



416 S. PARK STREET

A BRIEF HISTORY • 1922-2022

BEN HIRBY

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ITALIAN ORIGINS

The Mason Lounge occupies a Tudor Revival brick building known as The Frank Lombardo Store Building. It's a century-old part of Madison's once immigrant-rich Greenbush neighborhood.

Matteo "Frank" Lombardo and Giovanna "Anna" Lombardo, both born in 1881, immigrated from Palermo, Sicily to New Orleans in 1903. They lived in Plaquemine, Louisiana before moving their young family to "The Bush" in Madison.

In 1922, the Lombardos bought land from their neighbors Joe and Jennie Fideli and built their own shoe-repair business as part of Madison's Greenbush addition. At that time, S. Park St. was a bustling retail center. With its fresh, bright concrete paving, the 400 block boasted Ireland's Grocery, I. Stein's footwear and apparel shop, and later, Fedele's Barbershop.

**Best o'
Luck!**

May Fate smile her kindest
upon you during 1930 and
many years after.

Beneto Valenza

First Class
Shoe Repairing
416 S. Park St.

Ben Valenza in his Shoe Repair Shop, 416 S. Park Street. 1929



Ben Valenza in his Shoe Repair Shop. c.1929. Photo from "Spaghetti Corners: A Greenbush Cookbook", courtesy of the author, Catherine Murray.

Unfortunately, Matteo died less than two years into the venture. Unable to speak English and now a single mother with six kids, Anna rented the store to a neighbor, Benetto Valenza, who offered “First Class Shoe Repairing” at the shop for close to a decade.

FROM SHOES TO SPIRITS

The prohibition of alcohol in the US began with the passage of the Volstead Act in 1920. In 1926, Wisconsin held a referendum in which voters expressed their desire to allow the manufacture and sale of 2.75% beer. A subsequent referendum in 1929 resulted in repeal of enforcement of the act altogether, which was federally repealed in December of 1933.



Frank C. Lombardo behind his bar at “Frankie’s Tavern.” Note the shotgun over the front window, the stove, the FDR portraits, and the calendar showing January, 1936. Photo courtesy of David Lombardo.

FRANKIE’S TAVERN

Frank Casper Lombardo, Anna’s eldest son, was working as a meat cutter for a local grocer when he sensed opportunity. He filed for a liquor license during a Madison city council expansion, and by the summer of 1933, he opened Frankie’s Tavern. He was one of 57 taverns to receive a liquor license on Dec, 13, 1933, along with The Silver Dollar, Crystal Corner, and Ohio Tavern.



Frankie Lombardo behind his new bar with a drink in his hands. Note the sports figures etched in the glass backbar and the Four Roses bourbon promo clock above the back bar. c. 1953. Photo courtesy of David Lombardo.

Frankie's quickly became a neighborhood family place known for good company, food, and drink. Frank bought regular newspaper ads in the Wisconsin State Journal featuring meals, games, and draft beer.

One feature of Frankie's early days was a slot machine that used chips labeled "For Amusement Only." Patrons used these instead of legal tender to get around gambling ordinances. But since they purchased chips and then cashed them in at the end of the night, this was a loophole that didn't last. In September of 1933, Frankie's was one of 29 establishments raided by Capitol police, shutting down the practice.

FRANKIE'S TAVERN
 416 South Park Street
 "Frankie" Lombardo, Prop.
Wishes You All a Very
Happy New Year

Fri. Special	Sat. Special
FISH	FRIED
15c	25c
FRY	CHICKEN

CRIBBAGE TOURNAMENT
 Every Thursday

We Feature Blatz Beer!

FRESH	Fried Tender
PERCH	CHICKEN
Tonight	Saturday Night
20c	30c
FRANKIE'S TAVERN	
416 South Park Street	
BUDWEISER ON TAP	

Wisconsin State Journal ads from 1938 and 1940.



Hubie Pedracine making a cocktail at Frankie's on New Year's Eve c.1949. Note the stainless steel sinks that are still in use and the former backroom where the stage currently exists. Photo courtesy of Deanna Esser.



L to R: Hubie, Adelia, and Deanna Pedracine Esser (rest of people unknown) at the corner of the bar c. 1953. Note the wraparound bar, the entranceway, and the tufted booth in the corner that reportedly continued down the wall.

