

A Brewery in Fussville, Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin

Carole McGibany



Tennessen Farm – photo courtesy of Jim Tennessen

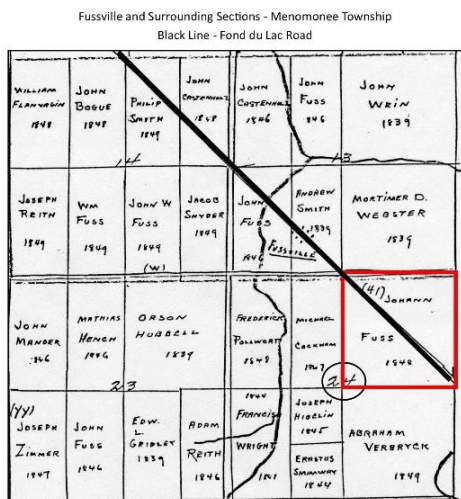
Before I begin this exploration into a brewery in Fussville (pronounced Foosville), I must confess I don't like beer. My husband laughs at my obsession with breweries and taverns and is puzzled when I ask him to go on brewery tours with me while on our travels throughout Wisconsin. "What's the fascination?" he asks, but I know. I love the history of Wisconsin, particularly the history of a small settlement called Fussville. Beer was an integral part of the heritage of the German speaking immigrants whose stories I have searched for, recorded and embraced these past nine years. And so, I welcomed this opportunity to organize the stories that I have heard about a Fussville brewery into one cohesive compilation. Here is a collection of various family's memories and additional research, and I ask for my reader's indulgence as I also include some history about the hamlet of Fussville as well.

Setting the Stage – Where was Fussville?

Fussville was once an unincorporated community in the east central portion of Menomonee Township, Wisconsin (Town 8 North, Range 20 East) in Waukesha County (now in the Village of Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin). The community center was the Plat of Fussville (Section 13) defined by roads now called Appleton Avenue (Hwy 175), Good Hope Road (Hwy W) and Lilly Road. Outside the plat were predominately farms. Farmers considered themselves Fussville residents too, even though their land was outside of the Plat where they went for farming needs, church and socialization.

My research takes place in the northeast quadrant of Section 24, Menomonee Township. Although outside the community center, Fussville residents would tell you that this was a part of Fussville too.

1848 – Northeast Quadrant, Section 24



Partial Map Courtesy of the
Waukesha County Historical Society

In the mid-1840s, German speaking immigrants were leaving places of economic hardship and political unrest in search of something better. Among them, a wealthy and much respected resident of Niederdrees Prussia, 57-year-old Johann Fuss, his 53-year-old wife, Anna Clara and their eleven children ages 13-32. Upon arriving to the area that would be known as Fussville, Johann, his sons and son-in-law (John Castenholz) bought up large parcels of land along what was once a footpath for the Menominee and Potawatomi who lived on the land. In 1863, as part of the Treaty of the Cedars, The Native Nations were forced to cede their land to the US Government and the footpath became a dirt road called Fond du Lac Road¹.

Proximity to this road allowed the settlers easy access to commerce and trade south to Milwaukee and north to the Fox River Valley. Selling for \$1.25 an acre, Johann bought a patent² on December 27, 1848 within Section 24, spending \$200 for the northeast quadrant, 160 acres.

1849-1850 - Jodocus "Adolph" Birkhauser - brewer

Speculation suggests that near or on the land where Johann purchased his patent, Adolph Birkhauser bought an existing farm in 1849³. Adolph was a brewer in his native Cologne, Germany, and turned his attention to building a brewery in his new homeland. Life was hard for those early immigrants with little medical care available and deadly diseases like smallpox and cholera prevalent. Adolph was one of those who succumbed to death, only a

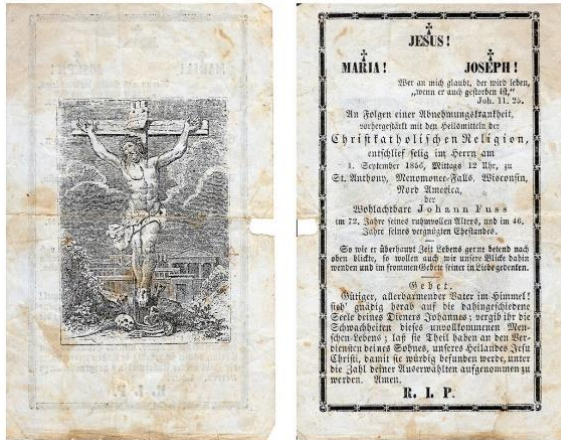
¹ Fond du Lac Road evolved and changed over the years. In 1922, the road was paved and became part of the State Highway System. It was then named Hwy 15, linking Green Bay to Milwaukee and known as the longest stretch of concrete in Wisconsin. In 1926, it became US Highway 41 and in 1953, became what we know today as State Highway Trunk 175 (Appleton Avenue).

