

Craft Breweries in Mountain Maryland and Nearby West Virginia

FEATURING EIGHT CRAFT BREWERIES WITH
ATTACHED TAPROOMS OR PUBS

Written by: **Mary Reisinger**



People have brewed beer for at least 6,000 years. In the past, it was often a solution to the problem of obtaining clean water, but beer has also played an important part in celebrating religion and in creating community. In the United States, the relatively recent emergence of craft beers has restored beer's role in helping bring people together. In the westernmost counties of Maryland and nearby West Virginia towns, eight craft breweries with taprooms or pubs exemplify this trend.

The earliest records of beer brewing come from the Sumerians in Mesopotamia. They documented at least nine brews, including golden, dark, sweet dark, and red, made with barley and various fruits, herbs, and spices. They drank beer from communal jars, using straws to bypass the material floating on top. They even wrote poetic tributes to Ninkasi, the goddess of beer.

Egyptians, who also brewed with barley, fruits, herbs, and spices, added emmer and other grains. They improved

brewing techniques and created many varieties of beer, which was not only a dietary staple, but also an important part of religious practice. Egyptians, too, had a deity, Osiris, associated with the making of beer.

Beer was brewed in Ancient China as well, especially during the Shang Dynasty (1600-1046 BCE). Millet, rice, and other grains were used instead of barley. Beer was highly regarded as a beverage for special occasions, and it was considered important enough that the government regulated its production.

Like many other aspects of these ancient cultures, beer brewing eventually made its way to Europe. In the Middle Ages, the Germans (German-speaking people in central Europe; at that time, there was no unified German state) are generally deemed to have perfected it.

The Germans took beer seriously. Bavarians developed the *Reinheitsgebot*, a purity law that initially allowed only three ingredients in beer: hops, water, and barley. They didn't

fully understand the role of yeast, which often was introduced to beer through the air since early breweries were in bakeries. The purity law was later amended to include yeast, and to add wheat to the approved ingredients. In German culture, beer was usually consumed in outdoor gardens connected to breweries, where people of all ages could gather to eat, talk, sing, and dance as well as drink beer.

As Europeans traveled to the New World, beer had an impact on Colonial America. Water on ships often became unhealthy, so everyone relied on beer during the long sea voyage. The Pilgrims, who were trying to reach the Virginia Colony, went off course and had to end their journey far north of their original destination because the captain of the ship needed to conserve enough of the beer supply to get his sailors back to England.

Europeans weren't the first inhabitants of North America to know about brewing. Native Americans made beer from many ingredients; in fact, they showed early settlers how to use spruce beer (made with spruce branches rich in Vitamin C) to ward off scurvy. Nevertheless, by the mid-1800s, German immigrants dominated commercial brewing. No longer bound by purity laws, they used corn and other ingredients that were available in North America.

While many people brewed beer at home for their own use, a number of successful commercial breweries opened and thrived until Prohibition, which outlawed commercial and home-based making or selling of alcoholic beverages. Many commercial breweries were bankrupted by Prohibition. Those who survived often did so by producing and marketing "near beer" (a low-alcohol beer allowed during Prohibition), soft drinks, and other items such as candy.

Prohibition lasted from 1920-1933. Unfortunately, the repeal that reinstated commercial alcohol production allowed wine to be made in the home, but not beer, so home brewing continued to be illegal. After World War II, many Americans who had experienced beer in Europe began to demand better and more varied brews in the States. This and other factors led to a period of turmoil in the industry when many breweries closed. The August Schell Brewing Company, in business since 1860, survived by first cutting a large English walnut tree on its property and selling the lumber, and then adding new types of beer to its lineup.

During the 1960s and 70s, interest in craft beer surged, but home brewing remained illegal until an unexpected

development in Congress. Senator Alan Cranston and Representative William Steiger, while working on an unrelated bill, added an amendment that made home brewing of beer legal. This bill was signed by President Jimmy Carter in October 1978 and took effect in early 1979. States could still regulate home brewing, and it took until 2013 for home brewing to be legal in all 50 states, but bill HR 1337 turbo-charged the craft beer movement in the U.S.

