

Houston Ice and Brewing Company's Magnolia Brewery

by

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The remnants of one of the largest and most famous breweries of Houston lie immediately downstream of the Franklin Avenue bridge. Several structures on the south bank of the bayou have survived from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when the Houston Ice and Brewing Company operated the Magnolia Brewery at this location, and by 1903, nearly 200,000 barrels of fine quality beer were produced annually for thirsty Houstonians.

The Houston Ice and Brewing Association was incorporated in 1887, with Hugh Hamilton as the president of the company, Bertrand Adoue as the vice-president and Hyman Prince as the secretary and treasurer. The story, however, begins much earlier and it revolves around the company's founder Hugh Hamilton and his expertise in the ice manufacturing business which was critical to the commercialization of breweries and the growth of the beer industry¹.

Beer, historically, was a warm beverage. In the United States, the first lager beers were produced in the early 1840's. Jonathan Wagner is credited with making the first lager beer in North America in Philadelphia in 1842. As spring ales, they were brewed in the winter and allowed to ferment in the cold air of winter. Lager beer is brewed in cool conditions with a slow acting yeast, then stored ("lagered") in cool conditions to clear the beer of particles and flavors. Brewing usually was a family operation and was done on a small scale. These were craft brewers².

For industrial production, brew masters had to move away from the craft brewing techniques. The brew masters had to exercise a high degree of control over the temperature of the beer so they could brew the beer all during the year, not just in the cooler months. Many brewers used natural ice in their operations. Ice was cut in the winter from frozen streams and lakes in the north and stored in sawdust insulated containers until it was needed. However, the year round production of lager beer required a level of ice production that could not be maintained through ice harvesting alone³.

In 1859, Ferdinand Carre patented in France an absorption process for making artificial ice, as they called it. The Carre process got a boost in Texas during the Civil War when the supply of natural ice from the north was cut off. Daniel Livingston Holden installed a Carre machine in San Antonio during the war and improved his Carre machine to produce clear ice while using distilled water. In 1873, David Boyle established the first ammonia compression plant for making artificial ice in Jefferson, Texas. These early attempts at refrigeration systems involved a labor intensive method with a series of 10 x 14 foot plates immersed in water with an ammonia refrigerant. An alternate method was the can ice system which required distilled water to prevent bubbles, but it was simple and less labor intensive. It made ice in three hundred pound cans. The use of ammonia, though, in the production of artificial ice was troublesome and dangerous⁴.

At the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in August, 1876, there was a major breakthrough in the technology of making artificial ice. Raoul Pictet, an inventor from Geneva, Switzerland, exhibited his new ice making machine. Pictet's machine differed from the more common liquifaction process using ammonia. His ice machine employed a vaporization and expansion process using the less expensive and less hazardous fluid of anhydrous sulphurous acid. The Pictet ice machine itself was quite compact, consisting of a 6-1/2 foot long cylindrical, tubular copper boiler with a diameter of 14 inches that was submerged in a steel vat. The Pictet process, with an eight horsepower engine, could manufacture 550 pounds of artificial ice in an hour. With that kind of productivity, the demand for the manufacture of artificial ice and cold air for refrigerating rooms for breweries skyrocketed. Refrigeration began to be commercialized and breweries became the largest users of the new refrigeration technology. By the end of the decade, the modern era of beer brewing had begun in the United States with the support of the industrial advances in commercial refrigeration, automatic bottling machines, pasteurization and railroad distribution. There were over 2,500 breweries in the United States by the late 1870's, producing about ten million barrels of beer per year (at thirty-one gallons per barrel)⁵.

The story of breweries in Houston began about 1849 with German immigrant Peter Gabel who opened a brewery on Preston Avenue at Caroline Street. Shortly thereafter, Henry Schulte, who had partnered briefly with Gabel, opened his own brewery near Frost Town and then moved to the banks of Buffalo Bayou at San Jacinto Street and Commerce Avenue. The Floeck family operated a brewery on their tract near Jackson Street. Each of these breweries were family owned craft breweries and probably produced modest quantities of beer in season. They operated on a small scale up to and through the Civil War, and into the 1870's as well.

