

Geography of Taverns of the Lower Wisconsin River Way

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The Lower Wisconsin River way is a beautiful and unique area of Wisconsin. Many small communities are located on either side of the Wisconsin River. In and around these communities there are many local establishments which provide a common place for people to gather and enjoy food, beer, and entertainment. The tavern has been a gathering place for people as long as it has been around. In the Lower Wisconsin Riverway taverns are places where the local clientele and tourists alike gather to discuss everything from recent sporting events, the year's crops, or most often, the weather. We came to the understanding that people go to taverns to get away from the outside world to a place where they can relax enjoy a cocktail, a meal, or the company of others. Every unique tavern can be a reflection of the people it attracts and the community it resides in. We believe that you cannot tell a book by its cover, but after our observations we believe you can tell quite a bit about a town by its tavern or taverns.

Communities throughout the Lower Wisconsin River way harbor a strong sense of heritage that's reflected in the drinking and dining culture. Whether it's a small town like Blue River that caters almost exclusively to the local crowd, or a large community like Prairie Du Chien with many taverns, an idea of heritage, and a sense of community resonates in the town's taverns. The differences in the communities are reflected in the taverns who adorn these towns.

During this semester we took multiple trips through the river way in an effort to see the differences in the river way communities that are reflected in the local establishments. Through two main routs we explored the Lower Wisconsin Riverway: The first major route was first on highways or 18 and 151. Starting in Prairie Du Chien on Highway 18, a town where the

Wisconsin River meets the Mississippi, we explored the southern portion of the LWR on Highway 18 passing through towns of Fennimore, Montfort and Cobb. The second main route we took was highways 14/60 and 133. Making a trip out on Highway we went along the North side of the Wisconsin River going through the towns of Gotham, Richland Center we eventually crossed back across the River and skirted along the southern side of the river from Boscobel to Prairie du Sac, hitting big and small towns alike and analyzed how their relative location and décor influence their place in the community which they reside.

We looked at many aspects of each tavern and interviewed to many tavern owners, bartenders, and loyal customers throughout our journeys in an effort to see if each establishment is representative of the community that surrounds it. Starting by looking at where in the town the establishment is located and its outer appearance we began to get a sense of the type of place each was going to be before we even walked thru the door. Whether located on the “main drag” or on the outskirts of town...catering mainly to locals or primarily tourists each tavern had its own unique feel. Décor, layout of the bar, the lighting, menu, types of beers available, and clientele all have a different impact on the vibe that each establishment emits.

Using an argument laid out in the article, “The Neighborhood Tavern and the Cocktail Lounge a Study of Class Difference,” by David Gottlieb. Gottlieb argues that there are certain fundamental criteria that distinguish the cocktail lounge from the tavern. Well, most of us know that there are not many cocktail lounges in Southwest Wisconsin or in the surrounding small towns of the Wisconsin River. We believe there is however two distinct different distinct types of taverns that cater to different clientele. Gottlieb defines a tavern as having the following criteria: “that it is located in the residential section of the city, has a bar and in some cases tables, mainly beer on tap and whiskey and a jukebox for entertainment.” Well, in this case most of

these criteria were met in the places that we stopped at on our travels, but we have decided to take his model further and alter it just a bit and use slightly different criteria to differentiate between local bars that cater to the local community and taverns that are more touristy and rely on more than just the local clientele to make a profit. The main criteria we are going to use to make these distinctions is the type of décor that each bar has, the lighting conditions in each bar, their menu, the type of beer that are available on tap, the type of music, and the presence or absence of a second exit.

We wanted to come into this geographical analysis of the taverns with as few as preconceived notions as possible so we did little research on the taverns of the area except in the literature that we sifted through. Our main way of finding the local establishments was we could come up on a local community that was near the Wisconsin River and find the main street. From there it was pretty obvious where we were going to start making our observation. Whether it be a small sign advertising a different type of beer and the bar name or a whole bunch of neon in the window we had our starting spot. From there we made our observations inside the establishment and tried to interview the prominent figures in each bar. Being respectful of the time we were taking away from the people who worked there here is guideline we used as a baseline for questions we asked:

How long has this establishment been located here?

What type of customers does your bar appeal?

Why do you believe that customers come to your bar, opposed to others in the community?

Do you offer anything special deals/promotions that would appeal to different parts of the community?

Do you sponsor any aspects of the community that you reside in? (local sports, businesses, schools, organizations)

How would you classify the crowd that you would consider regulars?

Where do the majority of your customers come from? Local community, Tourists, Passer byes?

What is your main mode of marketing to attract customers?

Has the clientele changed over the years or has it been similar?

What days of the week and what time of day are busiest?

Why do believe the establishment that you work in is more/less popular than the surrounding ones?

Does your favorite tavern offer any specific that appeal to the heritage or the specific community that it is located in?

How do you try and appeal to the people that live this area?

Why did you choose this location?

