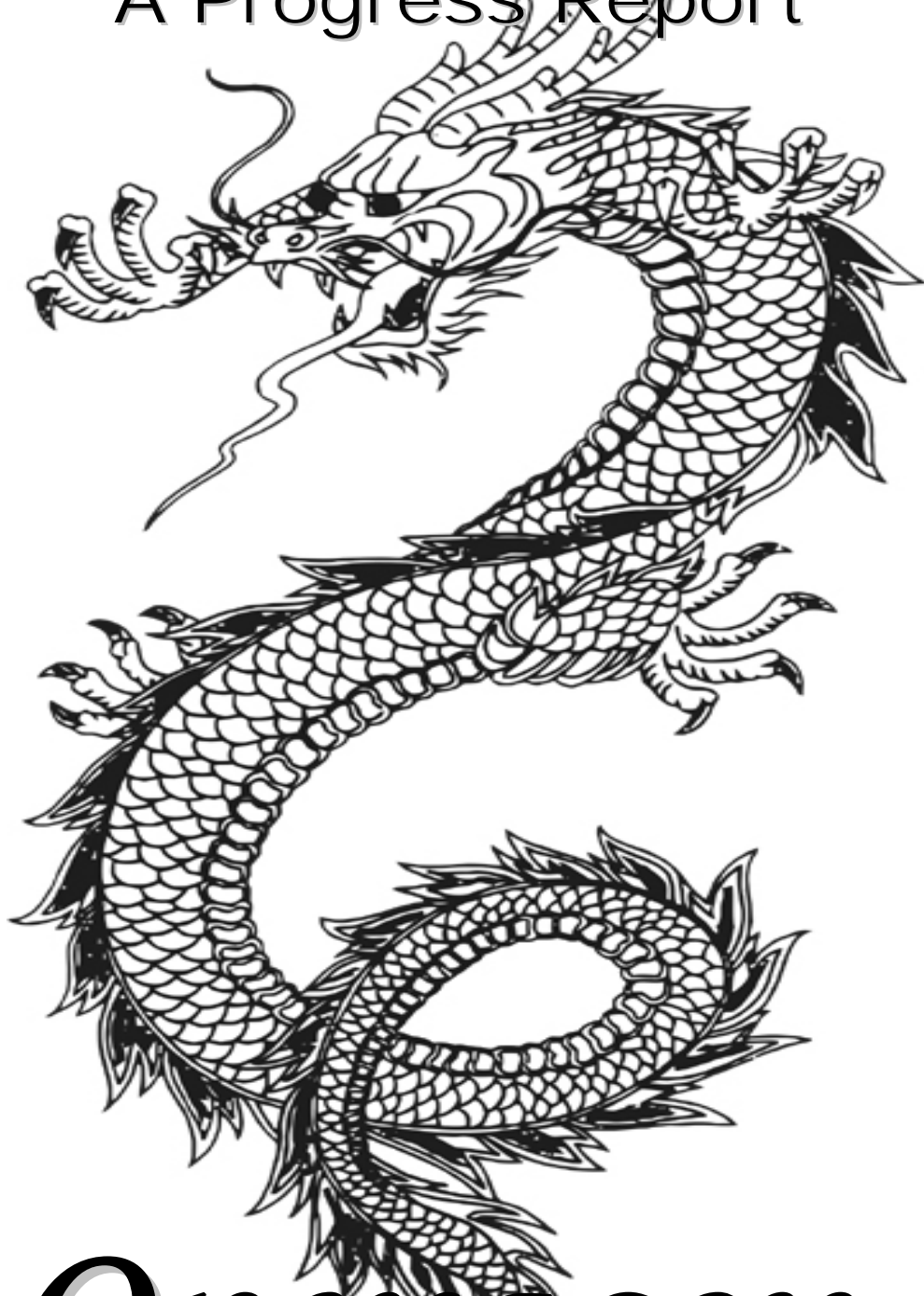


Flavor Forecast 2

A Progress Report



Operacon

with Somtow Sucharitkul

March 12–15, 2015, Milwaukee, Wis.

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See you soon!

Concom

Composer: Somtow Sucharitkul.

