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Deer? "No, Beer!": <u>Perceptions of Adirondack Identity in Regional Breweries</u>

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Abstract: This essay focuses on how breweries in the Adirondack Region of New York state reflect an "Adirondack Aesthetic" in the marketing and creation of beer. The author expands on previous scholarship to include new aesthetic elements. Ethnographic interviews with industry professionals reveal a human history of the Adirondacks. Adherence to or divergence from the expanded aesthetic tells how tourism, environmental law, and geo-cultural identity are negotiated by the craft beer industry in the region.

The Adirondack State Park in the northeast of New York State is often described as "Forever Wild," an often-cited phrase that comes from the constitutional amendment passed in 1894 which protects the State Park from corporate ownership and logging. The Park is viewed differently by certain populations; for some it is a place for nature to flourish, while for others—particularly residents of the Park—"Adirondack" names the values they define, expressed through the use of an "Adirondack Aesthetic." Today about 130,000 people live in the park and another 200,000 people reside in the park during the summer months. Tourists typically flock to the region for outdoor sports like skiing, kayaking, hiking, and the Olympic complex in Lake Placid, but are increasingly drawn to the craft breweries in the region.

The majority of brewers, owners, and enthusiasts I interviewed cited Saranac Brewery (owned by the FX Matt Brewing Company) as the beginning of craft beer consumption and production in the area, despite the fact that the beer is brewed in Utica, which is located in central New York, well outside the border of the park (often referred to as the "Blue Line"; Calderwald, Mathy 2017). In the years since, the craft beer industry has

received substantial support from New York State in the form of legislation and tourism initiatives, such as the Farm Brewing Law passed in 2012 which allowed businesses with a Farm Brewery license to serve beer and later spirits that are produced in New York State without a separate license. However, at least 20% of the three ingredients used in beer production must be grown in New York State, and this percentage will rise as years pass (Archer, 2017). Many of the brewery owners I interviewed are licensed as such. Legislation supporting the industry has been supplemented by New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo's tourism initiative, Taste NY, launched in 2013. The statewide program, facilitated by the state's Department of Agriculture and Markets, consists mainly of marketing and outreach events which promotes New York state products. While it is viewed by brewers and owners as an overall benevolent force, some have expressed frustration with the cost and paperwork associated (Archer 2017).

Politicians and tourists are not the only populations with an eye for the Adirondacks, the park has received much attention from scholars, poets, and scientists since the late 18th century, as noted by author Phillip Terrie:

It was clear that I was far from the first to take notice of the beauty of the region and those who were utilizing it. During the 19th and early 20th century, Romantics described the Adirondack Mountains and the surrounding area's beauty as "sublime" and "beautiful" (1994:53).

Austin Calderwald's definition of the Adirondack aesthetic focuses on "form and function, simplicity, and connection with nature" (2017:1). During my research I observed this aesthetic in the marketing and branding of the breweries in the area and I would add another set of qualifications to the Adirondack aesthetic: a belief in the importance of hard work, integrity, and the history of the region, including the industries that in some cases led to the destruction of natural resources in the park, pre-"Forever Wild." One park resident described to me that to see that something is an Adirondack product means "[I]t carries that quality with it, most Adirondack furniture is handcrafted, it's not like processed and built by a machine; it's wood that's been hand carved, that's been debarked, stained, put together by someone who worked pretty hard on it" (Gearsbeck 2017). Additionally, Calderwald's definition of connection with nature is not representational in nature: "This does not mean that the artifacts represent a connection with nature; connection with

nature literally means that the artifact allows the person to better experience, and therefore appreciate their environment" (2017: 22). In many cases the connection with nature that these breweries exhibit is representational. I will address the significance of the divergence from the direct experience of Calderwald's Adirondack Aesthetic to the representational connection which is an important piece of what I view as a Hybrid Adirondack Aesthetic.