By 1877, there were three breweries in Houston. Frederick Hahn had a brewery at the corner of Crockett Street and Beach Street where he also resided (on the banks of White Oak Bayou, four blocks east of Houston Avenue). Gerhard Schulte had taken over the operation of his brother's brewery about 1866 at the same location on San Jacinto Street. John Wagner and Charles Hermann were proprietors of Gabel's brewery on Preston Avenue⁶.

At this same time, the other component necessary for commercial brewing was beginning to appear in Houston. Elisha Hall and R. R. Everett established the Houston Ice Manufacturing Company. The ice house, or manufacturing facility, was located on the north side of Buffalo Bayou, near the City Water Works. Their retail office was on the south side of Prairie Avenue between Main Street and Fannin Street⁷.

Within two years, there was a significant expansion of the ice business in Houston. Elisha Hall brought C. C. Wiggin and B. C. Simpson into the Houston Ice Company and expanded the manufacturing of artificial ice at their plant located near Wiggin and Simpson's Phoenix Iron Works where the expertise for making the boilers and vessels necessary for the ice production process was available⁸.

In addition to the Houston Ice Company, Leigh Hutchins and Company operated the Pictet Ice Company, bringing the advanced ice making technology invented by Raoul Pictet to Houston in 1879. The Pictet plant was located on the south side of Washington Avenue between 5th and 6th Streets. Hyman Prince established an ice company as well, although he was probably a dealer rather than a manufacturer of ice. Prince's office was on the south side of Preston Avenue between Main Street and Fannin Street⁹.

The increased availability of ice and refrigeration had its effect on the breweries of Houston, too. John Wagner and Charles Hermann continued to operate the Peter Gabel Brewery on Preston Avenue as they had in the past. They were "bottlers of beer for family use" and proprietors of Gabel's saloon in the craft brewing tradition that had been common for the previous three decades. But, the beer business was changing¹⁰.

Houston's other brewery, owned by Gerhard Schulte and located on Commerce Avenue, enhanced its offerings of locally brewed beer with beer from the W. J. Lemp Company of St. Louis, Missouri. Rail cars refrigerated with an abundant supply of manufactured ice permitted larger breweries in the Midwest to ship their beer to places far beyond their own town. Regional beer distribution networks followed the railroad connections into major cities of Texas and the South where it was believed that the climate was too warm to produce quality lager beer. Seizing this opportunity, in 1879, Gerhard Schulte became the Houston agent for William J. Lemp's St. Louis lager beer¹¹.

Other regional brewers came to the Houston market, too. At this same time, the Eberhard Anheuser Company Brewing Association of St. Louis was represented in Houston by Henry Sues. Advertising itself as the "Largest brewery in the West. Bottling capacity 100,000 bottles per day," the Anheuser Company's secretary Adolphus Busch formed his first venture to provide beer to Houstonians. Busch and his companies would be associated with brewing in Houston from 1879 through the current day¹².

It was in this environment that Hugh Hamilton, the man who would be the most significant personality in the brewing of beer in Houston, came to town.

Hugh Hamilton was born in County Tyrone, Ireland, in July, 1852. Raised in Glasgow, Scotland, Hamilton came to the United States at age seventeen and began working at the Cramps Shipbuilding Yards in Philadelphia. It was there that he learned the boilermaker's trade. Hamilton went to San Antonio, Texas initially, but in 1878, he made his way to Houston on foot, walking from San Antonio. The twenty-six year old Irishman found lodging at the Green Tree House which was operated by Mrs. Julia W. Cleary. The boarding house's location on Preston Avenue near the Phoenix Iron Works may have been planned or fortuitous, but it would be significant in both his personal life and his business career¹³.

Immediately upon settling in his new town, Hamilton bought the ice factory owned by Wiggin and Simpson, one of the first such factories in Texas, and rebuilt the plant to make it more efficient. His skills as a boilermaker and pipe fitter allowed him to modernize and improve upon the ice making process so that this plant could produce five tons of ice per day. Hamilton sold his ice for ten cents a pound, and the potential seemed unlimited¹⁴.