Hotel Honcho: Dina Krause.

Consuite Coordinators: Jeanne Bowman, Alan Rosenthal.

Factotums: Cynthia Chernoff, Trinlay Khadro,

Greg Rihn, Georgie Schnobrich,

Christa Sinclair, Amy Theisen, You, perhaps?

Volunteers sought.

Everything Else: Dick & Leah Smith.

Contact Us

Web: fjagdh.com/operacon

Facebook: tinyurl.com/operacon

Twitter: @operasf

Email: operacon@fjagdh.com

Phone: (414) 856-5525

Operacon Members

- Don Ayres, Lyons, Ill.
- Jeanne Bowman, Glen Ellen, Calif.
- Seth Breidbart, New York.
- Cy Chauvin, Detroit.
- Cynthia Chernoff, Chicago.
- Cicatrice, Milwaukee.
- Barbara Cohan, Chicago.
- Lawrence Cohan, Chicago.
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- Sue Finkle, Mount Prospect, Ill.
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- Alexa Hollywood, Milwaukee.
- Elizabeth Anne Hull, Palatine, Ill.
- Julianne Hunter, Mequon, Wis.
- Gerry Isaacson, Somerset, N.J.
- Tanayut 'Top' Jansirivorkul, Los Angeles. [S].
- Richard Kaminsky, Evanston, Ill.
- Bill Kelley, Chicago.
- Jiraros Kewjaila [S]
- Trinlay Khadro, West Allis, Wis.
- Pantawit Kiangsiri, Los Angeles [S].
- Greg Ketter, Minneapolis.
- Dina Krause, Skokie, Ill.
- George Krause, Skokie, Ill.
- Barbara Letterman, Milwaukee.
- Richard Lettermann, Milwaukee.
- Suford Lewis, Natick, Mass. [S].
- Sam Long, Springfield, Ill.
- 'Orange Mike' Lowrey, Milwaukee.
- Jean Luzinicky, Wild Rose, Wis.
- Kathy Mar, San Leandro, Calif.
- Mary Ellen Moore, Mississauga, Ont., Canada.
- Murray Moore, Mississauga, Ont., Canada.
- Deirdre Murphy, Milwaukee.
- Chen Ooi, Chicago.
- Tom Page, Lansing, Mich.
- Mary Prince, Brown Deer, Wis.
- Sarah Prince, Keene Valley, N.Y. [S].
- Michael Proudfoot, Reading, Berks., U.K.
- Neil Rest, Chicago.
- Greg Rihn, Milwaukee.
- Teresa Roden, Milwaukee.
- Alan Rosenthal, Glen Ellen, Calif.
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- Ron Salomon, Framingham, Mass.
- Deborah Schamber, Milwaukee.
- Georgie Schnobrich, Milwaukee.
- Joey Shoji, Berkeley, Calif.
- Alex Sinclair, Louisville, Ky.
- Christa Sinclair, Louisville, Ky.
- Dick Smith, Chicago / Milwaukee.
- Leah Zeldes Smith, Chicago / Milwaukee.
- Matthew Strait, Chicago [S].
- Jon Stopa, Wilmot, Wis.
- Somtow Sucharitkul, Bangkok, Thailand.
- Thaitow Sucharitkul, Bangkok, Thailand. [S].
- Amy Theisen, Milwaukee.
- Charles Tritt, Mequon, Wis.
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- Todd Voros, Milwaukee.
- Bob Weissinger, Racine, Wis.
- Amy Wenshe, Plainfield, Ill. [S].
- Martin Morse Wooster, Silver Spring, Md.
- Zizhu Zhao, Los Angeles [S].

Progress report edited by Leah Zeldes Smith. Technical support by Dick Smith.

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Operacon is sponsored by the Fannish Educational Network.

Memberships

Full attending:	<i>Sold out!</i>
No-opera:	<i>\$65 at the door.</i>
Supporting:	<i>\$25.</i>

Full-attending memberships are now sold out. We don't think we can get more opera seats at this point, but in the event any current members let us know they will not be able to attend, we will make those memberships available.

Only no-opera memberships will be available at the door. If you have purchased a supporting membership, you may upgrade to a no-opera membership at the door.

