

checkback**King went
all to pieces
at death**

Checkback is a weekly feature of The Morning News that tries to answer the question "Whatever happened to . . . ?"

For King Gambrinus, the 9-foot-tall patron saint of Wilmington beer drinkers, things have literally fallen apart.

In July, the zinc monarch — who traced his lineage to the legendary Flemish king credited with first brewing beer — was shown in a newspaper photo reigning over a field of junked cars. But a worse indignity was to come.

About a month later, the king met a fate that was once thought to be the exclusive realm of intoxicated commuters: He was smashed on Airport Road.

Gambrinus' decline contained enough Byzantine turns to satisfy the most demanding students of palace intrigues: an exile during the Prohibition years, a missing arm clutching a flagon of beer, a touch that — like Midas' — brought ruin, and, finally, an undependable eye.

Now, he lies in more than a hundred pieces somewhere in Dismouthtown, Pa. His exact location — and his future — are a mystery. His only hope for a new kingdom rests with an antique restorer who once fixed a broken stone Indian.

Like many good ideas in the world of beer, King Gambrinus was conceived by a German. Joseph Stoeckle, a native of Wurttemberg, came to Wilmington in 1871 and established the Diamond State Brewery at Fifth and Adams streets.

In 1881, the brewery burned. Stoeckle had it rebuilt, and to celebrate, had a Brooklyn, N.Y., firm cast the king — complete with an overflowing stein of beer.

The brewery prospered until 1926, when Prohibition shut its doors. Although it reopened in 1936, temperance had taken its toll — the brewery went bankrupt in 1955.

In 1962, the brewery was demolished to make way for Interstate 95. Gambrinus, now minus the royal stein and the arm that held it, was dethroned.

Francis Corridori, owner of the old King's Inn on Naamans Road near Fouk Road, resurrected the king as an imposing welcome for patrons of his tavern. But Corridori had to close the tavern and Gambrinus was passed to his son, Tom.

Tom, now a 27-year-old resident of Brookmont Farms, said he turned down an offer of \$10,000 for the king two years ago.

When last photographed together in July, Tom and the king were hoisting foamy ones over the rusted Fords and Dodges at Continental Auto Salvage, 406 Airport Road.

Then Corridori sold the king to an antique dealer.

Eager to unload his Highness, Ed Frye, the salvage yard owner, offered to put him on the dealer's pickup truck. A metal hook was attached to an eye bolt on the king.

The winch started raising the statue when it happened:

The eye snapped and King Gambrinus was reduced to a pile of rubble on Airport Road.

By TERRY BIVENS