh, cooker. Um, the, and their rating stuff is a, that's an, a, a big crap shoot. I mean, think about Untappd. Uh, um. [Chuckles] It's kind of poignant sometimes. People come in and, you know, they got their little stickers and they just. Um, so I don't know. I don't think I can give you a very good answer.

01:06:46 TM: It just seems, it's a, it's a kind of radical expansion of, of who you could talk to. Whether you're, uh, you know, getting tips on brewing or advice on where to, where to drink. But.

BM: Oh. Well, no, there, I don't think there's any question about that. Um. And, but, again, I, I would liken it to, to, to beekeeping when, when I teach a beekeeping class three times a year. And, and I always say, well, here's some suggested sites you should go to. But even within those, you're gonna get different responses to the same question. And for people just beginning, it's just, it's really, it's really hair raising. I mean, they, they get very frustrated because, and, and rightly so, is they go to someone and say, "What do I do about this Queen?" And three people give 'em, give 'em different answers. Um, and I can imagine that would happen in beer as well.

TM: Right. Do you have another, um, beer book in your future? Or, no?

BM: No. No. No. [Chuckles] No, no, no, no. I'm writing a, with another guy, we're writing a history of beekeeping in Vermont. And then with another guy, we're writing a history of humor in Vermont. So, so, no, I'm, I'll continue to drink beer and hope that we continue to be popular. But, but, no, no more, no more books on beer.

01:08:14 TM: Alright, I, I have one question to end on, and it's a big one, and, um, that is, uh, looking, looking back at your very varied career, I'm thinking about beer in particular, um, to ask what you value most about what you do? Your work?

BM: [Long Pause] I'll give you a very serious answer. Um, I, uh, there's a great line of, uh, Chaucer, um, in which he says, "And gladly what he learned, and gladly teach." And I think that if I ever got put in a box or a, I'd, I'd like to have that on, uh, tombstone. You know, I'd, I'd, I think it's, um, I come from a line of teachers. And um, and I think that I was, if not put here to do this, but, uh, I think to help people think beyond themselves and, and learn about where they come from, and, is a, is a good calling. Yeah.

TM: I agree. Well, thank you so much for your time. Thank you, Bill.