In 1880, Hugh Hamilton and Company, proprietors of the Crystal Ice Manufacturing Company, proudly advertised that they made “artificial ice, as clear, solid and lasting as any natural ice.” Hamilton had formed his company with his friend Michael M. Mooney of San Antonio and Emile Hoencke, a local merchant who had a groceries and provisions store on the corner of Dallas Avenue and Smith Street. The office and plant were located near the City Water Works on the north side of Buffalo Bayou, and retail operations were handled from their office at 247 Preston Avenue. An ice house for the company was located at the corner of the Houston and Texas Central Railway and 2nd Street¹⁵.

About this same time, Hugh Hamilton fell in love with the daughter of the proprietress of the Green Tree House. Mary Wickham married Hugh Hamilton at Annunciation Church in Houston on November 21, 1881. The family grew and prospered along with the ice business. Daughter Julia was born in October, 1882, followed by another daughter Mary in June, 1884 and son Hugh, Jr. in August, 1885. Daughter Agnes came along in June, 1887, but Hamilton's wife Mary suffered a hemorrhage following the birth of Agnes, and Mary Wickham Hamilton died on August 13, 1888. After Mary's death, Hugh Hamilton married Lily Imhoff. Tragic events, though, followed and that marriage ended when Lily died in childbirth on October 16, 1896. Both mother Lily and infant daughter were buried in Glenwood Cemetery¹⁶.

During the decade of the 1880's, competition intensified in both the ice manufacturing business and the beer business in Houston. The local breweries expanded their business as suppliers of beers from the large regional breweries, and de-emphasized their own local brewing. The W. J. Lemp Western Brewery of St. Louis built an establishment on the former Gerhard Schulte property at the corner of San Jacinto Street and Commerce Avenue. The Joseph Schlitz Company of Milwaukee distributed beer from their agent's office at 46 Franklin Avenue. And, later in the decade, the Lone Star Brewing Company of San Antonio established an office on the northeast corner of Travis Street and Preston Avenue and tried to break into the Houston market¹⁷.

An advertisement by the W. J. Lemp Western Brewery in 1884 showed why these local operations would not succeed in the changing beer business. Lemp's ad promoted their St. Louis keg and bottled beer and proudly announced that they had “a full supply of beer and lake ice.” Lake ice as a means of keeping beer cool was on the way out. The future was in manufactured ice, and no one knew this better than Adolphus Busch as he dreamed of a national beer business from his St. Louis brewing operations¹⁸.

Adolphus Busch established the American Brewing Association in Houston as the agent for the Anheuser-Busch Brewing Association's Budweiser Bottled Beer by 1882. Busch, in St. Louis, was the president of the American Brewing Association, but Isidor Japhet, a local wholesale liquor dealer and merchant, was vice president. They built an ice factory and cold storage facility at the corner of 2nd Street and Railroad Street, and boasted that they had “the largest ice plant in the south” and they sold Dixie Pale and Hackerbrau bottled beer and American Standard keg beer. If you think that a cold beer on a hot afternoon today is refreshing, can you imagine what a “cold” beer in Houston in the 1880's was like? The future was cold beer, with an emphasis on cold¹⁹.

The demand for ice was not lost on Hugh Hamilton. Hamilton expanded his ice manufacturing operations throughout the 1880's and was a principal in Houston's two commercial ice production companies, his Crystal Ice Manufacturing Company and the Central Ice Manufacturing Company, a dealership operated by Hyman Prince, but the plant was managed by Hugh Hamilton. Both of these ice companies were located on the north bank of Buffalo Bayou along Washington Avenue between 4th Street and 6th Street. Hamilton also began to manufacture and sell his ice making machines. By 1886, the Crystal Ice Factory was the manufacturer of “Hamilton's Celebrated Ice Machines” that were made to order for any size, could be shipped anywhere in Texas and were the best and cheapest machines in use²⁰.

