

March 2012

Prague Beer

The high school *Anglicko-české gymnázium AMAZON* representing the Czech Republic under the eTwinning project "Cultural Journey THROUGHOUT the European Stars" has chosen the theme "beer culture in Prague." Our students had the opportunity to visit the Staropramen brewery in Prague to see how beer is brewed. Below, you can find out much about the history and presence of the brewery and the Staropramen brand.

In the second half of the 19th century, the suburbs of Prague enlarged and industrial companies were built up. However, at this time, none of the Prague suburbs had a brewery. Additionally, the small breweries' capacity in the city centre was not sufficient. Therefore, Shareholder's Brewery Staropramen was established in Smíchov – a Prague suburb with a notable customer potential made up mainly of workers from the surrounding plants.

The Shareholder's Brewery in Smíchov was established on the 23rd of October in 1869 based on a decision made by the Smíchov entrepreneurs. The brewery was located on the left bank of the Vltava River on a plot of land that measured 18,000 m². The brewery held a strategic position in the newly developing industrial area. It had a strong capital background and was proud of being an all-Czech company. The first beer batch was festively brewed and blessed by chaplain Láska on the 1st of May in 1871. By the end of 1871, the brewery had achieved a volume of 9,648 hl of produced beer. For example, the Ringhofer's Plant was one of its prominent customers. This plant used to buy thirty buckets of beer (about 17 hl) for their workmen every day.

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The first barrels were marked with Akc. Piv. Smíchov. At first, the brewery did not have a permanent name for their beer. The Staropramen name first became the official name of the Sharehold's Brewery in Smíchov in 1913. The trademark shape of the letter S with its hop and barley design has been maintained with different graphical forms until today. Today in the Czech Republic, Staropramen uses a new modern form of its logo with a vertical form.

The brewery grew progressively; therefore, its production and premises enlarged. Extensive reconstruction and a substantial boom took place particularly between the years 1933 and 1937 when Josef Paspá was the chief brew master. He belonged to the most important personalities in the Staropramen Brewery. During the period of his governing, the new brew houses (five in total) were enlarged; the boiler room with its engine room, the fermentation rooms with their cooling vessels and, finally, large wooden barrels were replaced with modern steel tanks. In 1933, thanks to its volume of 800,000 hl of produced beer, the brewery became the biggest brewery in Czechoslovakia.

Throughout its history, the brewery has had to face many difficult moments. These moments usually came as a result of political changes and natural disasters. For example, in May of 1872, the brewery was hit by a flood which affected the basements substantially. In 1884, the moderate winter brought a problem. There was no ice on the Vltava River which had been used for cooling the beer in the brewery basements. Due to this inconvenience, ice was transported from the foothills and the price of beer consequently increased significantly.

Significant crisis came during the First World War when only six-degree and four-degree beer (instead of ten- and twelve-degree beer as today) was brewed. The most qualified workers also joined the military service which caused another considerable loss.

Additionally, the Second World War adversely hit brewery development halting beer production until after the War when it slowly started up again once more. Low-degree beer was still being brewed and the twelve-degree Lager was implemented only in 1951.

In 1989, the “Velvet Revolution” took place in the Czech Republic which brought about the fall of the communist regime and changed the business environment completely. The national enterprise Pražské pivovary transformed into the joint-stock company Pivovary Staropramen a.s. and was passed on to different owners several times. Today, Staropramen is a part of the central Europe brewery group Starbev. The Pivovary Staropramen is the second biggest beer producer having a strong position in the Prague region, both in pubs with draught beer and in shops with bottled beer. Export is also becoming more important. At the end of the 19th century, Staropramen was already being distributed to Austria, Germany, Switzerland and the USA. Today, it is possible to get Staropramen in more than 30 countries around the world and this number is still increasing. The key markets include Ukraine, Russia, Sweden, Great Britain, and Germany.

Current Staropramen brewery production is based on traditional beer production and original formulas. With the Staropramen brand, the broad portfolio of ten beers is available in the Czech Republic and regularly scores points in Czech beer competitions. The following three beers are the most preferred beers on the export markets: Premium, Garnet and Dark. The Staropramen Garnet has its own interesting history. Its beer formula comes from the 19th century and it was brewed until 1938 when its official production ended. However, brewery employees had been passing the formula on from one to another and had secretly brewed one batch of this special beer once a year and drank it in the brewery. The current Staropramen Garnet beer production (since 2001) is inspired by this original formula and it maintains its huge popularity amongst consumers.

Another example of the rich history and its present life can be found in the restaurant “Na verandách”, which was opened in the Staropramen Brewery yard in 1872. This restaurant tapped between 30-35 hectolitres of beer during one afternoon which is a monthly beer sale in an average prosperous pub today. The restaurant “Na verandách” is still open and you can find it only a few steps from the brewery entry on Nádražní ulice.

The flagship of the Staropramen trademark in the Czech Republic are brand-name restaurants called Potrefená Husa. In 1999, Staropramen opened the first brand-name restaurant in Prague-Vinohrady. Since then, the number of pubs has increased not only in Prague but also in other towns around the Czech and Slovak Republic. Today, more than 30 restaurants with the name Potrefená Husa exist and have one of the broadest beer offers of the Staropramen brand.

Now, you know more about the rich history of the Staropramen beer.

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