Hotel Information

Our hotel is the luxurious Hilton Milwaukee City Center, 509 W. Wisconsin Ave., in downtown Milwaukee. A classic art-deco structure built in 1927, the newly renovated hotel boasts a AAA Four Diamond rating.

Room rates are just \$100 for double-double or king rooms. We have gotten an extension on this rate through the con, so if the hotel has any vacancies, you still ought to be able to get a room in our block. If you have any difficulty, please call us immediately.

Guest rooms have free high-speed internet access, and each room for an Operacon member will come with a \$10 food-and-beverage voucher for use in the hotel's three restaurants.

Reserve at tinyurl.com/operacon-hotel or call (414) 935-5940 and be sure to say you're with Operacon.

Check-in time is 3 p.m. When you check in, **please reiterate that you are with Operacon**, and ask for a room near our suite, which we're told will be on the sixth floor.

How to Get Here

You are headed to the Hilton Milwaukee City Center, 509 W. Wisconsin Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53203, (414) 271-7250. See the map on the back page of this progress report.

By plane: From General Mitchell International Airport (MKE), if you're traveling solo, the least expensive option to reach the hotel is the airport shuttle by Go Riteway. A shared ride is \$15 per person. You can reserve online at goriteway.com or by phone at (800) 236-5450. For two or more people

traveling together, a taxi will cost about \$30 with tip and be a more direct trip, so that's a better option.

By bus or train: You will arrive at Milwaukee Intermodal Station. Walk three blocks north along Fifth Street. The Hilton is on your left at Fifth and Wisconsin Avenue.

By car: *From the south* (Chicago and if driving from Milwaukee's General Mitchell International Airport/MKE) — Take I-94 West (it actually goes north) in the direction labeled "Milwaukee" or "Downtown." As you approach downtown (you'll see tall buildings and smokestacks), exit right at Plankinton Avenue (Exit 310C toward Lakefront).

Continue north on Plankinton to Wisconsin Avenue, turn left (west). Go four blocks to Fifth Street, turn left (south). The Hilton is immediately on your right with its parking garage just beyond.

From the west (Madison and beyond) — Follow I-94 East toward "Milwaukee" or "Downtown." When you reach downtown (you'll see tall buildings and smokestacks), keep left for I-794, then exit right immediately at St. Paul Avenue/James Lovell Street (Exit 1H).

Go north about three blocks to Wisconsin Avenue. Turn right (east), go two blocks to Fifth Street, turn right (south). The hotel is immediately on your right with its parking garage just beyond it.

From the northwest (U.S. 45 or 41) — Go to I-94 East. Follow directions from the west.

From the north (I-43) — Go south to downtown, exit right at for Plankinton Avenue (Exit 72B, toward Lakefront). Go two blocks north on Plankinton to Wisconsin Avenue. Turn left (west) and drive four blocks to Fifth Street. Turn left (south). The hotel is immediately on your right with its parking garage just beyond.

Parking

If you are a hotel guest, we have arranged discounted parking in the hotel's self-park garage for \$18 per day with in/out privileges.

For less expensive parking, there is an open lot across the street that charges \$6 per day on weekdays and \$10 on the weekend for all-day parking without in/out. Three blocks south, the lot at the Intermodal Station is \$7 per day (the sign says no in/out, but since you pay a machine and put the receipt on your dash, we can't see how they could tell if you left and returned). There is also limited metered street parking with a two-hour limit.

Occasionally Asked Questions

What's a relaxacon? A relaxacon is a low-key science-fiction convention, basically a weekend-long party with little or no formal programming and an emphasis on conversation and collegiality. When we heard that Somtow's opera was premiering in Milwaukee, we thought it was a great excuse to throw one.

There won't be any panels, but we will have lots of things to do, including close-up time with Somtow and Viswa Subbaraman, explorations of Milwaukee and food and drink tastings in the consuite.

We plan to screen a few special videos, and feel free to bring along your favorite games, whether playing cards, board games or whatever you like. (Leah is hoping to get up a game of Dictionary, and Dina has promised to bring her mah jongg set, although she really loves to play poker.) There will be plenty of time and space to play. Or, you can just hang in the con suite for that great game of fansmanship.

