

New Michigan Beer Books and Authors

By Rex Halfpenny

Over the past few months I have been contacted by several people working on a book about the Michigan Brewing Industry. This is not new; over the years and with increasing frequency many call or write, but few follow through. However, two of the most recent inquiries followed up, and I agreed to meet with each of them. I have to say it was a pleasure to meet them and talk to them about their particular project, beer history, and Michigan's beer industry, past to present and future.

Each author is already published and each has a very different approach to covering the same subject, so the books will be quite different. As such, I thought I'd give our readers a heads up on what is coming soon to the beer section of the bookstore near you.



First is Bill Rapai. Bill is a naturalist with a newspaper background. His first book published by University of Michigan Press is *The Kirtland's Warbler: The Story of a Bird's Fight Against Extinction and the People Who Saved It*. Most people have never heard of a Kirtland's Warbler, much less seen one. The little birds spend 8 months of the year in the Bahamas and migrate to only a few counties in Michigan to nest in the dense Jack Pine forests. The most prominent thing about these rare birds are the signs posting areas as Kirkland Warbler management sites or sanctuary. So this book will likely appeal to a small but passionate audience who appreciate Bill's expertise and attention to detail about this

endangered species. His second book, *Lake Invaders: Invasive Species and the Battle For the Future of the Great Lakes*, will be released in April by Wayne State University Press. This book should gain a broader readership because the Great Lakes eco-system and fresh water is important to all of us. Bill says this book is "strictly about aquatic species. Sea lamprey, alewife, round goby, spiny water flea, rusty crayfish, quagga and zebra mussel, hydrilla and Eurasian watermifol are the featured species."

Bill's new book, *Brewed in Michigan: The new golden age of brewing in the Great Beer State*, departs from the naturalist subject matter to tell the story of craft beer in Michigan. We craft beer drinkers are also a niche audience in a much larger beer culture, but there is no doubt that the audience here is much larger than those seeking his previous two titles. By design and at the request of Wayne State University Press, this book is the next step after Peter Blum's out of print book, *Brewed in Detroit, Breweries and Beer since 1830*, published in 1999 by Wayne State University Press.

A lot has changed in Michigan's beer industry since Blum's book 17 years ago. Bill will tell a story of community and passion and what makes our beer Michigan Beer. He hopes to illustrate the industry's sense of sharing, helping one another, using beer as catalyst to build community, and focusing on what he thinks are cool places with great atmosphere. He also wants to document innovation; he specifically mentioned Russ

at **Right Brain**, Joe at **Shorts**, and Ron at **Jolly Pumpkin** and many more. With apologies, he will not get to visit them all.

The second author is Rick Sigsby. Interestingly, Rick shares some background with Bill in that Rick served as a park ranger in Midland and also has newspaper experience. Rick also has a lifelong interest in racehorses and enjoys writing about them.

Rick published his first book in 2007 titled *Discovering Hidden Treasures*. The book is actually a

selection of highlights from of Rick's newspaper column "Rick Off The Record," interviews with a wide variety of interesting people, places and events. That book was followed by several others, most recently *Michigan's Holy Water, The Great Lakes Wine Bible*, published in 2013. For this book, Rick visited many of the state's wine personalities and includes over 80 interviews. So the work is really all about the people and not about the wine. In it you will read about owners and key players at different wineries, where they come from, and what they are doing.

Through various interviews, he provides the reader with the human interest aspect of the industry. His style is to ask many questions, then refine the collected material, often by combining answers and constructing appropriate questions. He also allows interviewees to verify material for accuracy and correctness.

Rick's current effort, *Michigan's Holy Hops, The Great Lakes Beer Bible*, is a an obvious follow up to his wine book and will mirror it, doing for the Michigan beer industry what Holy Water brought to the wine industry.

Rick likes to write and he self-publishes his material. He expressed that it is "easy to get published, but hard to give people what they want to read. You have to write what people want to read." To this end Ricks writes "to give readers three things: fun, learning, and people."

Bill and Rick are covering the same subject matter but in two very different ways; one is a cross between *Scientific American* and *Time* while the other more like *People Magazine* meets *USA Today*. Although not collaborative in any way, these two books should complement each other to the benefit of Michigan's beer enthusiasts. **MBG**

