



The Cone Top Brewery Museum & NABA

by Rob McCarty

Ed. Note: *This is the first in a series of updates on the exciting new Cone Top Brewery Museum taking shape in Vicksburg, MI. As was announced at the NABA Convention last summer and in the previous issue of this magazine, NABA is partnering with The Mill at Vicksburg, a multi-function entertainment and hospitality complex under construction near Kalamazoo, MI, to assist in the development and on-going programming of its Cone Top Brewery Museum.*

NABA Member and entrepreneur Chris Moore grew up in the Michigan village of Vicksburg. His vision to create a multi-use, regional destination focused on beer, music and events will become the economic engine that drives his hometown's economy for another century.

Scheduled to open in 2026, and with a focus on sustainability

and preservation, The Mill complex presents a one-of-a-kind campus that can thrive for many years.

A critical component of The Mill is the Cone Top Brewery Museum. It will inhabit a 16,000 sq. ft. space dedicated to the preservation of brewery artifacts and history. In addition to featuring an extensive breweriana collection owned by the museum, it also will provide NABA members with an ample and modern space to set up displays and help curate rotating breweriana exhibitions.

Importantly, there is no monetary investment involved on the part of NABA or its membership with this museum partnership.

There are several exciting goals that are being established for the museum project, in which NABA and its members will have an opportunity to play a significant role:



Above: The Ekhardt & Becker Brewing Co., was established in 1883 by August Ekhardt and Herman Becker, who purchased the Ulmer Brewery, founded 10 years earlier. Ekhardt & Becker was one of only 20 breweries active in Detroit after Prohibition. In 1937, it acquired another Detroit brewery, the Regal Brewing Co. In 1944, the company shortened its name to E&B Brewing Co. and by the late 1940s, was one of only five remaining breweries in Detroit. In 1952, that number decreased again when E&B acquired the Schmidt Brewing Co., another Detroit brewer. E&B itself was acquired by the Pfeiffer Brewing Co. in 1962 and then closed.

This hand-painted wooden sign is believed to be one of a kind. It measures 47 x 38 in. and dates from some time after 1953, when the "Brew 103" brand was introduced. The sign was removed from the brewery building at 1551 Winder St. in Detroit, by Edward Greaney, the lead architect on a project converting the building into loft-style condominiums in the 1970s. Greaney stated that this impressive sign graced the boardroom of the Ekhardt & Becker Brewery headquarters. The sign remained in Greaney's personal collection and was acquired from his estate for the Cone Top Museum in January 2021.



Alysse Thomas of The Mill/Cone Top team joins (from left) NABA members Stanley Summers, Joe Olsen and NABA Treasurer Jim Kaiser at a showing of Joe's outstanding collection of Stroh/Detroit breweriana, in June 2021. The display was set up in one of the storefronts in downtown Vicksburg, MI, also owned by the developers of The Mill/Cone Top Brewery Museum to promote awareness about the museum and NABA.

NABA and Cone Top will again be co-sponsoring a breweriana display and trade show with this year's theme being the "Stanley Summers Collection." This event will be held in downtown Vicksburg. The dates are June 10-11, 2022, and the show will be held in conjunction with another large annual event, "The Vicksburg Old Car Festival," which draws hundreds of participants and visitors.

GOAL 1

Capturing collectors and their artifacts for posterity

The number one goal is to preserve brewery history in every way possible.

The museum has begun collecting artifacts and capturing videos of breweriana collectors and their pieces and will be reaching out to NABA and its members for more assistance with this critical project.

The Cone Top team, in conjunction with the NABA Board of Directors, are very excited about the idea of visiting various NABA members and helping them digitally preserve their collections while making them a part of Cone Top Museum's permanent, online "virtual" collection.

GOAL 2

NABA members' collections on display

Remember "Show and Tell" time in elementary school? Cone Top will have themed breweriana shows welcoming NABA members to display their items to show (and tell) with fellow collectors and guests who visit The Mill to enjoy a concert, stay at its boutique hotel, enjoy its brewery and distillery, or all of these.

GOAL 3

Capturing the history of regional breweries

Regional breweries of a bygone era helped shape and define American culture throughout the late 19th and mid-20th centuries and also generated a rich history of breweriana. The Cone Top museum

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Mindy Reno, Cone Top Brewery Museum Collection Manager, stands next to a large, die-cut cardboard sign. The sign measures 53 x 26 in, and is for Cook's Goldblume Beer, F.W. Cook, Inc., Evansville, IN, c. 1952. This item, which has since been placed in a large frame for protection and display, came from an auction featuring artifacts from an old printing company warehouse which was liquidated in 2021. It was acquired for the Cone Top Museum at that time.

will celebrate the regional breweries from across the country that we have lost and explore what they meant to their communities.

NABA members can help to capture this history by contributing written archives, stories and photos of select permanent regional brewery collections that will be on display at the museum.

GOAL 4

The NABA Collection

In addition to the physical breweriana on display, the museum also will house a “virtual” collection. The goal is to create a long-term program in which Cone Top staff will professionally photograph NABA collectors' breweriana artifacts and display them virtually, online. NABA members will have the option to remain anonymous or receive full acknowledgment of their pieces.

This means that the items that might otherwise be seen only by a select few can be enjoyed by many more enthusiasts across the country. Just like all Cone Top's programming, the opportunity to have breweriana photographed and displayed virtually will be at no cost to NABA members.

GOAL 5

NABA Historian in Residence

The Mill already has a connection to a very robust, ongoing Arts and Music Residency program. Future plans call for a NABA Historian Residency program. Through this program, a NABA resident historian could be temporarily housed in the Cone Top guest house in Vicksburg to work on special projects at the museum. This residency will be full of possibilities, including the chance to:

- Contribute to the histories of regional breweries on display at the museum.
- Curate or set up exhibits.
- Interact with the public visiting the museum during open hours.

There are big goals for the future of the Cone Top Brewery Museum and the NABA partnership will be instrumental in achieving these and more.

Details about these exciting programs are in development and will be communicated in this magazine, so stay tuned!