There was a fire at Frankie's in the summer of 1948. Frank used it as an opportunity to rebuild. He obtained a building permit, sold what fixtures were salvageable, and remodeled the entire space, enlarging the bar and making significant improvements. The front and back bars that still exist were a part of that reconstruction.

FRANKIE THE FAN

Frank was widely known as a supporter and sponsor of local sports. The etchings of athletes on the mirrored back bar are a nod to his devotion. He was an avid coach and sponsor of Madison softball, basketball, hockey, and bowling teams. Frankie's teams were consistently mentioned in the local papers, winning softball championships in 1936 and 1938, and basketball championships in 1949, '50 and '51.



Group portrait of Frankie's Tavern Cagers, with coach Frankie Lombardo, winners of the 1949 Madison Municipal Basketball tournament. Photo by Arthur M. Vinje, via the Wisconsin Historical Society.



1953 group portrait of Frankie's Tavern softball team in uniform, with team manager Frank Lombardo and bat boy David Lombardo, left. Photo by Arthur M. Vinje, via the Wisconsin Historical Society.

Frankie was also involved in the creation of the Madison Cardinals hockey team, which filled the void when the UW dropped its hockey program in the 30s, and set the stage for the modern UW hockey program of today.

Frank died doing something he loved. In August of 1955, at 51 years of age, he slumped over from a heart attack coaching first base at Breese Stevens ball field.

FRANKIE'S AFTER FRANKIE

In 1956, Harold and Betty Tennyson took over the bar and retained the "Frankie's Tavern" moniker. Frankie's changed hands again in 1960 when Victor and Esther Blum took it over. Victor had been a floor sander and was ready for a new career. One day he came home and announced he was buying a bar. His wife Esther, pregnant with their daughter Sandy, was bedridden and there was little she could do about it.

With the Blum's behind the bar, Frankie's continued to be a family establishment with lots of regulars, bowling leagues, baseball teams, police gatherings, and third shifters. They put in a flat-top grill and a fryer in the front so they could serve egg-topped hamburgers, steak sandwiches, and cottage fries. Sandy Blum

and her siblings often helped out at the family business. She recalled a bottle chute that sent returnables down a wire cage into the basement where she was in charge of re-boxing them. She learned how to play Cribbage and Euchre there, too, where rules were: "Buck a game. Double on a skunk. Winner buys a beer."

Press clippings give us glimpses into life at the tavern. In January of 1965, Victor Blum held a perfect "29" cribbage hand while playing a two-person game at the bar. And in 1970, Esther was quoted as saying "I hope to God they make it" as she watched the Apollo 13 splashdown on TV at the bar.

The Blum family lived off the nearby alleyway, so they put in an intercom between the house and the bar. One night, around 1am, Sandy remembers glass breaking and the police being called. It may have been the night that someone was injured badly on broken glass during a break-in.



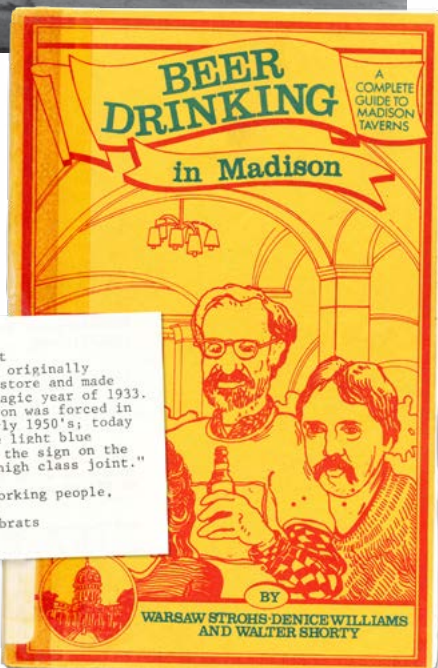
Hubert "Hubie" and Adelia Pedracine with Stan and Dorothea Baron at Frankie's Tavern in July, 1972, during the time Vic and Esther Blum ran the bar.

A NEW MONIKER: TUBBY'S PLACE

In early 1979, the Blums put Frankie's up for sale and John and Catherine Huseuth bought it. They renamed the bar "Tubby's Place," the first name change since 1933.