After getting a representation of what the tavern was structured and how it operated we analyzed the clientele and tried to ask them some questions that gave us a better feel of how this bar fit into the community it was located in. We found that most people we friendly and more than willing to talk as long as we wanted to listen. This made it easier than interviewing a busy bartender or bar owner. We know that of course local patrons are going to have a bias because more than likely they are going to be in the place that they feel the most comfortable. These are the questions that were the baseline of our talks with the customers:

Why do you go to the taverns that you frequent?

Does your favorite tavern offer any specific things that appeal to you heritage or the specific community that it is located in?

How far do you normally travel to get to your favorite taverns?

How much does the atmosphere of the tavern impact whether you go to one place or another? Or is proximity to the tavern a more important factor?

Is the atmosphere of the tavern created by the ambiance or décor? Or is it created by the people that frequent it?

What is your livelihood?

How long have you been coming to (this) bar?

How has the crowd changed over the years?

How has the establishment changed over the years?

What keeps you coming back?

After gathering the information on where the place is located, the characteristics of the place, and the views by the people that were there the last thing we did was to go to the internet and see what places actively advertised. We found this useful in determining what type of people the tavern was catering to.

On our first to the Lower Wisconsin Riverway we stumbled on a little joint in the country on the corner of Wisconsin Highway's 14 and 78. Rookies, is a place where every square inch of the place is covered in sports memorabilia. Steve Schmitt established Rookies Food & Spirits (<http://www.rookiesfood.com/>) in February of 1998. Prior to that time, the corner of Highways 14 and 78 was home to Governor's Bar. Since then, Rookies has featured an all-American menu, creative daily specials, homemade daily soups, a fresh fish fry every Friday, and slow-roasted prime rib every Saturday night. We were blown away by the intense sports theme. If you're a sports fan, you won't find a better place to watch all the games, local and national. Thousands of baseball cards cover the walls of the men's room, and autographed memorabilia covers nearly every other square inch of the restaurant and bar, floor to ceiling. Owner Steve Schmitt has filled Rookies with his passion for sports in the form of the best collection of sports memorabilia this side of Cooperstown (Self Proclaimed). Much of the memorabilia was donated and autographed

by Steve's personal friends. You won't believe the collection until you see it. They also carry a fair amount of local taps including Esser's Best, Lake Louis, Great Dane, and New Glarus. Whether you're a sports fan, passionate about top-quality down-home American cooking, or just in the mood to have a drink Rookies is an excellent choice.

After an extended stop at Rookies, a local enthusiastic Harley rider informed us of where we needed to be. We headed up Wisconsin Highway 14 passed through the town of Arena and rolled into Spring Green. Our first stop was the Village Tavern, which is located on the main street in the downtown area Jefferson St. The Village Tavern is a quaint little place without many frills or exciting amenities. The bar was over the top decorated with NASCAR memorabilia, most of which was Miller Lite memorabilia. The bartender was a friendly lady that informed us that they are typically not busy. The exception being when they have live music (mostly country) or when a race is on the TV. It was almost empty on this particular afternoon except for a friendly gentleman at the bar whose wife was across the bar playing on one of the multiple gambling machines, located on a far wall way away from everything else. Later on another patron entered and asked if they could change the TV, which was on Wheel-O-Fortune, to the NASCAR qualifying and we saw the bar in its element. The selection of beverages was admittedly limited. After we had settled into the bar the bartender asked us, "What would you like to drink? We don't have none of those fancy beers!" As our time at the Village Tavern the friendly locals were quick to suggest another place to stop.

A short little walk up the road we came across a neat little nostalgic place called The Players Club. The decor had an old-time feel with old black and historic photos of the area. The bar consisted of one medium sized open room with a pool table in the center and a bar at the front wall. It was a beautiful Friday afternoon and the town folk were definitely enjoying

themselves. Though they had a big screen TV and other smaller TV's they were turned off, and the radio was playing classic rock and country in the background. The atmosphere was very conducive for conversation and invited patrons to catch up on the weeks activity in wonderful happy hour setting while enjoying some of the area's local tap beer or a relatively cheap drink of ones choosing (\$2.25-2.75). After speaking with Barb the bartender she informed us that if we wait a couple of hours this place would come alive, as the busiest times happen to be usually between 7:00-10:00 of Friday and Saturday nights. When asked where Barb would be on a night like tonight if she did not have to work she said that most definitely she would be up the street at The Shed. Naturally, we were off to our next stop, The Shed.