² Whenever a settler purchased a patent, it meant they were the original purchasers or the land.

³ This is only speculation, based on the reference book, Memoirs of Waukesha County, Theron Wilbur Haight, 1907, and family obituaries in local newspaper publications.

year after making the difficult trip to America, dying at the age of 47 on August 30, 1850, leaving behind the mystery of a brewery in Fussville.

1856 – Johann Fuss dies

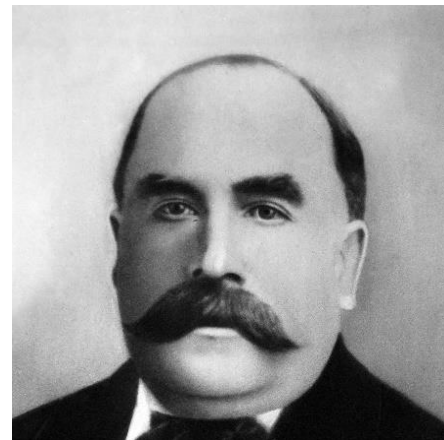


Johann Fuss Funeral Card

On December 1, 1856, the patriarch of the Fuss Family, Johann died at the age of 68. Without leaving a will, the division of his property between his surviving wife and children was difficult. The few records available at this time don't clearly explain how Johann's property was divided. However, maps and research suggest that Johann's son, Joseph acquired a portion of the land.

1859 – Joseph Fuss and the Fuss Hotel

While US Census⁴ statistics for 1850, 1860, and 1870 suggest that most of the Fuss sons remaining in Fussville lived and worked as farmers, Johann's son Joseph⁵ turned his attention to other pursuits. Married to Elizabeth Stuesser in 1850, the two raised their three daughters, Gertrude (Jonen), Clara (Stoltz) and Anna Maria (Tennessen) in Fussville. Joseph became a successful businessman, operating a sawmill and brewery (according to his obituary). It is said that lumber from his sawmill went to build the community centered St. Anthony the Hermit Catholic Church. The church's cemetery is resting place to Adolph Birkhauser, possibly Johann Fuss⁶ and other Fussville settlers

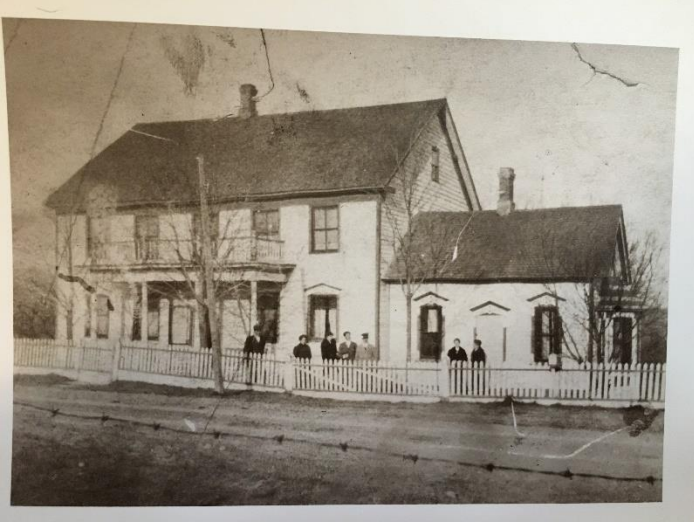


Joseph Fuss

⁴ My research often leans into statistics from the US Census. I am grateful to those hardworking men who trudged the dusty roads of Fussville, gathering information that allows me access, so important to my understanding of the make-up of the community.

⁵ In 1850, Joseph is reported to be a tavern keeper, in 1860 a brewer, and in 1870, a farmer.

⁶ Extensive research still has not uncovered the final resting place of Johann or his wife, Anna Clara, but Johann's fervent efforts to build a place of worship for the settlement lead many to believe the couple is likely buried in the St. Anthony the Hermit Cemetery.