What should I wear? For opera night, we're encouraging folks to dress up, for whatever your personal value of "dressing up" is — formalwear, steampunk finery, medieval garb, jeans with no holes in them — but that's entirely optional. (Shoes and shirt are required.)

For the rest of the weekend, your usual con wear is fine, but do look at Milwaukee weather forecasts before you pack. Right now, the long-range forecast is showing weekend highs ranging from 39 to 43 degrees F. and lows from 26 to 32 degrees, and partly sunny days.

However, it's still early to trust the meteorologists, and this is a very changeable time of year. We suggest planning to dress in layers. Also, bring boots. It's going to take more than a few above-freezing days before all the piles of snow melt, so things are apt to be pretty slushy. Once the snow goes, then we'll be into what e.e. cummings called "Just-spring when the world is mud-luscious."

When is the opera? Curtain time is 7:30 p.m. Friday night. Our bus will head there at 5 p.m., for those who want to eat dinner near the theater and/or see the theater's 6:30 p.m. pre-show talk, and again at 7 p.m.

What else is there to do? On Saturday afternoon, we'll head back to the theater for a private

talk by Somtow and Skylight Music Theatre Artistic Director Viswa Subbaraman.

The theater is located in *Milwaukee's Historic Third Ward*. Along with a wealth of taverns and restaurants, the Third Ward is home to the Milwaukee Public Market (all kinds of food vendors), as well as a variety of boutiques and shops such as Red Elephant Chocolate, Grotta & Co. (hand-dyed textiles), Blick Art Materials and Broadway Paper.

Within a few blocks of the Hilton, the *Milwaukee Public Museum* is one of the country's premier natural history and science facilities, featuring a planetarium and a variety of exhibits, such as the world's largest-known dinosaur skull and a life-sized replica of Tyrannosaurus rex, as well as Egyptian mummies. "Crossroads of Civilization," its newest permanent exhibition, opens on Sunday.

Also nearby are the *Harley Davidson Museum*, which documents Milwaukee's motorcycle history and culture, and the *Haggerty Museum of Art* at Marquette University, whose collection includes biblical etchings by Marc Chagall and photographs by Ralph Steiner.

A short cab ride will get you to the *Milwaukee Art Museum*, a Santiago Calatrava-designed building that flaps its wings every day at noon. The interior is under construction just now, and the permanent collection closed, but there is an ongoing exhibition on "Inspiring Beauty: 50 Years of Ebony Fashion Fair" plus some special events.

The Shops of Grand Avenue, an urban mall a block from the Hilton, offers Boston Store, T.J. Maxx and a number of smaller shops and eateries, including a branch of Jake's Deli, known for its hand-sliced corned beef.

Old World Third Street, a few blocks from the Hilton, is a wonderful destination, with loads of taverns, restaurants and shopping. Mader's German Restaurant, a local favorite, is there, as is the Usinger's Sausage factory store, where you can find 125 different kinds of wurst and smoked meats.

Across the street, The Spice House offers a world of fragrant seasonings, measured out to order, and down the block there's a branch of the Wisconsin Cheese Mart, featuring all kinds of local cheeses, with an attached bar offering dozens of

Wisconsin brews on tap, plus cheese plates and sandwiches.

The Safe House (aka International Exports, Ltd.), a very unusual bar, is one of Milwaukee's don't-miss destinations, at least for anyone who remembers the Cold War and "Spy vs. Spy." A couple of blocks from there is Karl Ratsch's, another very good German restaurant.

Potawatami Casino offers bingo, slots, poker and table games, plus bars, restaurants and shows.

It being the weekend before **St. Patrick's Day**, Milwaukee will have various celebrations going on, including a 140-unit parade that steps off two blocks from the hotel at noon Saturday with floats, bagpipes and marching bands and several organized pub crawls through the city's many bars and Irish taverns.

Do I need to book ahead? Various touristic destinations require advance reservations, notably manufacturing tours and special shows.