Before heading into the mountains for what I knew would be beer and tourism related research, I consulted the Taste NY digital map tool to determine the number of breweries in the area. The preliminary look through the websites of breweries showcased the use of regional symbols, phrases, and culture in the marketing and branding of each. There are eight breweries listed on Taste NY's website that fall within the boundaries of the park. Four of the brewery owners I interviewed were within the park and the fifth was only a few miles outside of it. These breweries include: Raquette River Brewing and Big Tupper Brewing, both located in the town of Tupper Lake in the middle of the Park; Fulton Chain Brewery in Old Forge in the southwestern Adirondacks; Adirondack Pub and Brewing in Lake George, a well-known tourist town in the southeastern part of the Park; and Adirondack Toboggan Microbrewery, which is just outside the eastern border of the park.

When I began my research, I did not have an aesthetic approach in mind, however it became clear that the Hybrid Adirondack Aesthetic influences almost every element of craft beer industry in the Adirondacks: logos, tap design, beer names, taproom décor, and even the flavors of beer. Using specific examples from my fieldwork, I analyze some elements of the craft beer industry and discuss the way they fit into the Hybrid Adirondack Aesthetic, as there can be overlap between qualifications.

Form and Function

Big Tupper Brewing is decorated with local wood, chalkboards from the old school in town, and tin from a shuttered hardware store in the area. There is also a wood stove set up between the bar and restaurant. Jim LaValley, the owner of a local real estate company and Big Tupper Brewing explained to me, "that stove came out of a train station, it really was designed originally to be functional, provide some heat, sit around, a local guy did the

stone work, that's local stone." (LaValley 2017). The way in which the restaurant has been decorated speaks to the importance of function in the Adirondacks. The chalkboards, the hardware, and the wood stove were all at one point purely functional. Once they were no longer needed Jim and Big Tupper Brewing gave them a new role, to be functional in a different setting. Instead of notes for school children the chalkboards are used for beer lists and restaurant specials. And while the stove had not been used yet, Jim does plan on using it in the coming winter months (LaValley 2017).

Connection with Nature

Raquette River Brewing's connection to nature starts first and foremost with its name: the Raquette River is one of two rivers which flows north in North America. Mark Jessie, a Tupper Lake native and part of owner of Raquette River Brewing, described to me that he and his partners grew up on the river, "fishing it, swimming it, and camping on it." The uniqueness of the area and their love for it, as well as the regional recognizability of the name, were all factors in choosing to use it as the name and logo (Jessie 2017; Fig. 5.1). The inside of the Raquette River Brewing's taproom also invokes the Hybrid Adirondack Aesthetics' representational connection with nature. When I asked how they decided to decorate the room he replied, "we don't want some ugly metal free standing building so to keep wood, a lot of wood and earth tone colors" (Jessie 2017).

When Richard and Justin of Fulton Chain Brewery first talked about opening a brewery, it was during a camping trip in the park where they saw an upside down guide boat. They took the boat out onto the lake and that was where Justin first suggested the idea. That boat and the outline of the Fulton Chain of lakes are featured in the foreground of the brewery logo, resting on top of a topographical map of the town of Old Forge (Fig. 5.2; Mathy 2017).

Kevin Archer, part-owner of the Adirondack Toboggan Brewery, makes the taps and other accessories for his beer himself, a flight holder is in the shape of a toboggan (Fig. 5.3) and tap in the shape of a fire tower (Fig. 5.4). The toboggan is a reference to how residents were able to coexist with nature during the harsh winters. Park rangers historically used the fire towers to spot forest fires. Today a number have been restored and, since each is

located at the top of an Adirondack mountain, attempting to hike each mountain is called the "Fire Tower Challenge".

The background of a six-pack carrier from Big Tupper Brewing features the outline of the Big Tupper Mountain. The brewer and the owner both strive to include hyper-local imagery and references in their packaging, but they often must "think a little more regional" when designing and naming their products (LaValley 2017). Big Tupper Brewing's taps used to be fly rod handles, a tribute to the amount of fishing which goes on in the Park. However, owner Jim LaValley found that when they are put in line with tap handles from other breweries they "got lost, you see all these different styles of tap handles that are out there and everyone is trying to be more kitschy than the next...I kind of step back and we went to a more simple just straight black kind of that logo, Big Tupper Brewing on top, then we do sticker down the side that says what ale" (LaValley 2017). Despite the change in tap design, the Adirondack Aesthetic is still upheld in the transition to simplicity.