On our way to The Shed we decided to go to another local hangout suggested by many patrons at the bar. They told us to drive to the stop sign and take a left towards the Wisconsin River and if you miss it, it is your problem and not ours. Following the directions we came upon the Wisconsin Riverside Resort (<http://www.wiriverside.com/>). A big sign greeted us that said, "Open for the Season." This is a seasonal establishment that closes down for the winter season and opens when the weather comes around in the spring. Their motto is; "Come on down by the river! Have a nice cool brew (out of a frosty freeze mug) or your favorite mixed drink, while watching the river go by." The Riverside Resort had a very nice sportsman club feel inside and was decorated with all wood wall coverings with big glass windows that allowed us to almost see the sunset looking down the Wisconsin River. There was a fair crowd for a beautiful Friday evening. Most patrons were there to enjoy refreshment or two. However, there were numerous people there enjoying a Friday Night meal (mostly fish fry). This is the only establishment on our trip that had more than one bartender as well as a cook in the kitchen so that they would be able to handle a rush if the place became overrun with patrons. One interesting aspect is that

they served no beer in bottles here; this is because they are located so close to the river and they have a huge deck and they are promoting safety so that no stray bottles would end up near the river. One peculiar aspect to the mar was that there was no TV or Music playing. While this is odd for us 'city folk', it was a comfortable atmosphere for the locals who were engaged in socialization. This seems to be a theme in the Lower Wisconsin Riverway that people come to bars for the reason to socialize not to become solitude people staring forward at a TV or peacefully listening to music. Here we also enjoyed one of their half-pound burgers that were extremely tasty and very quick service.

After our meal we decided to mosey on back to town to go to The Shed (www.shedspringgreen.com) and "karaoke Night." The Shed would be a great place to meet locals and relax after a play at American Players' Theater or a tour of Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin or The House on The Rock. You could also have fun by playing pool, foosball, darts, or gambling machines while drinking a local beer from Furthermore Beer, Lake Louie, and New Glarus Brewing Company. On this night however, there was none of the aforementioned going on. The single feature on the bar half of the establishment was karaoke. The bar side of The Shed was packed, it was the most "happening" place that we came across all night, and it took a while to meander through all the people if you needed to use the bathroom located directly in the back of the place. The other half of the place was the dining area where most everybody had finished eating for the night, but many remained to have a few drinks and talk amongst themselves while the craziness ensued on the other side of the bar. It was a little more upscale clientele which offered multiple choices of wine (first place we had seen this), if you happened to catch the bartender before he got up to the mic to sing "5 O'clock Somewhere" you had a better chance of being served. While we were there people kept filing in the door. The one

interesting thing about this bar is that they had a wall of programs from plays/musicals. This was a different twist that we had seen nowhere prior. The drink prices were slightly higher here, but with twice as much atmosphere you could hardly notice. It had become apparent that it might not be the place that aides in the time had by all, but the amount of people that aide in the happiness of all.

On our way home we decided to swing by the town of Roxbury because we had heard of a place that was authentic to the people of the area and we ended up and the Dorf Haus (<http://www.foodspot.com/dorfhaus/>). Nestled in the quaint German village of Roxbury, an old world atmosphere awaits you at the Dorf Haus. We were immediately blown away by the decor comprised of, "authentic antiques, paintings of famous German castles and Kings, and breathtaking stained glass." After our quick stop at the Dorf House we continued our journey back to Madison.

Trip 1 was a memorable experience that truly allowed us to engage and get a feel for the tavern scene in the lower Wisconsin Riverway. The collective experience from trip 1 helped to set the stage for subsequent 'research' trips.

A few weekends following our trip 1, we embarked on our second journey to the lower Wisconsin Riverway. We began our trip with a stop in Gotham at the Bat Cave. While this tavern was dark and cave-like, character and shared experienced of the community were oozing from the batman themed interior. As we entered the tavern an elderly woman promptly took our order and proceeded to make herself a drink as well. The first and unavoidable aspect to the tavern was the décor. The tavern was loaded with batman memorabilia. From drink holders to posters to men's underwear for sale, this tavern had more batman items that we could have imagined possible. Furthermore, the tavern had an apparent infatuation with Dale Earnhardt.

Interspersed between the batman collectables was Dale Earnhardt memorabilia. For entertainment the bar featured two old TVs playing HBO movies the selection of the afternoon was '21'. The bar also had a single pool table and a few gambling machines and pull-tabs for patrons to utilize. For food, there were the usual choices, burgers, chili, chips etc. The bar featured lots of hard alcohol but no tap beer, only cans. When asked when the bar gets busy the bartender states that you, "Never know when the cave comes to life." –Bartender. After leaving the Bat Cave we were not sure where to go, we had a few suggestions from the few locals but we had no place in mind. We drove up the highway until we saw a sign for the Weggy Winery. We promptly followed the signs to the winery and were delighted by the experience we had.

The Weggy winery was a quaint small-scale winery located in the hills north of the Wisconsin River. When we first pulled into the winery it looked as though no one was around. We walked to the front door and saw a welcome sign. The interior of the winery was a small-scale retail section that was boxed off from the production equipment that was clearly in view. As we entered the winery two elderly individuals, the owner Marely and a seasonal employee greeted us. We introduced ourselves and were educated for the next 45 min on the different varieties of grapes and types of wines produced at the Weggy winery. The winery grows most of its own grapes and produces over 20 different varieties of wines. They are locally owned and operated and have a friendly and knowledgeable owners and workers. During the fall they integrate the community into the harvesting process. Following the informational session we were invited for a tasting session in which the owner detailed the process of producing each individual wine as well as describing in detail the tastes and flavors of each variety. Overall the Weggy winery is an Innovative, charming and hospitable place. When leaving the winery we

casually asked the owner where a good spot to grab a drink would be. She mentioned Honkers. Off we went.