BREWERY TOURS: Along with drinking beer in Milwaukee, you can see how it's brewed. The beer that made Milwaukee famous isn't made here anymore, but Milwaukee still produces plenty of brews, and many of their manufacturers, from the giant MillerCoors facility to small craft brewers, offer brewery tours, typically with tastings included. From nearest to farthest from the Hilton:

Milwaukee Brewing Co. (613 S. Second St., mkebrewing.com) makes a variety of craft beers, including such unique offerings as a tea-infused brew. They offer \$10 "beer in hand" tours on Fridays and Saturdays. They do take walk-ins, but avoid disappointment by reserving ahead. They also run a two-hour open house on Saturday at 5 p.m. Note: They are across the street from Clock Shadow Creamery (see below).

Lakefront Brewery (1872 N. Commerce St., lakefrontbrewery.com), which produces a variety of brews, including seasonal options, ales, lagers and gluten-free beer. offers several types of tours, from short mini tours on up through Sunday-morning technical tours geared toward homebrewers and beer aficionados. Their tours sell out, so buy tickets (\$8 to \$30) ahead of time.

MillerCoors (4251 W. State St., millercoors.com) offers free, hour-long tours of its massive plant, with a look at underground caves where Frederick Miller cooled his brew over 150 years ago, as well as its high-speed production lines.

Tours don't require advance reservations unless you have special needs, and step off every 20 minutes from 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. daily.

Sprecher Brewery (701 W. Glendale Ave., Glendale, sprecherbrewery.com), which brews gourmet soda pop as well as a wide variety of ales and beers, including seasonal brews, hard root beer, ginger beer and gluten-free ale, offers tours followed by tastings in its Munich-style bierstube. Some Saturday tours include reserve tastings. Paid reservations are required (\$4 to \$20).

DISTILLERY TOUR: Great Lakes Distillery (616 W. Virginia St., greatlakesdistillery.com), Milwaukee's small-batch spirits maker, makes gin, vodka, rum, whiskey, absinthe, fruit brandies and seasonal spirits. They offer one-hour-long tours with tastings three to four times each for \$7. They also have a tasting room, if you want to skip the tour.

CHEESE-FACTORY 'TOUR': You can also see a cheese factory — **Clock Shadow Creamery** (138 W. Bruce St., clockshadowcreamery.com), Milwaukee County's only cheesemaker, has an observation window into their cheesemaking operations, and for \$3, a guide will fill you in on the mysteries of curds and whey. Walk-in slots aren't always available, and cheese production doesn't go on all the time, so check with them for the best times and reserve in advance at info@clockshadowcreamery.com or (414) 273-9711. They're across the street from Milwaukee Brewing, so you can get in two tours in one trip.

'ELMER GANTRY': In case one opera isn't enough for the weekend, **The Florentine Opera** (florentineopera.org) has extended a special offer to us. Recordings of their production of Robert Aldridge and Herschel Garfein's "Elmer Gantry" five years ago won two Grammys. Their remount has a performance at 2:30 p.m. Sunday at Marcus Center for the Performing Arts, and they've offered any of our group main-floor tickets for just \$10. To take advantage of this offer, contact Claire Braby at tickets@florentineopera.org or (800) 32-OPERA and mention OPERACON.

What can I do to help? We're looking for volunteers to help with various con tasks such as helping out in the consuite. If you can give us a few hours over the weekend, please drop us a line.

If you have a car, you might offer to take some of those who arrived by other methods to check out various destinations around Milwaukee.

Who is the Snow Dragon?

A singing dragon! Houston, Texas-based soprano Cassandra Aaron Black has been cast in the title role of Somtow's "The Snow Dragon," the opera in Operacon. "Rumor has it," she wrote on Facebook recently, "my Snow Dragon costume is going to be one for the books!"

Described by the Houston Chronicle as "stylish, big-voiced and sassy," Black has performed in more than 20 leading soprano roles and been a soloist in Italy, Switzerland, Germany, China and throughout the United States.