Fuss Hotel – Courtesy of Jim Tennesen

In the 1850s, family stories concur that Joseph owned and operated a hotel, the Fuss Hotel, located on Fond du Lac Road in Fussville, Wisconsin at the most southeastern tip of the northeast quadrant of Section 24. (Once Johann's land) Its convenient location meant the hotel was the first establishment travelers came to on their way through Fussville. It was said that famous Milwaukee land speculator Solomon Juneau and his wife, Josette once

stayed the night on their way north to visit family in Theresa, Wisconsin. According to descendants, the Fuss Brewery was also located here.

1899 - Joseph dies and the hotel changes hands

On December 6, 1899, Joseph died and was buried in the St. Anthony Cemetery. Joseph's youngest daughter, Anna Maria, and her husband, Heinrich "Henry" Tennesen became the owners and operators of the hotel and surrounding property. By the 1930's the hotel and land have been passed down to the couple's son, Harry Tennesen, his wife, Olive and their children. Harry's family farmed the land and turned the hotel into their residence.

The Farm

Conversations with Harry's son, Wilfred, paint a picture of the layout of the farm. He recalled the barn, corn crib, chicken house and a stone wall – possibly remnants of a brewery. Wilfred also recalled the spring house. Stories about the spring house were legendary and are key to this research. Wilfred's children, Jim Tennesen⁷ and



The Spring House – Movie Still courtesy of Jim Tennesen

⁷ Jim Tennesen is the family historian. With grateful thanks, I credit him with many of the pictures and stories shared here.

Donna Rossi, described the clapboard shed that stood on the farm near Hwy 41 (once Fond du Lac Road). A sliding barn door opened from the north into a small room sunlit by windows. To the right were ten or twelve fieldstone steps that led down to a bricked archway and tunnel reaching back about forty feet. Inside were two artesian springs, one near the entrance bubbling up in a stone pit; the second spring farther back in the cave. The temperature in the cave was always cool, making it the perfect place to store farm produce (and beer?) Other Tennesen family remembered fetching water from the spring house and using the space as a root cellar for storing potatoes, carrots and canned goods.

Fussville friend, Michael Szymanski, also remembered the spring house from his youth. He recalled, “You entered at ground level as the cave was built into a hill. “The floor was dirt, always damp and muddy. Sometimes standing water⁸. The temperature was cool as you might imagine. Could cool off there on hot summer days. The depth was probably 40-50 feet deep. There was a small pond that the road went over – we went fishing there for small bluegill and the big white Tennesen house was standing right close to the road.”

1873-1971 – The Rise and Fall of Fussville



Fussville – Courtesy Menomonee Falls Historical Society

In order to move this exploration forward, allow me to take us a couple of steps back and tell you about the rise and fall of Fussville. In 1873, the settlement was in its heyday with its own blacksmith shop, post office, stagecoach inn and saloons galore. It was a traveler’s oasis, but by the turn of the century with better roads and transportation, there was little need to stop in Fussville on one’s journey. A new church was built north in Menomonee Falls and attendance at St. Anthony

dwindled to 100 families. The post office was discontinued in 1903, yet, Fussville remained a place of faith and community.

Years passed and the population in Fussville rose and fell. Then, in 1958, the Village of Menomonee Falls (from here on, to be known as ‘Village’) annexed the Town of

⁸ In the late 1950s, the natural drain of the spring house to the Menomonee River was blocked when what is now 124th Street was built. As a result, water backed up into the underground cave to as deep as three to four feet. It remained flooded for years which is why Tennesen children could only enter with adult supervision. Shortly before the state rebuilt Appleton Avenue, the water miraculously began draining again, causing the cave to become dry once again. Memory of Jim Tennesen

Menomonee including Fussville. Still the little community maintained its unique identity and included St. Anthony the Hermit Catholic Church, various residences, small businesses, North Hills Country Club and four iconic taverns – Schmitz’s, The White Chip, Marach and Schusters, and Vogl’s. The community would soon change drastically.

In 1971, the Department of Transportation along with Village officials spent months of deliberation deciding on a new configuration of Hwy 175/Appleton Avenue. The decision was made to widen the thoroughfare from two lanes into a four-lane road with a median, which meant the demolition of most Fussville residences and businesses including the taverns and the Fuss Hotel/Tennessen property, -all built close to the highway’s edge.