Hard work/Integrity

When I asked what made his brewery an Adirondack brewery, Mark told me, "What we do is do everything ourselves... with our own hands... we're talking about handcrafted beer right? Everything here is handcrafted, we are organic from the gro und up" (Jessie 2017). Mark refers here to the built nature of the business, created by himself and a friend, first brewing beer in his garage to eventually building a taproom and even larger indoor pavilion to accommodate the number of people visiting their establishment. When they started the brewery both men had already retired from lifelong careers. In the Adirondacks hard work manifests in the creation not just of the business, but in the brewing of beer and the building of the physical space. Kevin Archer, the owner of the Adirondack Toboggan Microbrewery, also owns a woodworking shop, which goes by the same name. The tap handles and the flight holders he uses are ones he made himself. This brewery is a licensed farm brewery in New York State, meaning it was licensed under the aforementioned 2012 Farm Brewery Law, passed by the New York state legislature to help boost the craft beer industry. It is important to note that the brewery and farm are outside the park boundaries,

and therefore Kevin and his partner Dale are allowed much easier access to the natural resources needed to run their business.

Unlike the other breweries I interviewed, Adirondack Toboggan farms their own barley instead of buying it (from other New York producers). Kevin emphasized for me the importance of making each part of the brewery by hand: "we make all this stuff, our toboggans and our fire towers and our sample sleighs. You know all this wood we logged off our farm...when you go into a bar a hundred miles from here and you see that sled on tap, you know that's us" (Archer 2017). Jim LaValley of Big Tupper Brewing explained to me, "We advertise downstate that we're distributing the fighting spirit of a small town, it's one of our taglines" (LaValley 2017).

John Carr (2017) described the people in Tupper Lake, particularly the brewery owners, as hard working. It's a characteristic that helps residents define Tupper Lake, a town that many in the Adirondacks have described as up and coming. While the majority of the town is employed by New York State Corrections (Jessie 2017), Raquette River has recently expanded, the Wild Center Museum has reopened, and residents seem optimistic around talk of a potential Tupper Lake resort.

The History

The great camps of the Adirondacks were built as the country homes of America's wealthiest citizens in the 19th century. One of the best known is Great Camp Sagamore, which today is a National Historic Landmark, and the great camps still influence the region today. Mark of Raquette River Brewing explained that they used the idea of the great camps in the construction of their tap room: "the brown and the red those are like great camp colors, Adirondack colors that are done on a lot of camps" (Jessie 2017). Fulton Chain Brewery's taps are made from scraps of wood provided by an area logger. He is also responsible for some of the décor in their taproom. Logging was once the main industry in the Park, but has since become a touchstone issue dividing the different regions. Park residents I spoke to believe that logging, and the clearing of trees for development, is viewed by those outside of the Park's boundaries as an objectively evil occupation which is endangering the planet, rather than an industry that supports local communities. This divide between the regions of the state is evident in the lives of Adirondack residents who

feel environmentalists and politicians from outside the Park make decisions without considering their needs and wishes (Carr 2017). However, the owners of Fulton Chain Brewery clearly value the work this local logger does, and it's a symbolic gesture bringing the Adirondack Aesthetic into the forefront.

Big Tupper Brewing displays the industrial history of the Adirondack more explicitly than Fulton Chain. While Fulton Chain is decorated with organic looking décor, the walls of Big Tupper Brewing are decorated with local newspaper print from the 1930s. The photos that cover the wall are of the logging business that previously existed in the town of Tupper Lake. The Adirondack Brewery in Lake George also showcases the history of the region in their décor. Owner John Carr points out how important it is that people understand that the history of the Adirondacks is not synonymous with wilderness:

Yeah we have taxidermy, yeah we have hunting traps, we have photos of you know, places that used to be here like, amusement parks that aren't here anymore. There's a really great history spanning 150-200 years, and I think it's neat for people to come and maybe make a connection between what is here. There are all these neat things and the fact that things have happened here... and it really isn't just this 'forever wild', that you can't have anyone anywhere concept, people have lived here a long time and quite successfully without blowing the place up (Carr 2017).