Cassandra Black

Last year, Black spent time with the St. Petersburg Opera as a cover (the operatic term for *understudy*) for the title role in Vincenzo Bellini's "Norma." In 2013, she sang the role of Leonore in Skylight Music Theatre's production of the Beethoven opera "Fidelio," which was the Milwaukee debut of Skylight's Artistic Director Viswa Subbaraman. Other recent roles included Donna Anna in "Don Giovanni" by Mozart and the Mother in Engelbert Humperdinck's *Märchenoper* "Hänsel und Gretel," both with Houston's Opera in the Heights.

Milwaukee-born composer Daron Hagen is writing a 20-minute song cycle about Mata Hari for Black, which will debut this year. In 2011, she sang the role of Doll Common in Hagen's opera "Vera of Las Vegas" for Opera Vista, the Houston company founded by Subbaraman. The new song cycle was commissioned with the aid of a Kickstarter fundraiser netting \$3,615.

Black received her bachelor's degree in vocal performance from San Jose State University in 2003. That year, she launched her

operatic career in the role of Erste Dame in Mozart's "Die Zauberflöte" with Opera San Jose. She went on to earn her master's degree and doctorate from the University of Houston and apprenticed at Des Moines Metro Opera and Sarasota Opera.

As a young singer growing up in Northern California, Black performed with the Yuba City High School concert and chamber choirs, the Yuba College Symphony Chorus and the Chico State Choir. She also appeared in several productions with the erstwhile Civic Theatre West in Roseville, Calif., debuting in 1998 as Guinevere in "Camelot."

Science, Music and Science Fiction

BY SOMTOW SUCHARITKUL

I've always dreamed of creating a situation where the divide between art and science can be bridged.

Around 1980, I was in the lobby of the Sheraton in Boston where I encountered Marvin Minsky for the first time. I had no clue who he was. There were two pianos in the lobby. We both started playing. After a moment, it became clear that, even though we were both improvising, each was completely aware of what the other was doing, and the music began to gel into a complex and logical construct, far more integrated than one would think possible, and far bigger than either of us could create alone.

Five hours of playing together later ... having astounded all the attendees at the science fiction

convention we were at ... I was finally introduced to Marvin. I had heard of him, of course; he almost singlehandedly created Artificial Intelligence.

One of the world's great neurobiologists is V.S. Ramachandran. When he and I were children, we used to dress up in bedsheets and improvise huge scenes from imaginary operas. We created an artificial language in which to express the alien emotions of our characters.

What I'm saying is that music, so often, forms an underlying system of paradigms or structures that scientists intuit very well. There is a reason why Pythagoras numbered music among the scientific/mathematical disciplines.



Mr. & Mrs. Richard H.E. Smith II
request the pleasure
of your company
at a celebration of their
30th Wedding Anniversary
at 9 p.m. on Saturday, March 14,
in the Operacon consuite.





*We invite you to join us for Milwaukee's Friday Fish Fry tradition on March 13, before the opera, at a restaurant near the theater. If you'd like to join us, **RSVP by Tuesday, March 9**, to operacon@fijagdh.com, so we can include you in our reservation. We will be ordering from the menu, so non-fish eaters can come, too. Vegetarian and gluten-free options are available. Entree prices range from \$9 to \$19. Please **bring cash** to pay your share of the check.*

Friday Fish Fry

Milwaukee's Ubiquitous Tradition

BY LEAH ZELDES SMITH

Seafood houses ... German bierstubes ... steakhouses ... Italian eateries ... diners ... taverns ... even pizzerias, Chinese restaurants and gyros joints.... In Milwaukee, they all serve fish fry every Friday Night. Dick and I have personally eaten an Indian version, and we've heard about Polish and Puerto Rican variants.

Nearly every restaurant in the city offers this Friday fish special, and some go so far as to offer little or nothing else that night. At the Packing

House, a steakhouse, the fish fry is so popular that they have to open a drive-thru on Fridays.

Theories abound as to how Milwaukee's favorite Friday-night dinner became fish fry. Everyone agrees it had something to do with the pre-Vatican II rule of meatless Fridays (then year round, instead of the current practice, limited to Lent), but no one knows why this piscine custom should have so expanded and persisted in Milwaukee, over other cities with a large Roman Catholic population.