Honkers is located out of Muscoda , North of the River. Honkers is an 8 room hotel with a full service bar and restaurant. The architecture features a wooden façade of a traditional ‘log cabin’ on the outside. The inside had the same design. Honkers’ has the feel of a small town bar that has been franchised. The décor seemed standardized, lots of Jack Daniels posters and NASCAR memorabilia. As we entered the establishment we were greeted by many strange looks from the locals. They quickly subsided as they continued with their conversations. There were even t-shirts for sale featuring the slogan, “Get goosed at Honkers”. For entertainment the bar had a big dance floor and featured live music on the weekends. In the corner there were pull-tabs and gambling machines. The bar does not have tap beer, only cans. The menu featured large quantities of chicken, and that was their main seller. As with many of the bars that we went to, the ratio of men to women was heavily in favor of men. The community at Honkers was so engaged in conversation and mingling that we decided to hit the road and stumble upon our next stop.

After leaving Muscoda we found ourselves in Boscobel. Our first stop in Boscobel was Pat and Greg's Pour House. The Pour House is the first of three taverns in Boscobel that have tremendous character and warmth. Located off the main drag, Pat and Greg’s Pour House features the self proclaimed, ‘cheapest drinks in town’. Upon entering the establishment we were instantly greeted by an elderly man. He took our drink orders and began asking questions about what brought us in. He commented on the wide variety of individuals that go through the tavern. He was a tremendously friendly individual. For entertainment, aside from conversation with the bartender, the tavern featured numerous TV’s playing sports, a pool table, a dartboard

and a large U shaped bar that facilitates conversation amongst all patrons. The drink options were tap beer (Spotted cow, miller lite, Bud light, Coors Light, Leinenkugels's Honey Weiss), can beer and mixed drinks. The menu was limited to say the least and only featured frozen pizzas. The bar is known as a local watering hole and occasionally turns into a biker bar. Upon leaving the bar we were told to go to Kim's, where we were to play a joke on the bartender.

Kim's Silver Dollar is down the street from the "Pour House". We entered the bar and apparently the most "happy" local, who was previously at the Pour House, had, beat us to Kim's Silver Dollar. The bartender gave us a skeptical look and politely took our order. The bar has tap beer featuring Old Milwaukee, Seasonal Capitol, spotted Cow as well as standard liquors. The bar also makes a mean bloody Mary. The ambience of the bar was sterile due to the bright white lights and linoleum floors. To accent the sterile feeling, mounted fish and deer antlers adorned the walls. For entertainment there was one pool table, a TV, and a few local who were looking for a card game. Nothing particularly special about drinks, entertainment or service, but the establishment was unique in its blend of small town feel, sterile ambience and local patrons.

Following our stop at the Silver Dollar we found ourselves looking for a bite to eat. We ended up the street at the Double K. The Double K was the last establishment we stopped at in Boscobel. The Double K was formerly a JC Penny's however; you would never be able to tell based on the décor. The establishment was clean and handsomely decorated with the theme of north woods cabin. The interior featured a beautiful log cabin design, and bar itself was clean and polished. When we came in a middle-aged woman promptly informed us about the specials and the fact that the establishment is known for its hamburgers while warmly greeting us. The Double K is primarily a restaurant. The waitress/bartender engaged us in conversation by asking if we were turkey hunters. When we told her we were doing a research project she opened up to

fielding some of our interview questions. The Double K features a Friday night fish fry and has half a dozen pool tables where patrons can play for free. There are various drink specials as well as one known as the 'mystery shot'. It is a liter bottle with a paper bag over it labeled "mystery shot #". Going from 1-4. It is a special where patrons can order any single or combination of shots from the mystery bottles; truly an interesting practice.

On our way back to Madison we stopped by a tiny bar in Blue River -- Jody's Roadhouse. This 'hole in the wall' bar was located in Blue River population 587. The bar was located in a small building and could have easily been passed by if one was not making keen observations. Upon entering the bar, the dim lights and musty smell were immediately apparent. A few locals were grabbing a quick drink. This was also the first bar in which individuals under the age of 50 were present. The bartender and her husband were engaged in lively banter as well as sharing a few drinks together. There was one other local who was fixated on the NFL draft and was persistent in asking us questions about whether or not the Packers had chosen the right player with their pick. The bar featured a few tap beers (Capitol seasonal and Coors Light). Midway through our visit to Jody's Roadhouse a mother and daughter walk in through the back door. The mother is casually dressed in a sweatshirt and jeans while the daughter is dressed up in a poofy black and white dress, apparently its prom season in Blue River. The daughter does a model walk to show off her dress to the bartender and the two gracefully exit as swiftly as they had entered.

