



At the 2010 winter Olympics in Vancouver, Jon Montgomery won a spectacular come-from-behind victory to take the gold medal in skeleton racing. Moments after his win, the larger-than-life red-haired Manitoban walked triumphantly through the crowds at Whistler, giving high-fives and receiving pats on the back, as he made his way to an interview booth. From the mass of people who had gathered to see Canada's latest Olympic hero, a woman emerged with a pitcher of beer and handed it to Montgomery. Decked out head-to-toe in Canadiana gear, and with all of the eyes of the world watching, Montgomery drank a good portion of the pitcher and then lifted the jug over his head in victory. The crowd let out a collective cheer. Montgomery's Olympic "beer walk" emerged as a passionate declaration of national pride and speaks to the connection between beer and "the Canadian identity."

For those watching Montgomery's "beer walk" that day, it stirred the emotions and raised a number of questions. As a historian, my questions related to change and continuity. I wondered about the historical link between beer and the national identity. Was beer always the alcoholic beverage of choice of Canadians? If Montgomery had been handed a bottle of whiskey or wine would he and the crowd have acted the same way? If beer wasn't always the alcoholic beverage of choice of Canadians, then what had previously filled the cups of Canadians? Did the brewers of the nation have any historical role to play in developing the current culture of beer favoritism? When did the Canadian brewing emerge as a significant industry and how did our breweries evolve over time? How did they survive prohibition? Did the evolution of the Canadian brewing industry mirror the development of the industry elsewhere, or was there something distinctively Canadian about the way it grew? How did the industry evolve to what it has become today — i.e. one that it dominated by global giants, like AB InBev, and local craft brewers. What happened to those national brewers like Molson and Labatt which had dominated the industry just a few decades ago?

These questions sent me searching for answers and ultimately to Western Archives in lovely London, Ontario where *The Labatt Brewing Company Collection* has been kept since it first became accessible for public viewing in 2011. The *Labatt Collection* itself

Drink up the history at the Western Archives

is one of the largest corporate archives in the country. It is made up of over 2600 boxes, comprising some 450 linear meters of textual documents, more than 45,000 photographs and illustrations, and almost 15,000 audio-visual items.

For many readers of *Intersections*, the name Labatt will be synonymous with mass-produced beer. Just a few decades ago the company's flagship brand, "Blue," accounted for almost one in every five beers sold and the company controlled almost half of the national beer market. Its huge breweries dotted the Canadian landscape. Labatt owned a major league baseball team, the Blue Jays, a football team, the Toronto Argonauts, The Sports Network (TSN), Toronto's entertainment palace, SkyDome, The Discovery Channel, the Canadian chocolatier and ice cream company, Laura Secord, and through its subsidiary, Concert Productions International, it promoted the rock spectacles of the likes of David Bowie, Pink Floyd and The Rolling Stones. And that was not all. It also owned Chateau Gai Wines, Everfresh Juices, Johanna Farms and an assortment of other food and beverage companies. John Labatt Ltd. was everywhere.

With Labatt's fingers in so many pots, the archive at the UWO provides valuable insights into many more delights than just beer. There is information on wine, chocolate, sports, branding, marketing and advertising, public relations, managerial styles, government-business relations, working conditions, consumer culture, industrial relations, and much more.

Like a great restaurant, a great archive is as much about the "space" in which the consumption is taking place as it is about the consumption itself. In the back corner of the D.B. Weldon Library, in the heart of the university campus, the archive and research collection centre is a lecture-size room, measuring about 30 feet by 60 feet, which is finished with oak desks and barrister bookshelves. Old books and maps cover the walls. The room could easily accommodate twenty researchers, but whenever I have visited there have rarely been more than five. The room is bright, quiet, and cosy. The staff is friendly, knowledgeable and tremendously helpful. If you are ever visiting London, Ontario, therefore, I would recommend dropping in to drink up the history.

Matt Bellamy,
English Language Secretary