Simplicity

Simplicity is key to the marketing of the products of Raquette River Brewing. Their beers don't have "fancy names." Each beer is called "Raquette River" followed by the kind of beer: "Raquette River Pale Ale, Raquette River Red Ale, Raquette River whatever." The owner, Mark Jessie, explained to me that their logo was simple because "That's what I like, I like simple things". Considering Mark is a lifelong resident of Tupper Lake and the Adirondacks, his preference for a simpler look is in line with the Adirondack Aesthetic. The second of the two logos, which depicts two crossed snowshoes, is more intricate. When talking with Richard, one of the owners of Fulton Chain Brewery, he explained that when designing their taps "the simple ones are the ones that stick out now." Currently the taps at Fulton Chain are plain wood which have been painted with chalkboard paint. This allows them to change the name written on it, but they are working on a brand logo onto the front of the taps (Mathy 2017). This is a sentiment echoed by Jim of Big Tupper Brewing. This

preference for simplicity extends beyond the way beer is marketed. The majority of my informants professed a preference for simple beers:

"There are four ingredients in beer: barely, water, yeast, hops and that's all that should be in beer, there's a lot of breweries that put a lot of junk in it (Archer 2017)."

"There's beers that are starting to come out with citrus accents... not all of it, some have tried things with that but most of what they do is... old style beer ... they will add their own different types of malts and stuff like that and try and get their own flavor still trying to following the baseline of that style of the beer. They aren't not trying to come in and take this Belgian white and chock in bacon flavor like some of the breweries are (Gearsbeck 2017)."

"I'm not a fruit based beer drinker... there's a percentage of people who like that (LaValley 2017).

Despite the demonstrated preference, every brewery I encountered —with the exception of one—had some kind of "wild flavored beer." One explanation for this divergence from the Adirondack Aesthetic is because, as LaValley asserts, "there's a percentage of people who like that" and because many of these businesses cater to tourists' needs, they adapt the aesthetic to suit the needs of their business (LaValley 2017).

Marketing Authenticity

At first glance, some would argue that these beers create an inauthentic aesthetic, or that these breweries are forced to bend to the will of the market instead of their own agency. Regina Bendix confronts a similar situation in "Tourism and Cultural Displays: Inventing Traditions for Whom?" Like the people of Interlaken, these breweries are "inventing" and adding to the aesthetic while simultaneously telling the story that is important to them. Bendix tells us, "The organizers have maintained a theme that has been relevant and at times crucial to their own national or local identity rather than catering to tourist tastes or interest" (1989:140). Rather than deny that they are catering to tourists and those who do not subscribe to the aesthetic completely, breweries claim they take the opportunity to tell the story of the Adirondacks, or of their community. For example, Big Tupper Brewing has a strawberry rhubarb beer, which they sell only in the summer months, so while a tourist may come to Big Tupper Brewing specifically for the strawberry

rhubarb beer, the Adirondack Aesthetic is still impressed upon the visitor by the décor of the bar as previously described. Big Tupper Brewing's walls are covered in photographs that were taken in Tupper Lake; the wallpaper is comprised of local and historical newspapers. While the beer may not fit the aesthetic, the brewery owners use their power to show patrons what they believe to be most important, while drinking their fruit-based beer. Additionally, Big Tupper uses the anticipation for the strawberry rhubarb beer to their advantage, telling bartenders to "sell them something different" (LaValley 2017).

John Carr of the Adirondack Pub and Brewery does something similar in the decoration of his restaurant in Lake George. Lake George, located close to the southern border of the park, is easily accessible by car since it is only an hour and a half from New York's state capital, Albany, and is one of the most popular destinations in the Adirondack Park. Of the five breweries I visited, the Adirondack Pub's walls are the most ornately decorated and the furthest from "simple." A variety of taxidermy animals, hunting traps, antlers, and fake tree branches adorn the walls. In addition to these are photographs of the industries that have been long driven out of the Park, including old amusement parks as well as a bumper sticker from Indian Village [Note: Indian Village was a small amusement park in Lake George which featured a generic recreation of an imagined "Indian Village" for tourists to explore.].