In December 1978, Charlie Papazian founded the American Homebrewers Association (AHA). He went on to launch the Brewers Association and the Great American Beer Festival, and to write *The Complete Joy of Homebrewing*, an iconic guide still used today. In 1979, the AHA held the first National Homebrewing Competition and had 34 entries. In 2018, it received more than 8,000.

Home brewers were looking for something different than commercially available beer, and many hobbyists discovered they had a passion for creating new flavors. Ken Grossman, founder of Sierra Nevada, started brewing at home when he was 15. He kept the beer in his closet and when it was discovered, he explained it as a science experiment. Melissa Mendez (home brewer who started Project Halo Brewing), says that even after years of doing this, she is always "very excited" to taste the results of a new recipe she has created.

This new wave of amateur brewers led to a huge increase in craft breweries. In 1978, there were a hundred breweries in the United States. Today there are closer to 10,000, many of them craft breweries, most of these started by former home brewers. In recent decades, access to excellent craft beer has reached communities all over the country.

In the area of Allegany and Garrett Counties in Maryland, and the West Virginia counties adjacent to this tip of Maryland, there are currently eight craft breweries with attached taprooms or pubs. Most of them have opened within the past decade. Two are farm breweries, which must produce something on the farm that is used in the beer. Most of the owners began as home brewers. Two of the lead brewers are women. Several of the breweries are family-owned. Their food offerings range from food trucks to full kitchens. Some of them send kegs of their beer to bars and restaurants. Some can beer for customers to carry out, while others can for distribution in liquor stores. All of them provide a welcoming place for people to enjoy skillfully crafted beer along with food and fun.

Screech Owl Brewing & Spent Grain Café

304-379-4777; Owners: Roger and Crista Johnson
2323 Ralph Livengood Rd., Bruceton Mills, WV 26525
Sales of TO GO Beer: Tue – Thur 10 – 5,
Café: Fri 3 – 8; Sat 12 – 8 (kitchen closes 7 pm)

After 21 years of being an over-the-road truck driver, Roger Johnson was ready to stay home. He was an enthusiastic home brewer, so he and his wife Crista (majority owner) started a brewery in their garage in 2015, choosing the brewery's name because they can hear screech owls from their porch. They quickly progressed to a larger capacity brewing system, added onto the garage, and built a restaurant. Recently, they added a greenhouse for additional seating of customers. Daughter-in-law Kristin, who has taken over as lead brewer, and son Jameson, who is general manager and executive chef of the Spent Grain Café, have joined the operation, making Screech Owl woman-owned and woman-brewed and family-run.

The brewery had supplied kegs to restaurants and bars, but during the restrictions of Covid, these kegs sat empty, so they began canning for distribution to the marketplace, something that is still a strong part of the business. Screech Owl brews to high standards; the beer is not pasteurized, and no preservatives are used. This means it must be refrigerated. Their most popular retail beer is Hoo's Your Daddy IPA; at the café, the biggest seller is Bold Blonde Ale. Other favorites include Class 4 Zinger Hazy IPA (featuring three hops and named for a challenging whitewater rapid where three currents converge) and Dooley's Irish Red, named for Crista's maternal grandfather and declared by Irish visitors to



be the most authentically Irish beer they've had in the U.S.

Screech Owl focuses on the quality of the beer, the food, and the experience. They grow some of the ingredients for the café, and they use spent grain from the brewing process for baking (including pizza crust and rolls), selling excess to farmers who feed it to their livestock. They have installed a huge sandbox for children and cornhole for the young at heart. Screech Owl is not pet-friendly—only service animals are welcome. Customers will find a casual, safe environment where children can play while adults linger over their meals.



High Ground Brewing

304-789-1216; Owners: Dallas and Jana Wolfe
102 Railroad Avenue, Terra Alta, WV 26764
Hours: Mon – Thur 3 – 8; Fri 3 – 9; Sat 12 – 10; Sun 1 – 8

Lt. Col. Dallas Wolfe is a full-time National Guardsman, a former home brewer, and an entrepreneur who started a craft brewery business. He purchased a vacant building that he and his father renovated. Dallas began brewing early in 2019, milling his own grain, building up a supply of his most promising recipes, and setting up keg distribution. The taproom doors opened in May 2019. The brewery stayed afloat during the pandemic by setting up the small canning system Dallas had used as a home brewer, and selling cans and growlers of beer to individuals who came to pick it up even though they couldn't congregate at the pub. As the brewery returned to normal operation, Dallas and Jana worked to restore both pub sales and distribution of their beer.

