



WOMEN'S WORK

Having grown up on a tobacco farm, UNCG Archivist Erin Lawrimore understands how important that cash crop was for North Carolina. The associate professor knows the impact the once-booming textile industry had on our state. And over the years, she's witnessed both industries collapse and North Carolina search to replace them.

There's education, technology, and medical research. And a new, burgeoning industry with an estimated \$2 billion annual economic impact: craft beer.

It's a dispersed industry, with more than 250 small business owners scattered across the state. Which is why, in the fall of 2017, Lawrimore and her colleagues set out to systematically document the history, business, and culture of beer and brewing in North Carolina, starting in downtown Greensboro.

The digital project – Well Crafted NC – was made possible through a University Libraries Innovation and Enrichment Grant.

After months of oral interviews with local brewers and brewery owners, historical research, and a successful community launch event, something caught Lawrimore's attention: old beer recipes dating back to the 1800s.

The home brewers behind these recipes? Women.

"Until the brewing industry was industrialized after Prohibition, women

brewers were plentiful," she says. "Brewing was considered 'women's work.'"

As brewing turned into big business, women's roles were minimized. When craft beer began to grow in popularity, women remained underrepresented, with the burly, bearded man becoming the stereotypical "brewmaster" image.

Last summer, Lawrimore decided to expand Well Crafted NC to explore the role of women in the industry today.

"A 2014 survey found that 21 percent of craft breweries had at least one woman founder, owner, CEO, or head brewer," says Lawrimore. "It's more than I think most people would assume – and that was five years ago. I would think that number has gone up."

She argues that women have remained an integral part of the industry since industrialization – they just haven't always been as visible as men. But with the shift to craft beer and the recent focus on the "craftsperson," we're starting to see the women behind the beer.

"The brewer has gone from someone quietly brewing beer in the back to a public face for the business."

With support from a UNCG Faculty

Lawrimore launched Well Crafted NC with colleagues Richard Cox and David Gwynn, who work on University Libraries' digital projects. "We're bringing university resources to local groups to help them tell and preserve their stories," she explains. "We're also expanding access and creating more robust, representative historical records."

First grant, Lawrimore interviewed 23 women brewers and brewery owners across the state. Several themes emerged. First, many women have come to brewing from other traditionally male-dominated industries, including construction and IT. Also, most of the women have completed formal education programs. And finally, they rely on a strong support network.

"Women are still fighting stereotypes. They have to have the formal training and work really hard to prove that they belong."

While many of the previous Well Crafted oral history interviews focused on the history of the breweries, Lawrimore is focused on the personal stories of these women, all of which are available online.

"A lot of breweries are following that trend of local, craft, with a focus on story, and that's what Well Crafted NC is trying to capture," she says.

"This project allows these women to share their stories in their words, without any editing. Fifty years down the road, we'll have a snapshot of this industry in this moment in time – the women and men who are driving it and how the industry came to be."

By Alyssa Bedrosian • Learn more at library.uncg.edu/dp/wellcraftednc