

Checkin' out the taps at Maxwell's Plum

English-style pub, grill has 60 beer lines

By Carol Johnstone
Special Features Writer

Maxwell's Plum.
You can't miss it.

Big sign on the side of the building on the corner of Grafton and Sackville streets in downtown Halifax.

It's an English-style pub and grill, full service 'til 2 am.

Walking through the double doors I'm struck by warm air Med with laughter, talk, and '60s rock and roll. The first thing I notice is the stand-alone square old oak bar in the centre. The bartender is almost hidden by beer taps topped by beer-bottle levers that encircle the bar.

An old wooden barrel sits on the floor at one corner of the bar filled with peanuts; here and there shells litter the hardwood floor. A waitress approaches wearing a short-sleeved blue denim shirt and dark green apron to take my order.

Coffee.

Pm on duty after all.

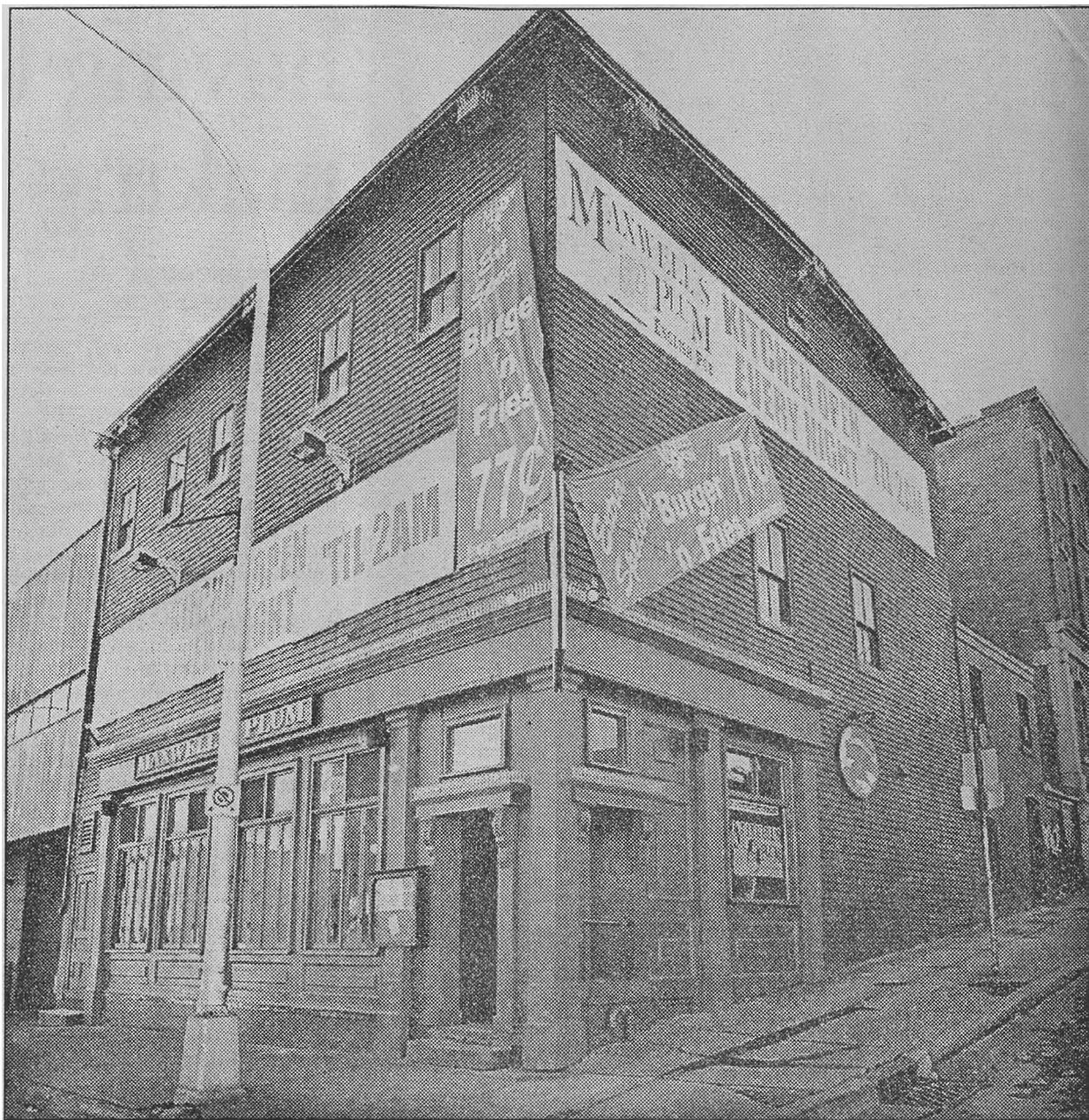
As she turns to fetch manager Alan Gordon, the back of her shirt is adorned with 'Where Good Beer Drinkers Gather.'

When Mr. Gordon and partner, Lance Webber took over the bar in February of '97, there were only six lines in place. Now there are 60. "While all the lines are in place, we're waiting for one new one to come in and get hooked up. We're hoping to put in Heineken," he says.

They have beer from all five Nova Scotia breweries: Sleeman's Maritime; Keith's TaBatts; Moosehead, and the microbreweries, Propeller and Garrison, plus many special order beers from the U.K., like Newcastle, Double Diamond, Tartan, and Beamish, plus numerous single-malt scotches and a full liquor bar.

Mr. Gordon becomes quite animated as he takes me on a tour of the basement I just have to see how all that beer gets up to those taps.

We head down steep wooden steps to the basement. As he opens the door, we're enveloped with a sigh



Ully P. Bleil Photography

Maxwell's Plum is hard to miss on the corner of Grafton and Sackville streets in downtown Halifax.

of cold air steeped with a strong yeasty beer smell.

"You have to push the beer with 18 to 22 pounds of pressure," he says.

He uses a nitrogen and CO2 blend, considered the best, he says.

"We use so much of it, that instead of buying it already made in 30-pound canisters, we have a machine that makes the nitrogen, extracting it from the air."

We enter a small, cement-lined room with a free-standing wall in the

middle. AU are lined with mostly 50-litre-sized steel kegs. Red plastic tubes containing gas enter each one and clear tubes with beer lead out.

Mr. Gordon instructs me to put my fingers in some open water swirling around polyethylene tubing.

"These are water baths that keep the beer lines cold all the way up as they leave the keg room," he says.

It's cold. The room itself is kept between 1-20 C.

After we go back upstairs, we

check out the bar area and the taps themselves.

"Now, if you hold the handle, you'll see what I mean by keeping it cold."

Definitely.

"Behind that sliding door, that's where we keep our mugs cold."

As the bartender edges around us in the cramped space, she says, "All kinds of cold mugs."

Next time I stop by, I'll order up a cold one, perhaps Mr. Gordon's favourite, Newcastle amber ale.