Continuing our exodus from the lower third we were guided to Muscoda, on the other side of the river, and into Wolfy's Irish Inn. Wolfy's Irish Inn was by far the liveliest bar we had visited all day. The bar was in the classic mold of an Irish tavern. We were warmly greeted by the freckled bartender and served promptly. There was a large gathering of middle-aged adults

having a few laughs and clearly on their way to being over served. The bar had the most extensive choices for beer and liquor alike. The bar featured Guinness and Jameson, but had plenty of other choices. The bar was welcoming, well lit and vibrant, and on the weekends the bar has a large dance floor where live music is often played.

The final bar we stopped at had the most interesting wait staff. Our waitress was already half a dozen drinks deep and had admitted to importing classes of 'jungle juice' from a bachelor party across the street. She was loud, funny and entertaining. The establishment was more of a restaurant than a bar. The bar had many inexpensive options on the menu. The décor of the place was a mixture between north woods cabin and sports pub. The patrons reflected this variety as well. There were families enjoying a meal, as well as the town drunk sitting opposite us on the other side of the bar. This establishment had a wide variety of food and drinks as well as a wide variety of patrons.

Our second trip to the lower third had proved to be just as entertaining, insightful and inebriating as the first. We were truly beginning to get a feel for the local, small town tavern culture of Wisconsin.

Our third and final trip took us to Prairie Du Chien. Our first stop was the Sawmill Saloon. Nestled just a block from the Mississippi, the Sawmill Saloon (<http://www.sawmillsaloon.net>) caters to summer tourists, fall hunters and a local clientele alike. Owners Bonny and Denny Fuller derived the name from the family business, lumbering. Further proof of the family business decorates the tavern. Saw blades, hacksaws and pictures of pristine Wisconsin trees forest the walls. When we walked in we were welcomed with 70's southern rock, and though tender Robbo claimed they catered to a young and old crowd we mainly saw middle-aged men wearing hunting caps. Sawmill does not rely on food to carry the business

(which has experienced good profits in the economic recession); rather it banks on the atmosphere and the famous Bloody Mary. The motto reads, “Come join us at the Sawmill Saloon of Prairie Du Chien, Wisconsin where every day is a holiday! You'll enjoy great drinks, fun and lively conversation!” This allows us to see that Sawmill relies on a sense of community and conversation to sell the bar.

To follow up our experience at the 'sawmill' we meandered to Jim's Bar is located in the historic business district of Prairie Du Chien. This bar caters primarily to a strong local clientele in addition to doing business with the seasonal tourists. Jim's Bar is the kind of place you walk into and the whole bar turns toward the door and stare an extra second, surprised at an unfamiliar face. After that awkward exchange, however you're warmly welcomed by smiles from the regular clientele and a 'what can I getcha' from Teresa, the weekend bartender. She has a great relationship with the customers. While she takes time from the full bar to answer my questions, one of the regulars gets mildly impatient, walks behind the bar and serves himself. Joking as he grabs a Miller Lite from the cooler and a glass from the counter 'What's a guy got to do to get a drink around here Teresa?' “Get your own shit,” she replies in laughter. Jim's bar is a Packer bar first and foremost. Pictures of players and coaches, jerseys and autographed apparel line the walls. The ceilings are painted with profile pictures of the 1996 Super Bowl team. Teresa told us it's a bloody mary bar, but they serve everything. Beers, they have macro and micro, but nothing on tap. The micro beers pale in comparison to the Miller and Bud Lites she says. This is a typical small-town Midwest sports/ dive bar. They definitely favor the Packers. The ceiling, walls, even bathroom is decked out in posters, memorabilia, Packer Green paint, neon lights, all the like. On a Monday night there were few people there, which opened us up to full range on the jukebox. We like dive bars... so why only three stars? Well, it comes down to the service. The

bar itself is a huge oval shaped beauty opening itself to a great potential for a social atmosphere. The bartender did not greet us nicely... When we tried to start a conversation he answered monosyllabically. When we finally gave up he retreated to the opposite end of the bar and never came by to check on us. There was one time he made a trip over to the front of the bar, but never asked how we were or if we wanted another drink. Perhaps he is painfully shy- if that is the case, he is in the wrong profession. Time for us to move to the next bar.

Right of 18 on the main highway stretch and commercial area of Prairie Du Chien resides Killarney's Irish Pub and Restaurant. What has the warmest architectural feel of all the other pubs in Prairie Du Chien has the coldest service and clientele. Upon our arrival nobody looks to the door. Eyes are glued to the television or to a plate of food. The clientele is middle aged to elderly, seemingly well dressed and well to do people. Crystal the hostess who could spare time to talk only if she was folding silverware into napkins confirmed these assumptions. The manager refused to speak. Crystal attributed it to her recent digression from a bad cigarette habit. "It sounds a little bad to say, but mostly high class people come here," she says. The pub is owned by a lawyer in town and is located next to the school and hospital. The town judge and businessmen frequent the venue as well. This venue offered various drinks, obviously specializing in the Guinness, Smethwick's and other expensive imports. Located along the main stretch, this bar attracts the passerby's and tourists from Minnesota, Iowa and Illinois looking for a "good sit down meal."

