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History Happy Hour: Buchanan campaign songs paired with Old Buck lager at Wacker Brewing Co.



MARY ELLEN WRIGHT | Staff Writer Feb 8, 2019



Wacker Brewing Co. employee Jimmy Diener will soon be ready to tap Old Buck Brew lager, to be served on [President LancasterHistory.org](https://lancasterhistory.org)'s History Happy Hour.

DAN MARSCHKA | Staff Photographer

In 1856, Democrat James Buchanan led a quiet presidential campaign against Republican John C. Fremont and American Party candidate Millard Fillmore.

Buchanan didn't make lots of speeches or organize big rallies. He let others — including musicians and a famous songwriting relative — do some of his talking for him, says Stephanie Townrow, director of education and public programs for [LancasterHistory.org](https://lancasterhistory.org).

The songs written for that presidential campaign will be the subject of Townrow's presentation at [LancasterHistory.org](https://lancasterhistory.org)'s second History Happy Hour, to be held on the evening of Presidents Day, Monday, Feb. 18, at Wacker Brewing Co. on West Grant Street.

As it did last year in Lititz, the History Happy Hour will feature a limited-edition Buchanan-inspired lager being brewed by Wacker for the occasion.

This year's beer is called Old Buck Brew.

Thistle Finch Distillery, which shares the building with Wacker, will create and serve cocktails inspired by Buchanan, who lived in Lancaster from 1806 until his death in 1868 and is buried in Woodward Hill Cemetery on South Queen Street.

Buchanan's mansion, Wheatland, is part of [LancasterHistory.org](https://lancasterhistory.org)'s campus.

Townrow says at least one cocktail will probably contain rye whiskey, in honor of Buchanan's beverage preference.

Townrow says there's no historical evidence that Buchanan drank beer.

"He drank a lot of port and after-dinner liquors, and more rye whiskey than you can even imagine," she adds. "He bought whiskey in 10-gallon quantities during his time as senator in Washington, D.C."



Wacker Brewing employee Jimmy Diener and historian Stephanie Townrow are ready to tap some beer at Wacker Brewing Co.

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DAN MARSCHKA | Staff Photographer

The brew

Old Buck Brew, says Jimmy Diener, who handles inside sales for Wacker Brewing, is “an amber lager, crafted from English barley, German wheat and American hops.”

Similar ingredients would have been used to make beer when Buchanan was walking the streets of Lancaster, Diener says, though “it would probably have all been locally sourced. They would have had those styles of grains growing here.”

Old Buck is described as “a beer to take you back to your roots,” Diener says, adding that the lager will be ready right before the event, after taking about five weeks to produce “from grain to glass.

“It will be served here until we’re out,” Diener says. “We did a large batch of it, so we’ll have plenty,” he says.

The logo on the beer, and the collectible glass those attending can take home after buying a pint, shows Buchanan riding on a buck.

A medallion made for his presidential campaign, Townrow says, contains a deer and a cannon, embracing the “buck-cannon” pronunciation of his name in some parts of the country.

Townrow says having a history event at Wacker is appropriate because of its name’s deep roots in Lancaster; Joseph Wacker bought Eagle Brewing from the Sprenger family in 1870 and his family operated it in Lancaster into the 20th century.



Stephanie Townrow of [LancasterHistory.org](https://lancasterhistory.org) will talk about James Buchanan's campaign music at History Happy Hour on Presidents Day at Wacker Brewing Co.

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Political tunes

Wacker Brewing is usually closed Mondays, but will be open Feb. 18 for this special event.

“The event begins at 5:30 (p.m.), as people come in and start (buying and) enjoying pints of the beer,” Townrow says.

At 6 p.m., Townrow will start talking about the songs used during Buchanan’s presidential campaign.

“I’ll be giving a little bit of history of his campaign music, and we’ll have a band here ... recreating those songs as I give a little history of them,” Townrow says.

The group of musicians, Townrow says, is being assembled by Mark Rast, who plays banjo in the local band Vinegar Creek Constituency.

After her musically accompanied talk, Townrow says, “the band will stick around till 7:30, playing folksy, Americana-type tunes.”

Townrow will discuss five songs that were central to the Buchanan campaign.

“Buchanan really didn’t campaign on his own behalf,” Townrow says. “Political campaigning like we know it today didn’t really exist back then.

“These (songs) were played at pro-Democratic rallies, but never in the presence of the actual candidate,” she says.



Arvin Alston II, head distiller at Thistle Finch Distillery in Lancaster, monitors the proof of alcohol coming out of the still. Thistle Finch staff will create and serve James Buchanan-inspired cocktails at a History Happy Hour event.

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“Buchanan was actually related ... to Stephen Foster, who was a major pop-music composer, essentially, in the mid-19th century,” Townrow says. “Stephen Foster’s sister married Buchanan’s brother.”

Foster, who was a Democrat, like Buchanan, wrote two original songs for his relative’s campaign — “The Great Baby Show” and “The White House Chair” — that soon became very popular, Townrow says.

On Sept. 17, 1856, Foster went to a pro-Republican parade in Pittsburgh, Townrow says.

“I guess he was so appalled by the things that they were saying that he wrote ‘The Great Baby Show’ to comment on what babies they were,” she says. The song was published in a Pittsburgh paper about 10 days later.

Foster's lyrics: "They called it a council of freemen you know / But I told you before 'twas a great baby show."

Another campaign ditty Townrow will talk about is "A National Song," credited to "a gentleman of Baltimore."

It includes the lines, "The Clarion of Clay wak'd our slumbering might, and the youthful Buchanan went forth to the fight. / Then gather around him ye good men and true, he periled his life in protection of you."

"Something that was common for campaign songs back then was that (composers) wouldn't write completely original scores, but would insert lyrics into songs that were already popular," Townrow says. "That way they could publish the lyrics in the newspaper, and everyone would already know how to play them and sing them."

"Irony of ironies," she adds, the most popular campaign song of Buchanan's Republican opponent, Fremont, was to the tune of Foster's

"Oh, Susannah."

(You can hear YouTube clips of these Buchanan tunes, and other political songs, on the website electionsongs.com.)



These glasses will soon hold Old Buck Brew, a lager being brewed for a History Happy Hour event.

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More happy hours planned

Townrow says last year's Presidents Day History Happy Hour drew a big crowd and was so successful she plans two additional events this year — one in the spring and one in December.

The winter event, she says, will probably deal with the history of Prohibition.

“We sold out of the pint glasses from last year,” when the happy hour was held at Fetish Brewing Co. in Lititz, with a limited-edition Madiera stout called Buchanan Fetish.

“The (glasses) for this year will actually have the 2019 date on them,” Townrow says, “so our thought is this will be a limited edition, and next year we'll have a different glass.

“We thought it would be really cool to have a collectible (glass) that is different every year,” she says, and is tied to a happy hour that explores some element of Lancaster County history.

IF YOU GO

- **What:** LancasterHistory.org Presidents Day History Happy Hour, featuring James Buchanan-inspired beer and cocktails, and a historical presentation about Buchanan campaign songs.
- **When:** Presidents Day, Monday, Feb. 18, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.
- **Where:** Wacker Brewing Co. 417 W. Grant St.
- **Admission:** \$5 in advance; \$8 at the door. Tickets are limited. Order online at bit.ly/HistoryHappyHour2019.

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