In 1889, Hugh Hamilton decided to compete directly with Busch's American Brewing Association in the cold beer market. Hamilton became the agent for the Christian Moerlein Brewing Association of Cincinnati. The Christian Moerlein Brewery was the most prominent brewery in Cincinnati and it sold beer throughout the United States, and even internationally. Its beer was considered to be one of the superior products on the market and, with beer vaults located adjacent to the Crystal Ice Factory at the corner of Washington Avenue and 4th Street, Hamilton was in direct competition with the American Brewing Association of Adolphus Busch a few blocks away. Hamilton advertised that he could provide “the finest beer on the market” from supplies that were replenished daily. Not surprisingly, many people agreed with that. Moerlein beer was thought to be the best on the market at the time, and the brewery's distribution system was one of the most extensive of its day. The brewery continued to operate after the death of its founder Christian Moerlein in 1897, but closed in 1920 with the enactment of Prohibition and did not re-open after the law's repeal²¹.

The next move by Hugh Hamilton was even more audacious. In 1892, he joined with his old friend Hyman Prince, with the Galveston investment firm of Adoue and Lobit, and with William M. Rice to build a large brewery plant on the site where his ice plant was located. Formally established in February, 1893, this venture was the Houston Ice and Brewing Association, and its brewery was called the Magnolia Brewery²².

Well known local architect Eugene Heiner designed and built the Houston Ice and Brewing Association's new main building on the northwest corner of Washington Avenue and 4th Street. Construction began in early 1892, and the elaborate and ornate five story brick structure was completed in 1893. In February, 1893, the final stages of construction included the drilling of a large, eight inch artesian water well for the brewery. This well, one of the largest in the City at the time, was drilled to a depth of over 800 feet in order to provide the brewery with the purest water possible. The state of the art brewing facility housed two large ice machines that had a total capacity of 100 tons of ice per day. Water for both the ice and beer operations was obtained from three artesian wells, 800 feet, 300 feet and 150 feet in depth, giving the brewery the capability of producing 60,000 barrels of beer annually²³.

On Friday, April 28, 1893, the Magnolia Brewery held a grand opening of the new brewery that had been under construction for a year. Festivities began at 10:00 am and went on all day. Special arrangements were made for "wage workers" who could not attend the grand opening in the daytime. The brewery's grand opening was extended with evening hours from 6:00 pm to 10:00 pm²⁴.

The Houston Ice and Brewing Company employed the German born Frederick P. "Fritz" Kalb as their brew master, and Hugh Hamilton excelled in making the refrigeration which enabled his brewers to make a uniform product all year round. The Magnolia Brewery began producing a general brand called Magnolia and a selection of bottled beer brands, including Extra Pale, Standard and its most popular, Southern Select. On February 25, 1894, the Houston Ice and Brewing Company proudly announced that they had proven that the climate of Texas and Houston, in particular, could be adapted for the brewing of beer. By 1895, they were brewing more than 35,000 barrels a year²⁵.

By 1897, the executive management of the Houston Ice and Brewing Company was composed of Hugh Hamilton as the president, Joseph F. Meyer, vice president, and Hyman Prince, secretary-treasurer. The management had challenges other than producing a quality product. The brewer's union was well represented in Houston, and the union frequently met with Hamilton regarding labor issues. Often the workers went on strike, but the matters were usually resolved quickly²⁶.

In one episode, the tenor of the times and the character of Hugh Hamilton's management could be seen. On May 27, 1899, the brewer's union called upon Hugh Hamilton to hire only union men in his brewery. Hamilton asked if that meant he would have to discharge his African-American workers, many of whom had worked faithfully for him for five to ten years. The union representatives said that it did. Hamilton told the union that he could not in good conscience fire the African-American men, and he promised to keep the brewery operating as usual²⁷.