After the excursion in Prairie Du Chien we ended up in Fennimore at Boxcar Wilky's. This bar and grill is one of three in Fennimore. Unlike its (seemingly) friendly competition, Boxcar can be distinguished showing signs of cutting back in these tough economic times. The bartender informs me that since March 1 the tavern has opened at 3pm, four hours earlier than it

traditionally opened its doors. "You bet it's because of the economy," she says. "Sure the local population is strong, but people passing through tend to not to stop here for food...not when there's a Burger King across the street." Boxcar serves a variety of beers, liquors and bar food. Their menu ranges from Busch Light to Spotted Cow, from Wing Dings to Pizza Burgers. The newly renovated bar attracts a younger crowd according to two locals. "The kids come here. It's bigger than the other two, a bit more modern, and there's the music they like to listen to..." This tavern is also newly renovated and reflects more of a modern style bar. Boxcar Wilky's in Fennimore, WI is one of these staple corner bars. As one would expect, the walls are covered with Packers, Brewers, Badgers and NASCAR paraphernalia. "Penny" the bartender was doing a great job slinging drinks around the horseshoe shaped bar while cooking our meals. The 1/2 lb. cheeseburger and fries hit the spot, and the local townies provided some good banter. She also offered a Happy birthday to Lyle the milk truck driver. (Who was so hammered, he fell asleep on the bar -- We asked him when he had to be at work, in the morning -- he replied, "4:30 AM". Wow. Champion.)

The adventure at Boxcar Wilky's left us wanting more. We saw Hilltop Tavern and knew we had no other choice. The Tarrells have kept Hilltop Bar and Grill in the family business since 1950. They bought the bar 21 years after the building was converted from a first National Bank to a bar. Proof of this fact can be found in the vault in the basement or the trap door behind the counter. Joe Tarrell owns and operates the establishment today. He's an older gentleman in his 50's or 60's with a handlebar mustache, a warm smile and a tendency to welcome his customers with stories. This bar is centrally located in the town and resides off the rout to Prairie Du Chien. Business has been steady over the past 50 years, it just has had to be augmented. "When the drinking age changed to 21, we put a little more focus on our menu," Tarrell says. The bar is

dark and the television plays softly in the background. We can hear it because, unlike the other bars in Fennimore there's no music playing at this one. The only sounds adding to the ambiance are glasses sporadically set on the counter while Tarrell entertains the dedicated patrons with stories and plans for the establishment. We've heard from Patrons at Boxcar that Hilltop has the best food selection. With seafood, steak, and gourmet pizzas on the menu it's not hard to tell why. The locals told us to head to 2nd Shot Saloon.

As we entered, Earl and Chelsea Adams tell us what's up with 2nd shot Bar and Grill. The bartender, Missy just started and this nurse and semi driver were more than happy to fill us in on Fennimore's drinking culture. This bar is a badger bar. Tom (the owner) is good friends with Barry Alvarez as the pictures lining the walls suggest. This bar is located a block from the main highway, and it seem to rely very little on food (at least on this Saturday afternoon), so what keeps it doing well in this recession? Tom, the owner seems to go out of his way to sustain his business by being a welcoming person to the local population, and treating tourists and passerby's the same if they happen to wander far enough off the main stretch to find his small establishment. The building used to be a garage and there's an oil deck underneath the bar. "This is the kind of bar where everyone feels welcome," Chelsea says. "You know Hilltop for the food, you know Boxcar for the fun, but you know this place because you're welcomed and everyone connects."

We were feeling quite 'fatigued' by this time, and on the way home we ran across a sad bar in Montfort. No other bar seemed to show the painful signs of the recession like Gundlach's bar and grill. Poised western portion of the main strip in Montfort, we wondered if the bar was even open when we pulled into the vacant lot. Montfort is a small town. We got the sense that there wasn't a strong local population keeping this tavern in business, so a strong tourist and

transient population seemed to be the only thing that could keep it afloat. It was a somber sight walking in the front door and seeing Dorsey sewing, accompanied at the bar with an empty scotch glass and fresh cigarette. She confirmed my assumptions. She said business is the worst it's been in 50 years, "and that's saying a lot," she continued. The establishment has a bar and grill serving pretty much anything on or off the menu. But if a crowd did come to the bar that afternoon, we're not sure how well they'd be served. With Dorsey (a woman well into her 70's) as the sole employee we couldn't imagine food could be prepared in a timely manner.

Finally, we convinced ourselves that we would only stop at one more location. We found ourselves in Cobb at Doc's Holiday Bar and Grill. Business is fine for this small tavern in Cobb. Roughly 5 miles east of Montfort and slightly smaller, Doc's thrives on faithful local customers. One block off the main stretch, this is the only bar in the small town. Business is down 21 percent from last year, "but it's nothing to worry about. We're doing just fine," says Cindy who owns the tavern with her husband. 75 percent of the tavern's income comes from alcohol sales, mostly Miller Light. "People don't care as much for the micro brews here," she says. "That's more of a Madison thing." There's a cafeteria-style kitchen that seems out of place in the wood-paneled barroom. Pool tables and big screens give off the Sports Bar façade, but the clientele seems rather uninterested in the NFL draft playing silently in the background.