The front of Tubby's Place shown here in 1983. Elements of the Tudor Revival architectural style are present above the windows, and a Frankie's sign still hangs above the building. Photo from Wisconsin Historical Society, Architecture and History Inventory



**** Tubby's Place

416 S. Park Street
 DECOR-The building was originally constructed as a shoe store and made into a tavern in the magic year of 1933. Due to a fire renovation was forced in the late 1940's or early 1950's; today it has a very handsome light blue formica bar top. Note the sign on the back bar. "This is a high class joint." Yeah, it is.
 CLIENTELE-students, working people, residents of the area
 FOOD-burgers, chili, brats
 PRICES-cheap

A Tubby's review from 1983's edition of Beer Drinking in Madison: A Complete Guide to Madison Taverns.



Matt picking grapes above the patio behind the building with the old Recovery Room sign.

RECOVERY ROOM

Have you ever noticed the Old Style sign over the back patio? In 1985, David Lombardo, son of Frankie, and owner of the building at the time, took over the bar from the Huseths. Seeking a fresh start, he built it back up and called it "The Recovery Room," welcoming medical workers in the area, as did The Klinik Bar down Park Street until it closed in 2007.

FRANKIE'S AGAIN

David decided the bar business wasn't really his thing and sold the bar to Darcy Brachman in 1987. She went retro with the name "Frankie's Again." She sold the bar in 1990.



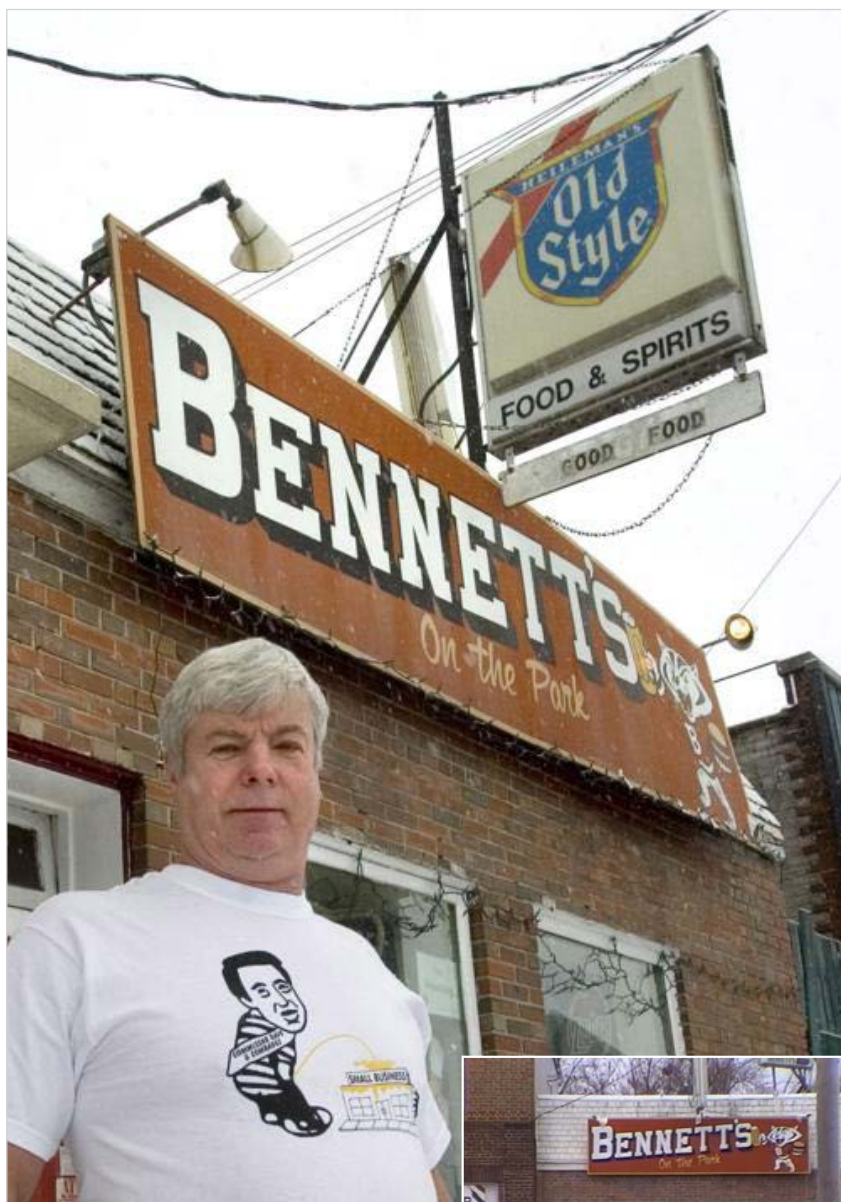
Phil Goldman and his buddies Ron and Greg, at the bar at Frankie's Again c.1990. Note the baseball mirror etching in the upper right which was replaced with a plain one. Also in the upper left corner is the 1936 photograph included previously.