1971 - Demolition of the Spring House

Jerry Brahm worked for the Village in the engineering department during the expansion project. He remembered, “the Department of Transportation Field Representative one day invited anyone from the Village who was interested to go out to the Tennessen portion of the project to see what they had uncovered before they continued their earth moving operations in the area. The place nearest to the roadway had been excavated which probably had included the entrance [to the spring house]. I had no idea at the time what (the structure) had been used for. You could get close to the remaining cave which was arched stone but could not go under it because some of the stones in the arch were already loosened by the excavation equipment.”

A Spring House, or Something More?

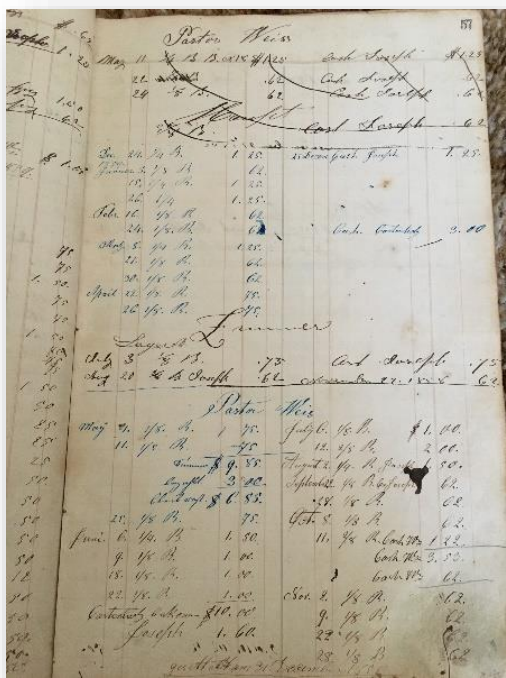
As I mentioned earlier, I love the history of my state, especially small rural communities like Fussville. I spent many summers and vacations visiting the farms of grandparents and relatives in and around Poniatowski in middle Wisconsin, located in Marathon County. But in all my travels and visits with family, never once did I hear of or see anything like the Tennessen spring house. And I wanted to see it. What was this magical place? Asking good friends, I was introduced to Wayne Kroll and his book, “Wisconsin’s Frontier Farm Breweries, 1830-1880’s⁹. With the book and its contents, I had struck gold.

⁹ Wayne’s research was extensive, coming together from spending countless visits and hours going through Wisconsin Business Directories located at the Wisconsin Historical Society library in Madison. The WHS library also has an excellent source of County Histories and in a few cases they were very helpful. The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture also had a record of breweries and how much each of them brewed (from IRS records). The National Archives in Chicago had all the old IRS Directories covering Wisconsin from 1866 to the mid 1870s. This was a big help in finding old "farm breweries" and where they were located and who was buying IRS Revenue Beer Stamps. Wayne and his fellow researchers traveled several times to the Baker Library at Harvard University to look at the old original R. G. Dun Directories located there. Although not without some errors, it must be said that Wayne’s research is still quite thorough and accurate.

Farm Breweries and Beer Cellars

In his book, Wayne wrote that most farm brewery sites were built on hillsides overlooking a body of water with an artesian well located on the property. These specifications were the same as the Fuss property and were confirmed by memories shared by Jim and Wilfred Tennesen and Mike Szymanski. Wayne wrote, "In most lagering cellars, the architecture was exactly the same – They were built of stone with vaulted or arched ceilings. The typical cellar was about forty to sixty feet long, ten to twelve feet high and ten to twelve feet wide." Wayne's measurements and the stories from my Fussville friends matched perfectly. Although the Tennesen spring house has been lost to time and progress, I am certain it was once a lager cellar and lives on in photographs, stories and the research done by Wayne Kroll. Could it be possible that somehow the cellar was part of Adolph Birkhauser's efforts, acquired and added onto by the Fuss Family? How I wished I could take that leap of faith.

1859-1865 – A Beer Ledger and Additional Evidence



Ledger Page Courtesy of Jim Tennesen

Before the Tennesen Family home was demolished in the highway expansion of 1971, Jim Tennesen discovered in the attic what appears to be a beer journal, the Fuss Beer Ledger. Dated from 1859-1865, its over 100 pages mention many Fussville names familiar to me, who bought their beer from Fuss. People like Anton Lotz, the blacksmith, and George Inden, the stagecoach inn owner. Even Fr. Weis from St. Anthony Catholic Church and the brewer's own mother ('Mutter' in German) were Fuss Brewery customers. Farther afield were entries made for sales in Waukesha and Milwaukee to men like Marres and Croll (Waukesha) and Weber, Meyer, Schuster and Beissen (Milwaukee).

