

# **ST. LOUIS'S GERMAN BREWING INDUSTRY: ITS RISE AND FALL**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The rapid rise of St. Louis from eighteenth-century frontier outpost to turn of the century metropolis was due in no small part to its German community. During the middle of the nineteenth century tens of thousands of Germans immigrated to St. Louis, bringing with them not only their skills, and labor, but also their love of association, sense of congeniality, and fondness for beer. The German propensity for beer was so great that brewing quickly became one of the most important industries in the city, helping St. Louis become a major commercial center by the outbreak of the Civil War. The success of the city and by extension its German community reached a new height in 1870 when the federal census proclaimed St. Louis the nation's "Fourth City". The excitement which accompanied the announcement convinced local boosters that St. Louis was destined to become "the future great city of the world." Nevertheless, by the following census, Chicago had surpassed St. Louis in both population and prominence.

For many historians the 1880 census marks the beginning of the city's gradual decline; however, in reality St. Louis remained one of the nation's leading cities until the interwar years. While a host of factors played a part in St. Louis's twentieth-century decline, one event has remained conspicuously absent from the city's historiography. In the beer-loving St. Louis, it would be Prohibition and the subsequent loss of the city's brewing industry which proved to be crippling. In addition to Prohibition's dire economic results, the loss of brewing and beer in St. Louis also irreparably damaged the

traditional German way of life, weakening German-American social and cultural bonds,  
and accelerating the ongoing process of assimilation.