BENNETT'S ON THE PARK

The most notorious bar to ever grace this building was undoubtedly Bennett's on the Park. Although Rich Bennett reportedly served good food and drink for 17 years, the bar was best known for "Smut & Eggs", a provocative pairing of video pornography and breakfast food on Saturdays started by his brother Gene at his Freeport Road location. In 2004 Madison banned smoking in bars, and by 2007, Rich Bennett blamed the ban for a loss of business and closed.

BACK TO THE 20S

In 2007, Jerry Canon and his son Ben brought a prohibition theme to the place, which was very appropriate given its origins. They installed a speakeasy peep-hole door in front, sold pitchers out of lined wooden buckets, and named food and drink after flappers and gangsters. They also had three large televisions for watching sports. Unfortunately, Azzalino's attracted trouble at bar time and the city of Madison revoked their liquor license in 2009.



Rich Bennett in front of Bennett's on the Park. c. 2007.
Photo by Henry A. Koshollek, The Capital Times



Bennett's on the Park with a red sedan out front.
Photo: City or Madison Assessor

THE MASON LOUNGE

In 2010, Bryan Richgels returned to his hometown of Madison after spending ten years in Portland, Oregon, where he worked fixing up old houses and hosting tastings at a fine winery.



Bryan adds a beer to the chalkboard.

He wasn't intending to open a business when he came across 416 S. Park St, but the brick face reminded him of a favorite place back in Portland, and the idea for the Mason began to form. Independent of recent history, he envisioned a very different bar: a low-key lounge that offered craft beer, fine whiskey and wine, encouraged conversation, and played great music.

He brought his unique sense of style to the place, applying his skilled trades and upcycled tastes to create a cozy, quirky

atmosphere. Preferring to partner with Falbo's Pizza next door or have guests carry in food, he removed the greasy kitchen up front to make room for more comfortable seating. And he put the kibosh on the big televisions, although one might show up for a key Badger or Packers game from time to time. In 2013 he built a fenced-in patio in the back and planted a merlot grapevine that today completely covers the pergola, creating an inviting outdoor seating space.

The Mason hosted live music weekly, making good use of the stage in the back of the bar. The Five Points Jazz Collective played most Tuesdays to an eager and regular crowd. Milk Street Radio and The Old Tin Can String Band also performed regular gigs.



Matt hangs a banner in the Summer of 2020 announcing that Mason has reopened.

UNDER NEW 'MATT'AGEMENT

Having worked in bars in Madison, Matt Kleiser was one of Bryan's earliest and most experienced bartenders. So after ten years, when Bryan was ready to move onto other ventures, Matt jumped at the chance to own the Mason. The transition began in late 2019 without much fanfare.

In March of 2020, Governor Evers issued the Safer at Home order. The Mason closed and remained so until July of that year. Matt reopened with some new pandemic-oriented features: an expanded outdoor seating space with a vegetable garden and heaters, a new air filtration system, and a hand-cranked canning device for packaging tap beer and cocktails to go.

As of this writing, the Mason Lounge is alive and well. Matt and a few trusted bartenders continue the spirit of the neighborhood tavern. Please tip them well. Cheers!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This history was researched and written by Ben Hirby, a friend of the Mason and patron since 2010. If you know any history or have images from the past, he'd love to hear from you at ben@hirby.org.

THE MASON LOUNGE

416 S. PARK ST.

THEMASONLOUNGE.COM