Robert L. Autrey joined the corporate management of the Houston Ice and Brewing Company as secretary about 1900. Autrey helped the company navigate through some legal issues brought by the State of Texas. In a court action, the Houston Ice and Brewing Company forfeited its charter on December 14, 1901. A new company of the same name was then incorporated and it took over the assets and liabilities of the former company. The reorganized management of 1902 included Hugh Hamilton as the president and Robert Autrey as the secretary-treasurer. H. Baldwin Rice joined the company as vice president, and long time brewer Fred P. Kalb oversaw the brewing operations as the superintendent and brew master²⁸.

Business for the Houston Ice and Brewing Company was good. In the years around the turn of the twentieth century, the company was producing about 250 tons of ice each day and reaching its capacity of 200,000 barrels of beer annually. In one extraordinary venture, the company was running two power boats to Key West, Florida to ship its beer to Cuba. This success allowed the company to improve its facilities²⁹.

On November 15, 1902, to accommodate the expansion of the business, construction began on a \$70,000 addition to the Magnolia Brewery on Washington Avenue. The new four story brick building was located on the brewery property between 4th and 5th Streets. The design by architect Olle J. Lorehn blended in with the two buildings on each side, and the structure incorporated design features similar to the original Heiner building on the east side. By 1907, the Houston Ice and Brewing plant and associated buildings, located on the north side of Buffalo Bayou along Washington Avenue, included the main building and an extensive brewing complex consisting of cold storage rooms, freezing tanks, ice storage, a wash room and beer cooling and storage cellars. The Magnolia Brewery facilities on the south side of

Washington Avenue included the bottling works, the office and stables surrounding a brick-paved courtyard³⁰.

A few years later, in 1912, the Houston Ice and Brewing Company expanded across the bayou to Franklin Avenue into a three story building redesigned by the firm of H. C. Cooke and Company and built on the foundations of a late nineteenth century structure. Magnolia Building, constructed partially over Buffalo Bayou, was connected with buildings on the north bank by a concrete platform over the bayou. The adjacent two story structure on the corner of Franklin Avenue and Milam Street served as the company's executive offices and tap room and also housed the Magnolia Cafe. The Houston Ice and Brewing Company, at its greatest extent, in 1915, consisted of ten buildings on twenty acres extending across both sides of Buffalo Bayou. It was an imposing presence in downtown Houston³¹.

In January, 1909, the Houston Ice and Brewing Company advertised its newest product from the Magnolia Brewery, Richelieu beer. Richelieu was brewed using the same methods used by breweries in the town of Pilsen (now in the Czech Republic). Pilsener beer has a pale, golden color with a creamy dense head and a rich, sweet malt flavor. The Richelieu beer was sold in kegs only, while Southern Select was a bottled beer³².

In early 1910, Fred Kalb, the Bavaria-born brew master and superintendent at the Magnolia Brewery retired at age forty-seven. Kalb, who immigrated to the United States in 1881, had worked at the Magnolia Brewery since its beginnings. His departure left the critical position of brew master vacant, and Hugh Hamilton began a search for a new brew master that would take over two years³³.

In 1912, about the same time that the new Magnolia Building on the south bank of Buffalo Bayou was being completed, Belgian-born Frantz Hector Brogniez was hired as the brew master for the Houston Ice and Brewing Company. With an excellent reputation in the industry, Brogniez was just what the Magnolia Brewery needed.

Frantz Hector Brogniez [[link to http://magnoliaballroom.com/brewmaster.html](http://magnoliaballroom.com/brewmaster.html)] was born in Haine-St. Paul, Belgium, about thirty-five miles south of Brussels, on October 26, 1860. He graduated from the University of Louvain with a degree in biochemistry and worked at a brewery in Lichtervelde, Belgium. Brogniez separated from his first wife Cornelia van der Hulst and, in 1896, he married the eighteen year old Alida Mathilde Grymonprez, who was seventeen years younger. Frantz and Alida Brogniez immigrated to the United States in 1896 to make a new start. They moved to Detroit where Frantz was hired to establish the Tivoli Brewery in 1897. Alida Brogniez fell ill and died on March 27, 1903. Alida's dying wish was that Frantz marry her younger sister Alice Albertine Grymonprez. Frantz and the eighteen year old Alice were married in 1904. Frantz Brogniez, his wife and his two children by Alida moved to Terre Haute, Indiana in 1904 where he was hired to design the construction of the People's Brewery. He was the brew master there until he joined the Magnolia Brewery in Houston in 1912³⁴.