Some historians suggest the tradition dates as far back as the 19th century, when Milwaukee brewers such as Pabst and Schlitz, who operated hotels and tied taverns, used Friday Fish Fry as a means of attracting beer-drinking patrons. Others say Friday Fish Fry began during Prohibition, when speakeasy operators offset their outrageous bootleg-liquor prices by offering free fish.

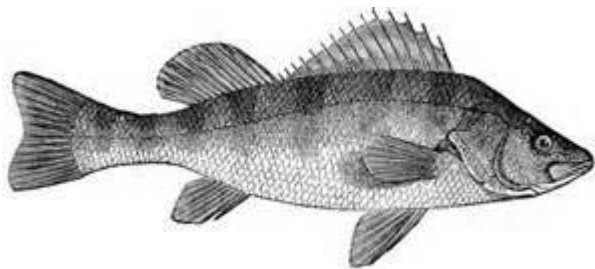
A 1933 Milwaukee Journal story confirms that Prohibition popularized the trend, and it expanded after Repeal:

On Friday nights thousands of people, young and old, go out to eat fish and drink beer, listen to music and song, and while away a few sociable hours. The fish fry is the city's latest fad — a hobby that has developed into immense popularity since 3.2 beer became legal. Never has the town had such an appetite for fish.

But the fish fry is also serving as a center around which some of the better drinking places are reviving the spirit of sociality which in beer days was known as "gemuetlichkeit." The fish fry is becoming a sort of family affair, a weekly event which father and mother and even the youngsters are attending.*

The proximity of Lake Michigan, which once boasted a thriving commercial fishery, no doubt also influenced the popularity and availability of fish dinners. In 1900, Lake Michigan fishermen hauled in an average of 41 million pounds of fish annually.

That number had dropped to 14 million by 1938. First overfishing, then pollution and, finally, invasive species, such as alewives and quagga mussels, have all but stopped commercial fishing in the lake today.



When Dick was a boy, yellow perch were caught locally in Lake Michigan, and he remembers a school field trip to see the catch brought in at Port Washington, north of town. Commercial perch fishing was closed here in 1996, and Milwaukee's last fishing tug anchored for good in 2011.

Yet the Friday Fish Fry goes on, more popular than ever.

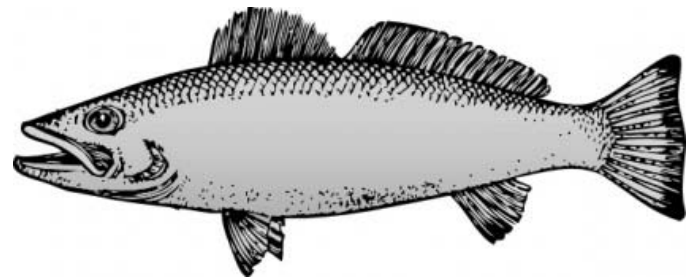
A typical fish fry features a heaping portion of battered or breaded fried fish. Icelandic or Alaskan cod is most common today, but some places offer other options, such as haddock, walleye or lake perch (our favorite), which usually costs a dollar or two extra. (Though today there's a limited perch fishery near Green Bay, and some promising investigation into aquaculture, yellow perch now mostly comes out of Lake Erie.)

Cod is usually served as beer-battered fillets, while for reasons I haven't been able to find out, perch is universally coated in breadcrumbs.

The fish nearly always comes accompanied by tartar sauce, coleslaw, marbled rye bread (mostly a regrettably squishy and tasteless but unaccountably popular version from Miller's Bakery) plus french fries or potato pancakes with applesauce. The potato pancakes vary widely in recipe, ranging from German-style potato-flour flapjacks to squashed tater tots, and many Milwaukeeans judge a fish fry based on potato pancakes alone.

