

## DER BIERGARTEN by Mike Retzlaff

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century when lager beer in Germany was coming into its own, the beer garden was an unplanned benefit. The lagering caves and caverns of breweries needed to be insulated against the hot summer sun. Leafy linden and chestnut trees were planted above the lagering cellars for shade. Once the trees were established and had filled out, it seemed rather natural that the shady areas the trees created could be used as a small park. They were furnished with tables and benches to entice patrons to partake of the brewery's products. It quickly became a social phenomenon. These were not outdoor saloons but family oriented places of social interaction.

Munich has a legendary tale of a privately owned table at the Augustiner-Heller Biergarten belonging to the German writer Sigi Sommer. He would fill a leftover pickle bucket with charcoal, light it on fire, and place it under the table so that he could keep warm while drinking in the garden during the winter. One day, he had drinks with a priest, Prälat Betzwieser, who had a wooden leg. A few beers in, they realized that Betzwieser's leg had caught fire beneath the table. One person recalled, "When he left he could not walk straight but you cannot blame the beer for it."

Besides countless other American cities, many Germans migrated to New Orleans, due in large part to the cotton trade. Cotton from all over the South was sent to New Orleans for export and much of it was shipped to Bremen, Germany. On their return trip, the ships carried many German immigrants. With them came their culture, cuisine, and preference for beverages. Part of the culture was "der biergarten" and their need to relax after a hard day or week of work was important. Spending a little time with friends and family over a glass or two of beer seemed just the thing and promoted Gemütlichkeit; the feeling of comfort and being at peace with the world.

Beer gardens have, over the years, dotted our city's landscape. Among them were:

- 1840's National Beer Garden  
St. Peter @ Bayou St. John
- 1840's Old German Union  
Orleans St.
- 1843 Tivoli Gardens  
Bayou St. John & Basin St.
- 1848 Schleuter's Beer Garden  
St. Charles & Gravier
- 1850's Casino Beer Garden  
Carondelet St.

- 1850's Punecky's Beer Garden  
Prieur St.
- 1850's Schroeder's Beer Garden  
Levee & Short St.
- 1850's Zum Grünen Garten  
Levee & Josephine St.
- 1851 Carl Krost Beer Garden  
Conti (1856)  
Common (1863)
- 1857 Christian Krost
- 1853 Louis Stein's  
Bienville St.
- 1870's Bensel & Dirks
- 1880 Carrolton Garten
- 1895 Over the Rhine Beer Garden  
@ Spanish Fort
- 1890's Court Exchange  
Rousseau & Phillip
- 1890's Doerr's Beer Garden  
Live Oak & Acht (@ NOCC golf  
course?)
- 1910 Heidelberg Family Garden  
419-423 St. Charles (site of #1 Shell  
Square)
- 1937 E. Klaus's New Beer Garden  
Westwego

(Remember that many street names have changed over the years; parts of Levee and Water Sts. are now Tchoupitoulas; Delord became Howard and then Andrew Higgins, etc.)



The Beer Garden has not outlived its usefulness as it is starting to return to our collective culture. There are several of them in the Metro NOLA area which are open to the public. Deutsches Haus includes one in their plans for the new construction on Moss Street.