In each tavern we carefully considered several elements. From façade to interior, from lighting to menu, from beer selection to patronage, we analyzed these aspects and drew conclusions based on what we already knew about the Lower Wisconsin Riverway and that particular institution's place in it. Whether it was Boscobel or Roxbury, Prairie du Sac or Muscoda, we criss-crossed the Wisconsin River, hitting big and small towns alike and compared their relative place and influence to the respective town.

Our findings derived from an extensive table we used to compare the above elements to conclude if the institution represented a tourist or local tavern. Our analysis determined most tourist institutions reside in Spring Green, Prairie Du Chien, Boscobel, and Muscoda while local taverns gravitated toward drive by and small towns like Cobb, Montfort, Fennimore, and Gotham.

The local taverns tend to be darker lit and emphasize traditional bar games like pool, dice, gambling machines and darts, served macro brews from the bottle, and valued a communal dynamic over physical presence. Additionally the local taverns tended to have two entrances: a front where passerbys entered and a back for the locals. Despite giving curious (but friendly) looks when someone new entered the bar, most of these taverns were exceptionally inviting and warm. Tourist taverns were equally inviting and better lit. An emphasis was placed on food and macro brew, obviously catering to a tourists interested in attaining a unique Wisconsin experience.

Doc's in Cobb and Gundlach's in Montfort best represent this local appeal. When you first walk into Doc's you get a sense of how much the community of Cobb relies on its local population to sustain business. Early in the day Doc's serves tavern patrons food and drinks. Without this population, the bartender insists there would not be a Doc's in Montfort. The tourist patrons have fallen off the map in recent years and with Doc's just a hair off the main stretch it's evident that without a vibrant local population there would be no venue. Doc's is a dark tavern with an emphasis on pool and sports. There aren't many gimmicks in the bar intended to give tourists a reason to stop in. Instead the walls are lined with area sports teams, historic photos of Cobb and Packers memorabilia, all intended to serve the local population.

The beer served here is primarily Miller Lite, and although other varieties are offered the locals prefer the big name beer. This was typical of the other local taverns we visited. Locals didn't need to spend an arm and a leg to get a local brew. They knew the taste and it was expensive just to order. Those kinds of drinks tended to be reserved for tourist bars where passerbys were looking to try something new.

Though Docs was doing well, Gundlach's shows the opposite end of local business in a recession. The town of Montfort is not doing quite as well as Cobb financially (many residents recently lost manufacturing jobs), and this local bar and grill feels the effects. No residents come to the tavern for a drink or to dine as they're forced to save.

Gundlach's offers a menu but its nothing like the tourist menus. Traditional sandwiches are on the specialty board which doesn't appear to have changed in quite some time. Gunlach, like other taverns struggling through the recession are not well kept as employees don't see the point and in some cases fear foreclosure.

The inside of these taverns still focus on games like pool and darts, and the television is typically on low in the background. The atmosphere is dark and not particularly welcoming. Though the scenes are forlorn, the employees and patrons tend to be warm and cheerful after you become accustomed to their presence.

A tavern called the Sawmill Saloon in Prairie du Chien and the Hilltop in Fennimore best represent the tourist variety. The tourist bars were lighter when you stepped inside. They had a clearly marked front entrance that most people walked through. The institutions tended to feature a full menu that could typically be accessed online. The service at these venues surpassed that of local taverns. Additionally the tourist taverns had some sort of gimmick intended to draw in passing customers and hopefully lure them back the next time they came into town.

Sawmill Saloon was very well lit so the first thing a visitor would see upon entering is the main gimmick, the saw blades on the walls. This themed bar has a story that the friendly bartender is willing to part with if you ask. The owner's family was in the lumbering business and eventually the owner got into the tavern industry. Beer selection in these tourist venues is extensive and the tender usually knows the best kind to eat with a particular meal in addition to a little information on each brew. There's an emphasis on local beers and things unique to Wisconsin so people associate the good, local beer with the tourist tavern. The inside is welcoming, but there's typically an option to sit outside at these tourist venues as well.

Hilltop in Fennimore has many of the same characteristics demonstrated in Sawmill Saloon, but the Hilltop has the most extensive menu. The Hilltop best represents the dining variety of tourist tavern. Specialties include local meats, but there's also a unique seafood menu. Again, these are all tactics to bring tourists in the next time they are traveling through. The bartender also told me that many tourist institutions attempt to distinguish themselves because people love being able to recommend venues for fellow travelers and even if they had just an alright time, if they remembered the name, they'd be likely to spit it out in casual conversation.

Most of the tourist venues adhered to these basic principles of serving passerbys. A welcoming atmosphere was always present, but often times the local connection and storytelling suffered and surrendered to gimmicky facades to bring in those traveling populations.