For John, one of the most important things about the Park was not the concept of "Forever Wild," the way it was for others I interviewed; what he wanted me to know was that the history of the Adirondacks is not synonymous with wilderness. Instead the Adirondacks is a place where nature and humanity can live together, as long we understand how to do so responsibly. If New Yorkers forget about the industries that once existed in the Park, then they do not understand the history and the true meaning of the place. Tourists from all over New York come to the Adirondack Pub and Brewery, and while the décor does play on the feeling of "Forever Wild", the photographs are John's way of adapting the Adirondack Aesthetic to remind tourists of the Park's human history. This is significant because he feels that it is the New Yorkers who live in the more populous areas of downstate New York who are responsible for the intense regulation imposed upon the residents and businesses of the park.

Community

In his article, "Put Your Very Special Place on the North Country Map!": Community Participation in Cultural Landmarking," Varick Chittenden states that "People in our region— dominated by the Adirondacks but including major river valleys and plateaus— have long struggled with the concept of a collective identity" (2006: 49). That is, the large distances and geographic features that separate the communities inhibit a sense of collective identity for the region. In spite of this, the craft brewers in the region have developed their own larger community. Despite the hour-and-a-half drive and mountains separating them, Richard Mathy tells me of the great relationship between him and Mark Jessie at Raquette River Brewing.

Raquette River, they were the first brewery we went to visit when we were thinking about opening this place and Mark was like super inviting, he didn't know us from a hole in the wall...he was like c'mon in...let us check out his whole place... it's amazing to watch that place grow, anytime someone tells us they're going up that way we usually send a crowler (Mathy 2017).

Mark also told me of the great relationship between brewers in the area:

The other day we were about to brew a beer and we didn't have some specialty grain that we thought we had in the grain room so I called Chris Erikson at Lake Placid Pub and Brewery and he was like come on over, and he gives me the grain and we come back home and get the beer going (Jessie 2017).

These sentiments are incredibly similar to those discussed by Jared L. Schmidt in his 2017 Presentation at AFS, "Communitas on Draft: Craft Brewers and Community in Madison, Wisconsin." Schmidt noted that "Craft-brewers in Madison express a sense of normative communitas through sharing not only techniques and ideas about recipes and styles, but ingredients" (2017). Despite the vastly different landscapes of Madison, Wisconsin and the Adirondack Park, the two communities of breweries have managed to form similar bonds and identities. This is a testament to the power that the craft beer industry has and the way it is changing the idea of community in the Adirondack Park.

Further proof of expansion of community via the craft beverage industry experience is experience with New York State's Business Licensing Office. Both Big Tupper Brewing and Adirondack Toboggan Microbrewery were forced by the state office to change elements of their marketing because of governmental regulation. In both cases, the changes

related to the perceived abuse of alcohol. Big Tupper Brewing's Touk (a style of hat popular in the Adirondacks) Winter Ale was originally supposed to be marketed with the tagline "don't let your head go numb" (LaValley 2017). However, New York State would not allow the tag line because it could be seen as encouraging alcohol abuse. Adirondack Toboggan Microbrewery's original logo, designed by a local artist, featured a lumberjack standing on a toboggan drinking a beer. New York State would not allow this logo because it could be perceived as encouraging drinking and driving, or drinking and sledding. To avoid the problem, the current logo features a lumberjack on his knees, drinking a beer (Fig. 5.5) (Archer 2017). While Big Tupper Brewing is regularly subject to government regulation via the Park Agency, the Adirondack Toboggan Microbrewery—despite being outside the Park border—shares this experience, and the frustration of regulation, a sentiment which the community shares.