High Ground brings in food trucks from the second weekend of May to early fall. Popcorn and pepperoni rolls are always on hand, and the in-house menu increases in winter. The taproom schedules live music, trivia contests, and other events. Taps are kept supplied with favorites such as Mandatory Fun IPA and Coal Train Porter. About four years ago, Dallas was asked to create a beer for the Lurch Festival in Philippi that celebrates Ted Cassidy, who played Lurch on the Adams Family. The result? You Rang. Courtney Simpson, taproom manager and head brewer for the past year, is proud to



have collaborated with Dallas on the creation of the award-winning All Pedal No Brakes. In addition to the pub attached to the brewery, a large "biergarten" joins the building for outdoor seating in suitable weather, and High Ground is part of the Harvest Host network.

Dallas chose the name High Ground partly because the brewery is in Terra Alta ("high earth"). The closely related "high ground" has two additional meanings: militarily, having the high ground provides a tactical advantage, and ethically, taking the high ground means doing things the right way. Dallas and his wife Jana try to take the high ground in their management of the brewery by giving back to the community as much as they can, including by raising funds and collecting goods for local animal shelters. The pub welcomes well-behaved pets (dogs on a leash) with their humans.

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Mountain State Brewing Company

304-463-4500; Founders: Brian Arnett and Willie Lehman
1 Nelson Blvd., Thomas, WV 26292
Hours: Mon, Tue, Thur 5–9; Wed CLOSED;
Fri–Sat 12–9 (Pub ‘til 11); Sun 12–7

Stepbrothers Brian and Willie grew up in West Virginia, only familiar with, in their words, “light beer and homemade wine.” They became curious about the possibility of producing better beer and took up homebrewing in the early 1990s, drawing on their parents’ books and knowledge of homebrewing from the 1970s. They started a craft brewery in 2005, in the small town of Thomas. As natives of West Virginia, they naturally turned to the state’s nickname for their brand.

The brothers’ goal to self-distribute their craft beer was made possible by West Virginia’s 1991 legalization of brewpubs, a license category in which breweries are allowed to sell their product in glasses at their own pubs and distribute their extra beer to other establishments without going through a distributor. Mountain State began operation with an attached pub and ambitious goals for selling their product regionally. Within a decade, Mountain State beers were so popular in the marketplace that it was difficult to meet the demand in their existing facility. This led to a huge expansion of the physical plant that was completed in 2016. The brewery now has far greater capacity as well as access to a lab, grain silos connecting to milling equipment (they have a standing agreement with a farmer



to take the spent grain for his livestock), and a large canning line.

The self-reliant ethos that shaped the development of the company is also evident in the décor and furnishings of the Thomas pub. The brothers made much of what they needed to get started. It’s a comfortably rustic place to sip on Mountain State’s popular brews and to enjoy salads, sandwiches, and the featured artisanal flatbread pizzas. Outside, there is

cornhole and picnic style seating. Mountain State has grown the business and added new outlets, with several other taproom locations, but the original site is a great place to see how the idea and the hard work of the brothers have led to two decades of successful operation.

Stumptown Ales

309-259-5570; Owners: Cindy and Jon Robeson
390 William Ave., Davis, WV 26260
Hours: Mon–Wed 3–9; Thur 4–10; Fri 2–10; Sat 1–10;
Sun 1–7



The Robesons moved from Northern Virginia to Davis, WV, and bought a large Victorian house so that Cindy could fulfill her dream of running a bed and breakfast. Jon shifted his law practice to the area, changing his focus to real estate, and Cindy served as his legal assistant. Craft beer wasn’t widely available in the area at that time, so Jon started home brewing. As Cindy puts it, “one mid-life crisis later,” Jon decided to open his own brewery and bar in 2015. Davis, like many logging towns, had the nickname Stumptown. The story is that

in the town’s early days, a person could get from one end of town to another by hopping from stump to stump. This inspired the brewery’s name.