Jim Tennesen allowed me to digitize the journal and then to share it with author, Wayne Kroll. Wayne studied the many pages and made an exciting discovery, finding that by mid-1863, beer was not only being sold by the keg but by the bottle ('flaschen' in German) in boxes – generally not the case for these small farm breweries. "Now if we could only find an antique pottery Fuss beer bottle," Wayne remarked!

The Spring house and Prohibition

Wilfred told me this next story that recalls a time during Prohibition. He remembered how the artesian spring water in the spring house could be brought to the surface with a hand pump and how city folk came to the farm and paid five cents a gallon for the clear, crisp drinking water. And while the clear water was being sold above ground, bootleggers from Chicago, with their cigars and Pierce-Arrows and Cadillacs were below ground using the lager cellar to transform the same water into beer for illegal sales. Wilfred remembered how many a police officer from both Milwaukee and Waukesha County stopped by to sample the illegal brew. He remembered the smell of malt and the confused look on the faces of drinking water customers who wondered where that brewery smell was coming from. Wilfred recalled the family, “never said a word.”

1874 - The End of the Brewery

An article from the local Waukesha Freeman newspaper dated February 19, 1874 reports news of the destruction of the brewery and adjoining residence by fire. Thanks to a Fuss brother who happened to be on the scene, the sleeping Fuss family members escaped “without being singed.” The article goes on to report, “Both the brewery and residence were totally destroyed at a loss of about \$6000.” Interestingly, some Fuss family members believe that the fire was not an accident, but arson, set by a rival brewer.

1948 - The Settling of Fussville –one final word.

My friend, Jerry Brahm, reminded me of a homespun research paper written by the Fussville Busy Beavers 4-H Club under the leadership of their director, Mrs. Holmes. THE SETTLING OF FUSSVILLE was published in the Menomonee Falls News in two installments on November 25 and December 2, 1948 and was an extensive study into the founding of the settlement. As I read the installments, I came upon this sentence, “The first family, John (Johann) Fuss with his wife and eleven children established themselves on the Menomonee River on what is now the Tennessen farm, built a home, cleared the virgin timber, and erected a brewery and inn, at that time, the only stopping place for travelers on this road between Milwaukee and Fond du Lac.” Yet another voice, this time from the 1940s that confirms the existence of a brewery in Fussville, located right where all my research and stories indicated.

A Note of Thanks

And so I close this essay of stories and research about a Brewery in Fussville, but first with a note of thanks. While books, census statistics and plat maps give me facts and figures, it is hearing the stories and sitting down with Fussville friends one-on-one that gives deeper meaning to any exploration that I may make. Before submitting this paper for consideration,

I reconnected with friends Jerry Brahm and Jim Tennessen who eagerly embraced my efforts and shared their additional memories and insights. I wish I could have done the same with Jim's father, Wilfred.



Wilfred Tennessen with daughter, Donna

When Wilfred's father was preparing to sell the farm, he gave Wilfred and his siblings the choice of money or an acre of land. Wilfred chose the acre and became the last remaining Tennessen of Fussville, living on the land of his Fuss and Tennessen forbears, not far from the site of the old Fuss Hotel. Wilfred died there at the age of 100 in August, 2021. It is with gratitude that I dedicate this compilation to him. His stories live on here, preserving memories of the spring house and a brewery, all in the little community of Fussville.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR-Influenced by her own rural Wisconsin roots, Carole began investigating stories about Fussville in the mid 2010's. Moving to Menomonee Falls in 1991 and attending St. Anthony the Hermit Catholic Church, she often heard whispers about Fussville and decided to find out more. Many St. Anthony parishioners were descendants of Fussville founding families and were eager to share their memories, pictures from old scrapbooks and photo albums. They encouraged her to speak to others outside the St. Anthony community. Carole recorded the stories and compiled them into two books, *Glimpses – Memories of St. Anthony Parish and the Lost Community of Fussville, Wisconsin* and *A Second Glimpse – More Memories of St. Anthony the Hermit Parish and the Lost Community of Fussville, Wisconsin*. Although born and raised outside of Menomonee Falls, she considers herself a Fussville adopted daughter and continues to look for ways to preserve the stories and memories of Fussville.

End note: On May 21, 2025, the Village of Menomonee Falls dedicated their first state historical marker. The marker commemorates Fussville and is located on a new development not far from what was once the Tennessen property. Embracing the history of Fussville, the developer named his new apartment complex *Tennessen Flats* in honor of the family.