Defining Adirondack

In addition to changing the idea of community, the craft beer industry is also affecting what and where is considered "Adirondack." As these breweries have shown us, the Adirondack Aesthetic can be utilized as a successful marketing technique, even by businesses outside of the Park. According to Forest Studebaker, "the use of the phrase Adirondack Coast in marketing has clearly come into use you see it in a lot of billing and firm names" (2017). Forest Studebaker has, for the last 50 years, been an on-again, offagain resident of the City of Plattsburgh. Recently, Plattsburgh and the surrounding area are being referred to as the Adirondack Coast by tourism agencies because of its proximity to both Lake Champlain and the Adirondack Park. When I asked Forest if any breweries were utilizing the "Adirondack Coast" name, he pointed to Valcour Brewing Company and their use of old Navy Barracks as the site for their brewery. Studebaker also pointed out to me that a few years ago he would have considered Plattsburgh part of a region called the North Country, not the Adirondacks. And yet, as Studebaker confirms, Plattsburgh has been integrated into the marketing of the "Adirondack Coast".

While Plattsburgh is not a true "Adirondack Town," it does factor a great deal into the lives of people in the region and residents of the Park. When residents of smaller "Adirondack Towns" need something which is unavailable they head to Plattsburgh as it is

home to a larger variety of stores, a major area hospital, and doctors' office. My informant, James Gearsbeck, however, would not include Plattsburgh in the Adirondack Region because the area supplies the Park with so many resources. "Yeah, they can be the Adirondack coast," he concluded. (2017). In fact, a key factor to determining local or regional identity, as John Carr points out, is dealing with the Park Agency as a course of everyday life (something that may become easier with the aforementioned constitutional amendment).

One word that seemed to come up again and again in interviews was "region" (Jessie 2017; LaValley 2017). When describing where their customers already were or where they wanted to reach, both breweries identified not just the park boundaries, but as far south as Interstate 90. Big Tupper Brewing focuses their package marketing more regionally than local, claiming that more people will recognize the mountains as a reference to the Adirondacks than as the outline of Big Tupper Mountain. Each package also has their tag line "the fighting spirit of a small town." While people will only generally recognize the mountain, Big Tupper Brewing is also helping to create a regional identity that places "a fighting spirit" as an element of the Adirondack Aesthetic. I argue that both a new Adirondack identity and idea of place have begun to appear in the region. This is due in part to the increase in craft breweries in the region that utilize a unified Adirondack Aesthetic in their marketing. Some of the many elements of their marketing that are influenced by the Adirondack Aesthetic are tap handles, beverage labels, beverage names, brewery names, logos, tag lines, and taproom/brewery décor.

I would argue that the region and idea of Adirondack currently expands past the "Blue Line" and encompasses in part the city of Plattsburgh as well as the communities which are around ten miles outside the eastern boundary of the Park, like Governour (the location of Adirondack Toboggan Microbrewery) and Edwards (the location of Adirondack Toboggan Microbrewery's barley farm). Examples of the Adirondack Aesthetic or adjacent imagery in communities farther from the Park boundary are becoming common. One year after the initial interviews took place at Farm Cidery, Nine Pin, located around an hour from the park announced an initiative called "Nine Pin 26er." The program calls on cider drinkers to try all twenty-six of the cidery's new ciders in a year. The name and marketing are based on a concept of gaining 46er status, or climbing all 46 of the Adirondacks High

Peaks, a well-known accolade among hikers in the region. This is not a direct invocation of the aesthetic, but certainly demonstrates the power of the Adirondack imagery.

In an attempt to concisely answer my question "what does Adirondack mean?" I contend that to the residents within and directly surrounding the "Blue Line," Adirondack means more than a locality. Instead, Adirondack identity combines a dedication to Calderwald's Adirondack Aesthetic—form and function, connection with nature, and simplicity— as well as dedication to and value placed on hard work, and the history of the Adirondack Park. All of these are showcased in the region's breweries, which have become an important stage where Adirondack residents can express their b eliefs, pride and identity.

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Figures



Fig. 5.1—Both of Raquette River Brewing's logos pictured.



Fig. 5.2—Fulton Chain Brewery's logo, featuring a topographical map of the area.



Fig. 5.3—A flight holder in the shape of a toboggan created by Kevin Archer, owner of Adirondack Toboggan Company Microbrewery.



Fig. 5.4—Beer taps in the shape of an Adirondack fire tower and a toboggan created by Kevin Archer, owner of Adirondack Toboggan Company Microbrewery.



Figure 5.5 Logo of Adirondack Toboggan Company Microbrewery, featuring the sitting lumberjack.