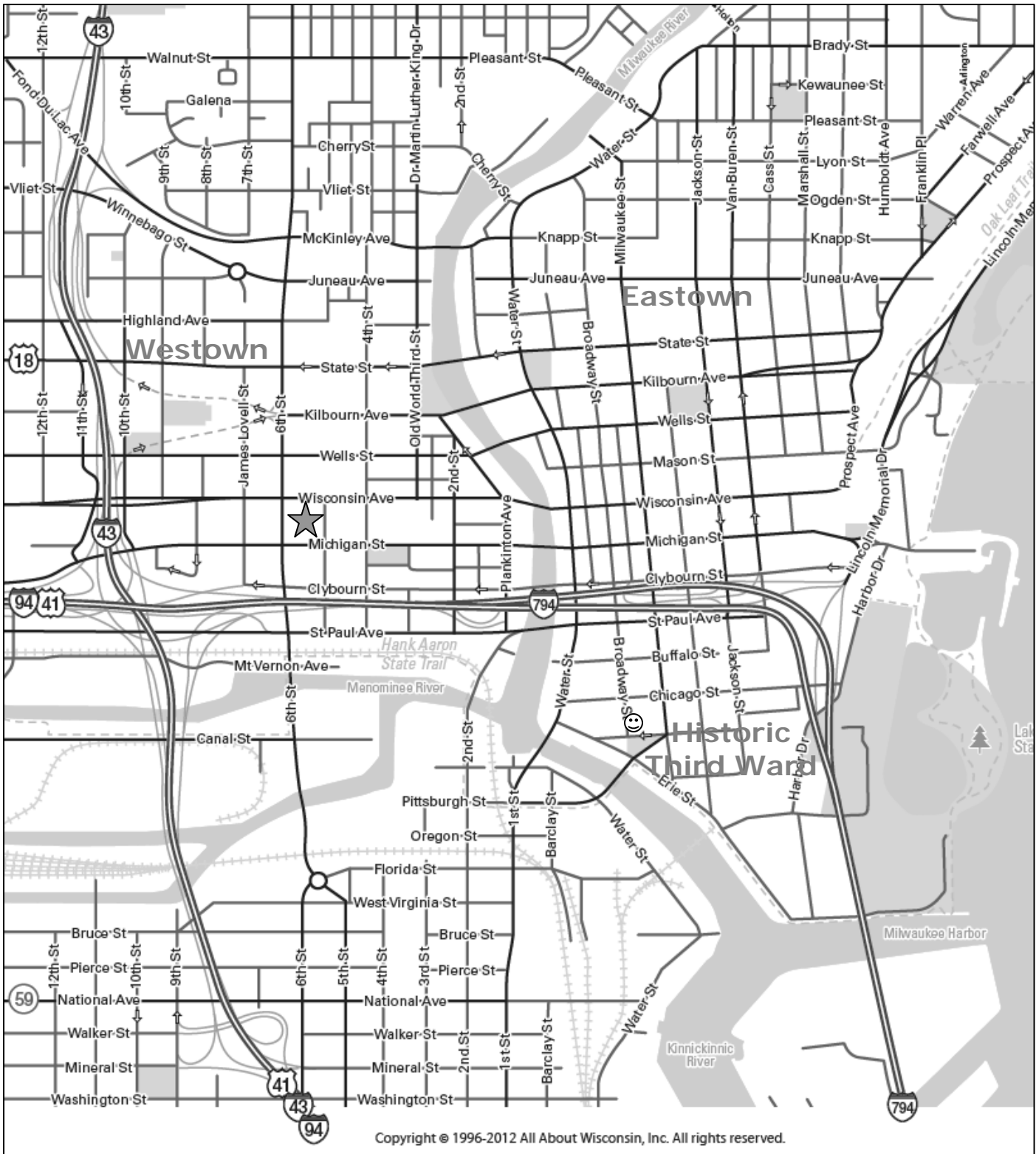
Friday Fish Fry is no longer free, yet even at the priciest restaurants, it's a low-cost meal. We've never seen it priced at more than \$15, and one south suburban bar we visited offers the meal for \$3.50!

Some venues, particularly church and veterans' halls, offer all-you-can-eat fish fry, an idea pioneered in 1957 by Louis Hirschinger, one-time operator of the still-extant Tanner-Paull American Legion Bar and Restaurant. Even without AYCE, portions are very generous.



* "Fish Fry Taste Conquers City in Wake of Return of Beer," Milwaukee Journal, July 9, 1933.

Downtown Milwaukee



- ★ = Hilton Milwaukee City Center
- ☺ = Skylight Music Theatre