You can't tell a book by its cover, but you can tell quite a bit about a town by its tavern(s). Communities throughout the Lower Wisconsin Riverway harbor a strong sense of heritage that's reflected in the drinking and dining culture. Whether it's a drive-by town like Montfort catering almost exclusively to passerbys and tourists or a strong community like Prairie Du Chien where distinct shades of class paint the town; an idea of heritage, community and class

resonate in the town's tavern. Tavern's reflect their towns. A culture can be distinguished in the architecture, the music, and the drink choices in a particular establishment. A culture can be distinguished by place, by a community and by the comradery in sharing a drink.

Chart of Results:

Tavern	Town	Tourist/Local	Lighting	Beer Type
Rookies	Mazomanie	Both	Light	Local Taps
Village Green	Spring Green	Local	Dark	Standard
The Players Club	Spring Green	Local	Dark	Local Taps
Wisconsin Riverside Resort	Spring Green	Tourist	Light	Anything
The Shed	Spring Green	Local	Dark	Anything
Dorf Haus	Roxsbury	Tourist	Light	Local Taps
Bat Cave	Gotham	Local	Dark	Standard
Weggey's Winery	Richland Center	Local	Light	Wine
Honkers	Richland Center	Local	Light	Standard
Pat and Greg's Pour House	Boscobel	Local	Dark	Standard
Kim's Silver Dollar	Boscobel	Local	Dark	Standard
Double K's	Boscobel	Tourist	Light	Local Taps
Jody's Roadhouse	Blue River	Local	Dark	Standard
Wolfy's Irish Inn	Muscoda	Both	Dark	Irish Whiskey/Beer
Ernie's Bar and Grill	Muscoda	Tourist	Light	Local Taps
Sawmill Saloon	Prairie Du Chein	Tourist	Light	Local Taps
Jim's Bar	Prairie Du Chein	Local	Dark	Standard
Killarney's Irish Pub	Prairie Du Chein	Both	Light	Local Taps, Import
The Boxcar	Fennimore	Local	Light	Anything
Hilltop Bar and Grill	Fennimore	Local	Dark	Local Taps, Import
2nd Shot Bar and Grill	Fennimore	Local	Dark	Standard
Gundlach's Bar and Grill	Montfort	Both	Dark	Standard
Doc's Holiday Bar and Grill	Cobb	Local	Dark	Miller Lite

Tavern	Beer Delivery	Menu	Music vs. TV	Multiple Entrances
Rookies	All	Extensive	TV/Music	X
Village Green	Can/Bottle	N/a	Tv (Qualifying)	

The Players Club	Bottle	N/a	Music	
Wisconsin Riverside Resort	Frosty Mug/Can	Bar Food/Fish Fry	None	X
The Shed	All	Extensive	TV/Music	X
Dorf Haus	All	Culture	Music	
Bat Cave	Can/Bottle	N/a	Tv (Movie 21)	
Weggey's Winery	Wine Glass	N/a	None	
Honkers	Can/Bottle	Broasted Chicken	Music	
Pat and Greg's Pour House	Can/Bottle	Frozen Pizza	TV (Sports)	X
Kim's Silver Dollar	Can/Bottle	N/a	TV (Sports)	X
Double K's	All	Extensive	TV (Sports)	X
Jody's Roadhouse	Bottle	N/a	TV/Music	
Wolfy's Irish Inn	All	N/a	TV/Music	X
Ernie's Bar and Grill	All	Extensive	TV	
Sawmill Saloon	All	Bar Food	TV/Music	
Jim's Bar	Bottle	N/a	TV/Music	X
Killarney's Irish Pub	All	Extensive	TV/Music	
The Boxcar	Bottle	N/a	Music	X
Hilltop Bar and Grill	All	Extensive	TV	X
2nd Shot Bar and Grill	Bottle	N/a	Music	X
Gundlach's Bar and Grill	Bottle	Bar Food	TV	
Doc's Holiday Bar and Grill	Bottle	Bar Food	TV	X

Tavern	Clieele (Sex)	Clieele (Age)
Rookies	Mixed	Ranging Middle to Old
Village Green	Male	Older
The Players Club	Mostly Male	Middle Age
Wisconsin Riverside Resort	Mixed	All (Young Kids-Old)
The Shed	Mixed	Middle Age Mostly
Dorf Haus	Mixed	Most Older
Bat Cave	Male	Older
Weggey's Winery	None	
Honkers	Mixed	Middle Age
Pat and Greg's Pour House	Male	Middle Age to Old
Kim's Silver Dollar	Male	Middle Age to Younger
Double K's	Mixed	Middle Age to Old
Jody's Roadhouse	Male	Middle Age
Wolfy's Irish Inn	Mixed	All (21 to Old)
Ernie's Bar and Grill	Mixed	Families

Sawmill Saloon	Mixed	Middle Age Mostly
Jim's Bar	Male	Middle Age
Killarney's Irish Pub	Mostly Male	Older
The Boxcar	Mixed	Ranging Middle to Old
Hilltop Bar and Grill	Mixed	All
2nd Shot Bar and Grill	Male	Middle Age to Old
Gundlach's Bar and Grill	Male	Middle Age to Old
Doc's Holiday Bar and Grill	Male	Middle Age

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