Brogniez was already famous in the industry for his quality beers, but his work at the Magnolia Brewery was extraordinary. Under Brogniez, the Magnolia Brewery's Southern Select beer won the Grand Prix at the World's Fair in Ghent, Belgium in 1913. The general public concurred with the judges' assessment in the best way possible. The Houston Ice and Brewing Company became the largest brewing company south of Milwaukee³⁵.

What is more remarkable, however, is that the Grand Prix was awarded to what was most likely the first batch of beer made by Brogniez for the Magnolia Brewery. After Brogniez moved his family to Houston from Terre Haute in 1912, he certainly must have made the preparations as brew master to add his particular formulations to Magnolia's Southern Select beer. By December, Brogniez's beer was brewed, and for four months the lagering process was allowed to work its magic on the beer. The beer was bottled in early April, 1913 and this fresh batch of Southern Select bottles was stored for four months prior to being sent to the competition at the Exposition Universelle et Internationale of 1913. The Exposition Universelle et Internationale was what we call a World's Fair today, and the one in 1913 was held in Ghent, Belgium from April to October³⁶.

The competition at the World's Fair was intense as four thousand sixty-eight breweries had entered their beer products in the judging. Beers from all over the world were represented at the event, but in the end, only one beer prevailed. On August 11, 1913, Frantz Brogniez received a Western Union telegram from his friends at the Zymotechnic Institute in Chicago that his beer had been awarded the Diplome de Grand Prix at the Exposition Universelle et Internationale, Gent (Ghent)³⁷.

Within a week, Robert L. Autrey, vice president of the Houston Ice and Brewing Company announced in the local press the great news that the company under Brogniez had been awarded the Grand Prix. Advertisements throughout the fall highlighted the Grand Prix award for the much celebrated Southern

Select brew. The accomplishment was truly exceptional for a beer brewed in Texas. Even today, the Heineken company still touts its own Diplome de Grand Prix that was awarded at the Exposition Universelle de 1889 in Paris³⁸.

As the Magnolia Brewery was growing in prominence in the second decade of the twentieth century, it was also faced with intense competition in the regional beer market. Price wars over beer were common, and many of the small craft breweries did not survive. There was a lot of consolidation in the industry. Local brewers grew at the expense of the craft breweries and of the large regional brewers with extensive distribution networks. The number of breweries in the United States declined to about 1,400 in 1914. Attempts to gain a competitive edge led some brewers in Texas to espouse questionable practices and, in 1915, several breweries in Texas were accused of violations of Texas anti-trust statutes and of making contributions of corporate funds to political campaigns³⁹.

In addition to this difficult economic environment, brewers faced the rising influence of the temperance movement in the United States. The temperance lobby became quite politically astute at this time and displayed an influence in Washington that jeopardized the beer industry. The onset of the hostilities of the world war permitted the prohibition lobby to ride a "wave of virulent xenophobia that came with World War I" aimed at German immigrants and other groups who regarded alcohol consumption as a part of their cultural traditions. On April 4, 1917, the day Congress declared war on Germany, Texas Senator Morris Sheppard introduced the prohibition amendment in the U. S. Senate. By the end of 1917, the proposed constitutional amendment was approved by Congress. The Texas legislature ratified the federal amendment in 1918, and by 1919, the 18th Amendment to the U. S. Constitution, commonly known as Prohibition, was ratified by the necessary number of states⁴⁰.