Initially, Jon did his own recipe creation and brewing. He now hires people to brew. They have a good lineup of beer and don’t place a lot of emphasis on creating new ones. Originally, Jon’s brews were hop-centric, with lots of IPAs. Over time, they’ve added lighter beers, stouts, porters, sours, pale ales, and Belgian-style brewing. Their flagship beers, always on tap, are Holy Citra! Double IPA, Lefty Lucy Amber American ale, and Bewildered Hippie IPA. When they opened in 2015, they were voted best new brewery in West Virginia. Two years later, Brilliant Stream named Stumptown Ales West Virginia Brewery of the Year. In recent years, they have opened a second taproom in Fairmont, WV, but the brewery remains in Davis.

Stumptown Ales is a pleasant and welcoming space that emphasizes good craft beer. They have Tuesday trivia nights only during shoulder seasons (November until the opening of ski season, and April through the first half of May) because in peak winter or summer seasons, the room is too crowded to run a trivia contest. They have a small kitchen, so their menu is limited. On Wednesdays they offer pizza, and they have occasional food trucks, but people are encouraged to bring in food from other places. Visitors will find that, as the sign near the entrance says, they may enter as strangers, but they will leave as friends.

Brewery and the Beast

301-691-BREW (2739); Owner: Craig Frazee
418 S. Main St., Accident, MD 21520
Hours: Mon, Wed, Thur 11–8:30;
Tue CLOSED; Fri – Sat 11–9:30; Sun 11–6



Craig Frazee began operating a food truck, the Bar-B-Qed Beast, featuring his own line of smoked meats, in 2014. When he considered opening a restaurant, he decided to draw on his experience as a home brewer and include a brewery in the plan. In preparation, Craig took a six-week online brewing course and sought advice from many experienced brewers, including folks from Short Story, 1812, High Ground, and Screech Owl. He leased a suitable space (once a butcher shop, appropriately enough) in Accident and renovated it to his needs. Brewery and the Beast opened its doors in August 2024. Presently, it is the only craft brewery in Garrett County.

Business has been fairly steady in the brewery's first year. Craig schedules lots of events to add to the experience for customers, especially in the winter. There are trivia nights on the second and fourth Wednesdays of each month. First and third Wednesdays are open mic nights. A local writing group reads on the second Thursday of each month. Mondays are senior citizen days with 20% discounts for those 55 and older. Live music events are often scheduled on weekends. Brewery and the Beast is also available for special events and for catering. The food truck is still in occasional use, though running a restaurant and a brewery keeps Craig



busy. The menu at Brewery and the Beast capitalizes on Craig's deep knowledge of smoked meat and his creative approach to cooking.

Craig describes the current setup as a nano brewery, even smaller than a micro brewery, so they have to plan carefully to brew enough beer. He and his brother Brian do the brewing, but he expects to hire brewing help eventually. He hopes to expand the brewery's capacity in the future, and he'd like to explore distribution. For now, Brewery and the Beast is off to a great start with exceptional food and an excellent line up of craft beers.

Dig Deep Brewery

301-338-1013; Owner: Marcus Rowley
2 Howard St., Suite B, Cumberland, MD 21502
Hours: Mon – Thur 4–10; Fri 4–11; Sat 1–11; Sun 1–6

Unlike most craft brewery owners, Marcus Rowley was never a home brewer, but since he was young, he has had the goal of owning a brewery. His opportunity arose when he learned about the old Footer Dye Works Building wanting to lease a section that was basically a shell. It's an amazing location in Cumberland, visible from the expressway, with ample parking. Marcus' vision was to have a clean space with excellent lighting—neither glaring nor too dim—with an industrial vibe. After a strenuous and expensive process that required him to “dig deep” into his supply of energy and money, Marcus was able to start brewing in June of 2019 and open for business in September of 2019.

