

The Trubadours

The Trubadours Go Ivy League

by Gary Corbin and Laura Guimond

As much as we'd prefer it sometimes, not every trip we take is to Old World Brewvana. But our most recent traveling and tasting experience was pleasurable to a very high *degree*, as we were able to visit the pubs alongside some of our country's most august (in September) halls of learning.

Pioneers Blazing the Trail

We started in college-thick Springfield, Massachusetts, near where one of the authors grew up during a time when there was a number of local beers – but no variety. Schaefer, Narraganset, and the like were just local imitations of BudMillSchlitz, and by the time we moved West in 1993, even those brews had dropped out of sight, overwhelmed by the Big Three. But with the **Pioneer Valley Brew Pub**, Springfield has joined the micro revolution.

Calling itself a Bistro, the pub is elegant, even posh, by brew pub standards, with dinner prices to match. And at \$4.00 a pint, the brew is on the spendy side also. Unfortunately, the beers were by no means special, with the exception of the *Duryea Porter*, dark brown with a reddish tinge, malty, with a roasty nose, plenty of residual sweetness well balanced by a chocolatey/roasty flavor and just enough hop bitterness. Their seasonal *Octoberfest* had a funky, DMS-like aroma, lacked the maltiness and body we were looking for, and was too bitter for the style.

The *Armory Amber*, named for the nearby arsenal raided in the 1780's by American counterrevolutionaries opposing the Continental Congress (which led to the calling of the Constitutional Convention in 1787) would have inspired neither Tory nor Whig. Reddish-copper in color, it shared the funky nose of the O'fest, and was similarly light in malt flavor and body. The *Mohawk Pale Ale* was deep gold with a distinctly non-Pacific-Northwest light hop nose (definitely not Cascades!), malt dominating moderate bitterness, with a slightly hoppy finish. *Falcon Nut Brown* was better, with a thick, creamy head, a very malty nose, reddish-brown in color, medium bodied and mild, lightly bittered with just enough dark malt flavor.

The PVBP is worth a visit if you happen to be in Springfield (sports fans, the Basketball Hall of Fame is right up the street), but not worth a special trip. And stick to the darker beers.

John Harvard Must Brew

John Harvard's Brew House is a new chain of brew pubs springing up in a number of East Coast cities. We visited the original, just a few blocks from the Harvard campus in Cambridge, filled with students taking advantage of the exam-free time at the beginning of a new semester. Jim Koch, look out – there really *is* a great microbrewery in Beantown now.

We had a great meal at the nearby Bombay Club, so we didn't try the brewery's grub, but sample we did every last beer in this pub. The *Tettnang Lager* was straw-colored, with a noble hop flowery nose. The beer was malty but well-balanced with noble hop bitterness, some sweetness and a touch of DMS, and a strong but balanced finish. The *John Harvard Pale Ale* was medium-copper in color with a slight haze. There were some citrusy esters and some malt in the nose, with strong bitterness overcoming almost as strong malt flavor, some sweetness and slight caramel, with a satisfyingly bitter finish.

The "Old Willy" IPA had a deep copper color, with some haze. It had a low head, a mix of creamy and rocky

foam that stayed well. It had a strong hop nose with lots of floral and strawberry esters. Although it had a strong malty sweetness, bitterness dominated and carried through strongly in the finish. The *Midlands Mild* brown ale was deep ruby-brown, with almost no nose – just a slight maltiness and low esters. The flavor, though, was anything but slight: sweet, chocolatey, with low bitterness and low hop flavor, and a sweet finish. With a little more hop bitterness and flavor, it would be a great porter.

The oddly named (for Boston) *Auld Savannah* smoked ale was deep ruby-brown and had a smoky, slightly phenolic nose. Malt dominates the flavor, but the smoke comes through next and dominates the finish. The malt was nearly balanced by low-to-medium hop bitterness, and detectable but low hop flavor. It was good, but we found the *Dry Irish Stout* somewhat more enjoyable. The thick, nitro head stays long on the deep black liquid, accentuating the roast malt in the nose, punctuated by some esters but no hop aroma. It boasted a very roasty flavor – bitter, malty, and smooth, medium-bodied in spite of its robust appearance. Roast malt dominated the finish.

Next time you're in Boston, unless you're really stuck on visiting a bar "where everybody knows your name", we highly recommend John Harvard's. And show up thirsty.

Triumphant

Ask a Portlander to name famous beer cities, and Princeton, New Jersey probably doesn't make the top ten list. But with a large, thirsty student (and faculty) population nearby, **The Triumph** may put this old college town on the brewing map. This brew pub opened in May, 1995. Brewer Tom Stevenson took Siebel's eight-week course in Spring 1996, and since then the pub has flourished. The owners expect to open a second pub in Red Bank, NJ soon with a 250-seat equity theater.

Tom and his brewing partner, Adam, were kind enough to visit with us while we sampled their wares, and filled us in on the brewing details. The Triumph uses all European hops in both its lagers and English-style ales, and a mix of American and European malts. The ten-barrel brewery uses a single-stage infusion mash for all its beers. Ales are cold-conditioned for a week after fermentation; lagers get at least four weeks in cold-jacketed fermenters.

Some of the beers were downright excellent; a few were not to our tastes. The *Pilsner* was fair. Its low head and almost absent nose were not a good start. Highly bitter, it also had a strong malt flavor, but was not quite balanced. It had strong hop flavor but a bitter finish with some sweetness and no real hop finish. The *Oktoberfest* had a very pretty, red/amber color, but again there was almost no aroma. Malty, medium-high in bitterness with a noticeable roast flavor and some phenolics, its finish was slightly dry. The *Munich Helles* had a slight hop nose. It was well-balanced: malty with medium bitterness, medium-high hop flavor, and a strong finish with both malt and hop flavors.

The cask-conditioned *Pale Ale* had slight hop fruitiness in the nose, diminished no doubt by its low carbonation level. Malty, bitter, and hoppy (tasting like East Kent Goldings), it was complex but young, with a slight grassiness. It sported strong hop flavor in the finish. The *Bengal Gold IPA* again had very little in the nose. Highly bitter, with medium malty sweetness, strong caramel, citrusy hop flavor and a bitter finish, overtones of oxidation made this a less appealing mix. By contrast, the *Smoked Porter* was right on. Dark brown and just a bit cloudy, the beer's wonderful chocolate malt aroma is followed by a strong roasty malt flavor. There is subtle smokiness from German Rauch malt and some phenols; the brewer wisely kept the beer's bitterness low to avoid accentuating that potentially harsh flavor. There is some hop flavor in the finish to complement its chocolatey sweetness.

Finally, the *Oatmeal Stout*, on nitro, was black, with a creamy, thick long-lasting head. The nose was pure roast malt. Black and roast malt dominate the flavor, with sweetness and a smooth, full body. There was low hop flavor but moderate to strong bitterness – some roast, some hops – and a roasty, bitter finish.

As we were leaving the Triumph, the host asked how we liked the beers. Hardly waiting for our answer, he gushed about the IPA and lagers. In contrast, we preferred the darker ales... but then we remembered: don't we always?