In anticipation that the 18th Amendment would go into effect (which it did on January 17, 1920), Hugh Hamilton began to diversify away from the brewing business. In summer of 1918, the Houston Ice and Brewing Company installed \$600,000 of new machinery to convert the brewery into a business that manufactured food products. The Magnolia Dairy Products Company, as this new venture was called, produced a variety of dairy products, including Honey Boy Ice Cream, buttermilk, cottage cheese, Magnolia Brand Butter and condensed milk. The logo of a magnolia blossom in a lone star, carried over from the familiar brewery logo, was imprinted on the company's packaging. By January, 1920, the 69 year old Hugh Hamilton, once the foremost brewer in Houston and, perhaps, Texas, declared himself to be a manufacturer of dairy products⁴¹.

In mid-summer of 1922, Hugh Hamilton traveled to Milwaukee for medical treatment, and on Friday night, August 4, 1922, he died there. His body was returned to Houston and Hugh Hamilton was laid to rest in the family plot in Washington Cemetery alongside his first wife Mary and their son Hugh, Jr. who died in an automobile accident in 1911⁴².

James H. Studdert, the secretary of the Houston Ice and Brewing Company and a long time associate of Hugh Hamilton, took over the management of Magnolia Dairy Products Company, and by 1924, had renamed it the Lone Star Creamery. Studdert operated the creamery well into the 1930's, but he relocated it elsewhere. In March, 1925, the building formerly occupied by the Magnolia Creamery was converted into a "first class popular priced hotel." The new owner, E. F. Williams, christened the new establishment as the Magnolia Hotel. The hotel, fitted with the most modern steam heating system, accommodated two hundred fifty guests, and each room was supplied with hot and cold water⁴³.

In the same year, architect Alfred Finn designed alterations to the part of the Magnolia Brewing complex at 110 Milam Street for the Dixon Packing Company, as the former Houston Ice and Brewing Company structures were put to other commercial uses⁴⁴.

The redeployment of the former Houston Ice and Brewing Company complex of buildings along the bayou was short lived. The rising waters of the Buffalo Bayou flood of May 31, 1929 damaged a portion of the complex and the concrete platform over the bayou. Then, the flood of December, 1935 did even greater damage to the buildings. Significant parts of the the Magnolia Hotel and the Dixon Packing Company were undermined by the swift current of Buffalo Bayou and portions of the buildings crumbled into the bayou⁴⁵.

The Houston Ice and Brewing Company, which closed during Prohibition, had its sprawling industrial plant devastated by the floods of 1929 and 1935. Although the 21st Amendment which repealed Prohibition was ratified in December, 1933, many regional and craft breweries in the United States were unable to re-open for business. Only about one hundred sixty breweries were able to be revived after Prohibition, and the Magnolia Brewery was not one of them. The Houston Ice and Brewing Company closed for good in 1950, but before it did, the old brewery attempted a comeback when Prohibition was repealed⁴⁶.

By 1932, the popular sentiment for the repeal of the Prohibition Amendment had grown to the point that the end of Prohibition seemed inevitable. As the bill for repeal was making its way through the U.S. Congress in late 1932, business interests began to plan for the legal sale of alcoholic beverages, including beer. In Texas, the Houston Ice and Brewing Company applied for and was granted a charter for the manufacture of beer on November 12, 1932. The new directors of the company, including Munford W. Hoover, Egbert O. Hall and J. T. Scott, Jr., announced their plans for the construction of a \$250,000 brewery as soon as the sale of beer was legalized⁴⁷.

For the re-opening of the brewery, the Houston Ice and Brewing Company recalled their reknown brew master. Frantz Brogniez had spent more than a decade in El Paso where he commuted to Juarez to work for the Juarez Brewery. He wasted no time in returning to Houston. He resigned from the Juarez Brewery in October, and in December, 1932, Frantz H. Brogniez was appointed as the vice president and superintendent of the Houston Ice and Brewing Company⁴⁸.

Promotional material in early 1933 indicated that the company's Southern Select beer would be brewed with the formula that won the Grand Prix in 1912. Throughout the summer and early fall of 1933, Munford W. Hoover, the president of the Houston Ice and Brewing Company, promoted the re-establishment of the famous brewery. He promised that a one thousand barrel per day brewery would be in operation in early 1934. Hoover, however, was unable to find the financial backing for the venture⁴⁹.