Within months, the new business had to find ways to work around the limitations of pandemic restrictions. Initially, they sold beer to customers who arrived in their cars to pick it up. Later, Marcus and his crew carried out the tables and chairs to the parking lot each morning and prayed for good



PHOTOS BY MARY REISINGER

weather. Each evening, they carried everything back inside. Each year has brought new conditions that Marcus meets by constantly adjusting things like the schedule of special events or the beverages he creates. He thinks Dig Deep was one of the first breweries to make a sort of hybrid between ale and lager that he calls a dirty ale. When customers asked for gluten free drinks, he started making a high-quality flavored seltzer.

At Dig Deep, the aim is to have beers on tap that will satisfy any taste preference. Marcus feels he has been very lucky with his brewers, both originally home brewers, who have helped him to maintain the level of excellence he wanted. He now looks forward to moving to higher-capacity brewing and to a commercial canning system for distributing the brewery's products. Meanwhile, Dig Deep is open seven days a week, with something for everyone.

1812 Brewery

301-338-2490; Founders: Cory and Sean McCagh (son & father)
13006 Mason Rd. NE, Cumberland, MD 21502
*Hours: Mon–Tue CLOSED; Wed 5–8; Thur 5–10; Fri 4–10;
Sat 12–10; Sun 1–7*

After college and on the way to graduate school, Cory McCagh moved into the house on an old farm his parents' had bought several years before. He became interested in planting hops. He started with four varieties of hops on one acre that he thought would take a few years

to root, but they were thriving within a year. He embarked on another kind of study—hops and brewing. Then he and his father, Dr. Sean McCagh, decided to convert the old barn on the property into a brewhouse. After extensive renovation, they opened 1812 Brewery (named for the age of the barn) in 2017 as Allegany County's first farm brewery.

It became a full-fledged family operation. Brother Casey studied brewing. Other relatives pitched in with everything from waiting on customers to marketing. When Dr. McCagh sadly passed away in early 2021, Cory continued to have the support of his family, including his mother Terri. 1812 also has the support of the community. Recently, some public



1812 BREWERY

funding has made it possible for the McCaghs to expand into a new custom-built structure on the farm. This should make it possible for 1812 to increase its already significant distribution to wider markets.

The 1812 property now boasts a large open patio, a covered taproom, play space for children, a window for ordering beer and other beverages, and a log-covered building where performers play on the front porch. There is a farmers market and craft show on the first Sunday of each month. The farm is also part of the Harvest Hosts network. The enterprise has grown into a wonderful place to have a brew, eat something from a food truck or order food to be delivered, listen to live music, and enjoy the gorgeous scenery with family and friends.



PHOTO BY MARY REISINGER

Locust Post

301-697-3519; Owners: Denise and Tony Cornwell
31706 Old Adams Rd., Little Orleans, MD 21766
Hours: Thur 5–8; Fri–Sat 12–10; Sun 12–6



Tony and Denise Cornwell had the idea of building a barn to serve as a wedding venue on their farm in Little Orleans, but 1812 owner Sean McCagh suggested that they open a farm brewery instead. They spent nearly two years visiting breweries, talking to brewers, home-brewing, and starting the necessary paperwork before breaking ground in 2019 and opening in October of 2020. Both the Cornwells are artists; in addition, Tony is a home improvements contractor and Denise is an accountant. Their combined skills have led to a custom-designed “barn” housing their brewery and taproom, and a thriving business. As complements to the brewery and taphouse, the Cornwells are on the Harvest Hosts and Hipcamp campsite networks and they have a 9-hole disc golf course.



The black locust trees Tony pulled from the farm's woods to support their hops gave the place the perfect name. Locust Post uses the Cascade hops they grow as well as other hops.

They brew a line of European-style beers that have proven very popular. With small-scale equipment, they can beer for patrons to take with them, but they have not ventured into larger-scale canning for distribution. Their aim is to expand the business on site and to grow the friendly and enjoyable community at the taproom.

The Cornwells have developed a menu of pizzas and light fare, including some gluten-free options, to accompany the beer and other beverages. They feature products of other area vendors ranging from Maryland wine to maple syrup, from beef jerky to t-shirts. The taproom is filled with recycled architectural elements and the artwork of Tony and other local artists. They have regular trivia nights and frequent live musicians. When weather allows, patrons find ample outdoor seating on the deck and on the lawn near the music pavilion, but rain or shine, there is always a warm welcome at Locust Post Brewery.