

# Sipping Through History in Front Royal

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George Washington would have rocked the current Virginia craft beer scene. In fact, in some ways, he is, even now, competing in it. Wander on down to the Beer Museum in Front Royal and you can enjoy a pint of his tavern porter, 7.0% ABV, thank you. It's dark and creamy and good.

And, it's the only one of 18 tap choices at the museum that wasn't brewed in Virginia. For the sake of history, the choosers turned to Philadelphia and the Yards Brewery for an authentic offering from one of Virginia's most famous native sons.

Walk across the hall from the tap room and you'll find George himself (in cardboard cutout form) standing in front of the 1754 recipe for his popular brew, taken from his handwritten notes. Ingredients included bran hops, molasses, and yeast, with one instruction to let the boiling hot liquid "stand til it is little more than Blood warm." Hmm. How warm is blood?

David Downes, museum founder, enjoys telling the story of Washington's first unsuccessful run for office. He lost, Downes says, because his opponent provided potential voters with more beer. That was in 1755.

Washington's successful 1758 campaign included 46 ¾ gallons of beer to "encourage" voters to support his candidacy.

Now celebrating its 7th year, the non-profit museum is the first museum in the country to focus on a single state's history of beer. Downes, a lawyer, said he combined his two favorite things—beer and history—when he decided to see if he could make a beer museum work in Front Royal.

The statistics on the museum's website point to why it was a good time to launch such a venture: "Virginia is currently experiencing exponential growth of craft breweries. With only one craft brewery in 1994 (Legend in Richmond), the Commonwealth can now boast to having more



**Beer Museum founder David Downes, left, with Bruce Townshend who is such a loyal patron that he got married in the tented biergarten three years ago.** *Photo, Joan Anderson*

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# BEER MUSEUM

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Beers available on tap in the museum change often.



Bottled beer got a rival when cans arrived in the 1930s.



Soon the beer museum front porch will be filled with Two Pint Tuesday celebrators. Photos, bottom left, top right and left, Joan Anderson



Even George Washington welcomes pups to the beer museum.

Photo, VBM

than 200 craft breweries today. Virginia craft breweries had a \$1,046,000,000 economic impact in 2015, producing 274,111 barrels according to the Brewers Association. No other state can claim as lengthy a history of brewing and beer consumption as Virginia.”

### Museum exhibits

A walk through the museum’s six display rooms takes you from the beginning of the Virginia Colony in 1607, to the founding father’s recipes, to the influence of German immigrants, to Virginia’s failed efforts during Prohibition, to the introduction of the first beer can in America, and to the craft beer renaissance of today.

About those beer cans, Downes reports that early ads promoted their use over bottles by reporting “Your wife can bring more beer home for you at one time now.”

Among the bits of history, you will learn are—

- The first advertisement from the col-

onies to appear in England was an ad from Virginia for brewers to come to the colonies.

- Taverns played a variety of roles in the early days of our country, especially politics.
- Why Abraham Lincoln was against prohibition.
- Why an 1870 brewery in Alexandria was named “Tivoli.” (Hint: read it backwards)

The displays and artifacts at the museum are not stuffy or formal. In fact, there is a certain dusty, musty feel to the place that somehow seems to echo what tavern life a







A curious stained glass window decorates the room devoted to Prohibition History at the Virginia Beer Museum. What does the coffin signify? The death of John Barleycorn, of course. Photo, Joan Anderson

few centuries back would have been like. In front, a long porch with rocking chairs is a great place to sip and watch the world go by on Chester Street. Many of the passers-by are dog walkers, who stop and allow their pups to exchange sniffs on the front porch as the museum is pup-friendly, inside and out.

**The outside**

In a vast back yard, the museum often has music and themed events (from Bobbie Burns Night to Halloween), sometimes featuring food trucks as the building is not approved for selling food. (That’s why the dogs can go inside.) Downes, however, would like someday to find a way to add a working kitchen. The yard has even hosted the wedding of two of its regulars.

Now back to that front porch. It was Tuesday and three people and one dog sat enjoying a pleasant late afternoon. Then one couple showed up, then another, then two guys, then a solo woman, then three more dogs until the porch was brimming with good humor and hugs. The crowd kept growing, the ales were flowing, and everyone seemed to know each other.

It turned out to be Two-Pint Tuesday, a tradition that started in Front Royal before the Beer Museum existed but moved there when it opened. It is a gathering of folks of all skills—realtors, politicians, downtown shop owners, retirees, veterans—who come together once a week for the conviviality that beer brings. Not that they do drink two pints, it just rolls off the tongue better combined with Tuesday.

As a non-profit, the museum is supported primarily by the sales of beer in its tap room at \$7 a glass. And lest you dare not like beer, they also have wine for \$5 a glass. Hours are Monday to Thursday, 4 to 8 pm; Friday, 4 to 10 pm; Saturday, noon to 11 pm; and Sunday, noon to 5 pm. For the latest on music and events, check out VAbeermuseum on Facebook.

Cheers!

**The Virginia Beer Museum**

16 Chester Street, almost across the side street from the gazebo  
Front Royal  
Phone: 540-313-1431  
Website: virginiabeermuseum.com



The tented biergarten often hosts musicians and events marking historical anniversaries.

**Our founding father’s beer recipe.**  
Photo, Joan Anderson

**GEORGE WASHINGTON'S BEER RECIPE**

George Washington, like most Founding Fathers, enjoyed beer and always made sure a decent supply was on hand at all times at his Mt. Vernon estate. Not only did Washington enjoy good craft beer, he also knew how to make it. This is a recipe for "small beer" that Washington wrote in one of his notebooks. This notebook is currently in the collection of the New York Public Library.

**To Make Small Beer**

Take a large Sifter full of Bran Hops to your Taste — Boil these 3 hours. Then strain out 30 Gall. into a Cooler put in 3 Gallons Molasses while the Beer is scalding hot or rather drain the while boiling hot let this stand til it is little more than Blood warm. Then put in a quart of Yeast if the weather is very cold cover it over with a Blanket. Let it work in the Cooler 24 hours then put it into the Cask, leave the Bung open til it is almost done working — Bottle it that day Week it was Brewed.



Fronting on Chester Street, the Beer Museum is just around the corner from downtown shops and restaurants. Photo, VBM

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