At this time, Howard Hughes decided to enter the revival of the brewery business, and he hired Frantz Brogniez to build the Gulf Brewing Company. Prohibition ended with the ratification of the Twenty-first Amendment, which repealed the Eighteenth Amendment, on December 5, 1933. Soon thereafter, in January, 1934, Frantz Brogniez, the president and brew master of the Gulf Brewing Company, was distributing the first batch of beer from the new \$1,250,000 brewery⁵⁰.

The Gulf Brewing Company facility was an ultramodern plant that was built under Brogniez's supervision from his own brewery designs. Located at 5425 Polk Avenue, on the south part of the Hughes Tool Company lot, Gulf Brewing was the first brewery to use the Muer Filter, a product made in Belgium, and the plant's initial production capacity was 220,000 barrels of beer per year. The brewery employed about fifteen hundred persons and produced a lager beer that was made with the same formula that had won the Grand Prix in 1913. The company held a contest to name the beer, and it was called Grand Prize Lager Beer to commemorate the international award⁵¹.

Frantz Brogniez died October 9, 1935, but his Grand Prize beer continued to be popular for another thirty years. In 1963, the Theodore Hamm Company of Minnesota bought the brand. Hamm's operated the brewery until 1967 when the plant was closed⁵².

In 1967, historical preservationist and architect Bart Truxillo acquired the old Magnolia Brewery building at 715 Franklin Avenue. Truxillo renovated what was left standing of the neo-classical structure, and during the early 1970's, it was the site of the Bismarck Restaurant, a fashionable downtown eatery managed by famed Houston restaurateur Manfred Jachmich. For the last several years, the second floor Magnolia Ballroom has been a popular place for meetings, parties, high school proms and other special events⁵³.

Today, from your boat on the bayou, you can still see the reinforced concrete foundation posts and support beams of the former Magnolia Building. The remains of the concrete infrastructure that supported the part of the building that extended about thirty feet into the channel of Buffalo Bayou lie under the modern bridge at Franklin Avenue. The nightclub, which occupies the basement of the Magnolia Brewery Building, uses the deck on the old foundation as a patio which is decorated with hanging baskets and potted plants⁵⁴. From this "balcony" you can enjoy the bayou view both under the Franklin bridge and to the south.

Passing downstream, imagine the concrete platform that covered the bayou and extended as far downstream as the last ragged-edged structure on the south bank. These are other parts of the Magnolia Brewery complex. The Dixon Meat Packing Company was the last tenant of the 7,000 square foot, four story building at 110 Milam Street that dates from 1906. Although vacant for more than thirty years, this building was redeveloped in 1996 as a private town home that features glass window walls to the bayou and a roof deck with a swimming pool.

The small fragment of the Houston Ice and Brewing Company embodied in the few structures in the corner of Milam Street and Franklin Avenue is an excellent reminder of the City's most historic brewery operation, but it scarcely reflects the full extent of the sprawling complex that consisted of ten buildings on twenty acres along the bayou. Nothing remains of the ice factory and main brewery on the north side of the bayou.

Footnotes

1. Industrial advantages of Houston, Texas and environs. Houston: Akehurst Publishing Co., 1894. Pages 61-62.
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3. Ibid.
4. Woolrich, Willis R. and Charles T. Clark. "Refrigeration." The Handbook of Texas Online. <<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/dqr01>> [Accessed August 23, 2011].
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6. "Great Exhibition. The Machinery Hall Display." New York Times, Wednesday, August 22, 1876, page 2. "Warm Beer." Kegeators.com.
7. Mooney & Morrison's directory of the city of Houston for 1877-78. Houston: Mooney & Morrison, 1877. Page 216.
8. Ibid. Page 109.
9. Morrison & Co.'s general directory of the city of Houston for 1879-80. Houston: C. D. Morrison & Co., 1879. Page 123.
10. Ibid. Page 245.
11. Ibid. Page ix.
12. Ibid. Page 194.
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