BREWERY HISTORY

Brewery History (2019) **180**, 3-

THE GALVESTON BREWERY: HOW A HISTORIC BREWING COMPLEX SHAPES THE INDUSTRY AND IDENTITY OF A SMALL TEXAS CITY

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Introduction

The history of brewing in the United States lies in the evolution of thousands of small, local breweries that emerged late in the nineteenth century. A few of these breweries grew into mammoth enterprises of international fame, many more reached peaks as regional leaders, but most nineteenth-century brewing companies, including the Galveston Brewing Company in Galveston, Texas, never expanded outside their communities of origin. Nearly all breweries of the latter type disappeared during the era of prohibition or otherwise dissolved after acquisition by larger entities. The country had roughly 2,000 breweries throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century but by the early 1980s, the total was less than a hundred.[1] Physical traces of lost breweries tended to fade near the end of the twentieth century after

the closure, and often demolition, of the facilities. A revival of local breweries in recent years has brought along a renewed interest in old and nearly forgotten brands. In cities like Galveston, where the local brewery complex remains standing, buildings serve as the clearest embodiment of earlier eras of American brewing. This case study illustrates aspects of the evolution of the American brewing industry and the vital economic roles that breweries played in small cities.

The establishment and growth of Galveston

The city of Galveston, Texas occupies a barrier island on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, about 100 kilometers south of Houston. Long before the incorporation of the city, the island was home to native tribes, Spanish explorers, and pirates, all of whom took advantage of its adjacent natural harbor. During the first half of the nineteenth century, as waves of settlers moved into Texas from the eastern U.S. and Europe, a group of land speculators led by Canadian-born trader and investor Michel B. Menard identified Galveston as the most suitable location for Texas' primary port. In the 1830s, 40s, and 50s, Menard and his associates in the Galveston City Company developed the city and its port infrastructure. They focused their attention on the northern portion of the island through investments in wharf facilities lining the Galveston Harbor. Their efforts met with success and Galveston became the principal port in the region and the commercial center of Texas in the years leading up to the American Civil War (1861-65).

As was the case in most coastal cities in the American South during the nineteenth century, the cotton industry drove Galveston's commercial explosion. Cotton proceeds funded railroad growth and with each new railroad line built into the hinterlands, more tracts opened for cotton cultivation and more settlers came to Texas to establish farms.[2] With this virtuous cycle in effect, the state's cotton industry grew exponentially during the second half of the century. In 1849, the state reported production of 58,073 bales (each weighing 500 pounds). By 1900, the total had grown to 3.5 million bales.[3] At the heart of the Galveston's central business district, the Strand (also known as Avenue B) was lined with the offices of cotton factors, merchants, and suppliers. To the west, freight depots, storage sheds, and

compress facilities bolstered the city's cotton-processing capabilities.

The reliance on cotton came at a cost. As historian David McComb has noted, the city remained dependent on the cotton trade while cities in the northeastern U.S. developed industrial economies. Local business leaders generally failed to assuage the concerns of New York and Chicago investors who believed that the island's vulnerability to flooding made it a risky commercial environment.[4] As a barrier island, Galveston sits atop shifting sands in a location prone to severe tropical weather events. Today, the island is protected by a 17-foot-tall, concrete seawall that lines the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, but the city still undergoes flooding events both routine and acute. During the nineteenth century, before the construction of the seawall, every storm had catastrophic social, economic, and reputational impacts.

The Galveston Brewing Company

The organization of the Galveston Brewing Company represents one noteworthy case in which Galveston businessman successfully attracted out-of-state investors. In 1895, John Reymershoffer, Bertrand Adoue, and other local investors partnered with national brewing magnates Adolphus Busch and William J. Lemp to found Galveston's first brewery.[5] Busch was the co-founder of Anheuser-Busch and Lemp inherited his father's beer empire. The men were competitors in St. Louis, where each developed major innovations, including large-scale bottling, ice-making, and beer-dedicated railroads.[6] Their cooperation in Galveston suggests an understanding that expanded brewing operations across the country would be mutually beneficial.

The company acquired land at the intersection of Church and 33rd streets as the site of the new brewery. The original complex consisted of three interjoining, Romanesque-style buildings. Adolphus Busch likely advised on the selection of St. Louis architecture firm E. Jungenfeld and Company to provide the brewery's design. The Jungenfeld firm designed other breweries in Texas on Busch's behalf including the Lone Star Brewery in San Antonio.[7] The original design for the Galveston Brewery included three buildings. One of them-the Galveston Brewery Building-remains stand-

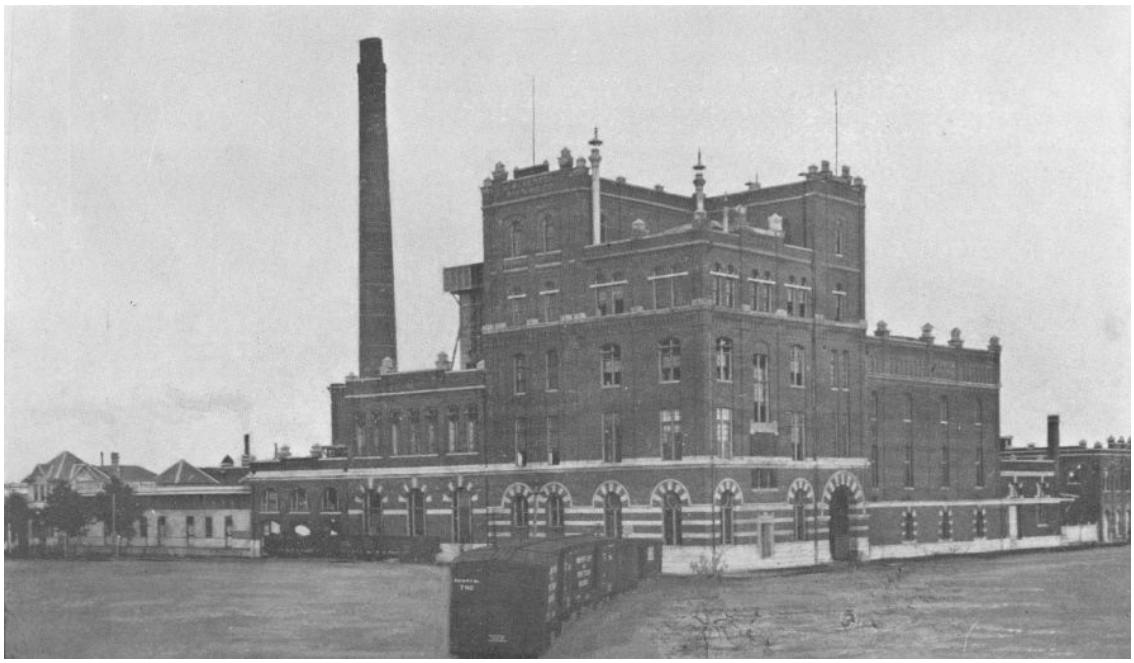

Figure 1. A 1900 Photograph of the Galveston Brewery as seen from the corner of Postoffice (Ave. E) and 34th Street. (Dexter, W.W., Picturesque Galveston, Galveston: Galveston Tribune*, 1900.*

ing as part of the existing brewery complex. The other two - an ice factory and bottling plant - are demolished.[8]

Amidst Galveston's cotton-dominated economy of the 1890s, the Galveston Brewery complex stands out as the most audacious attempt to launch a new industry. An

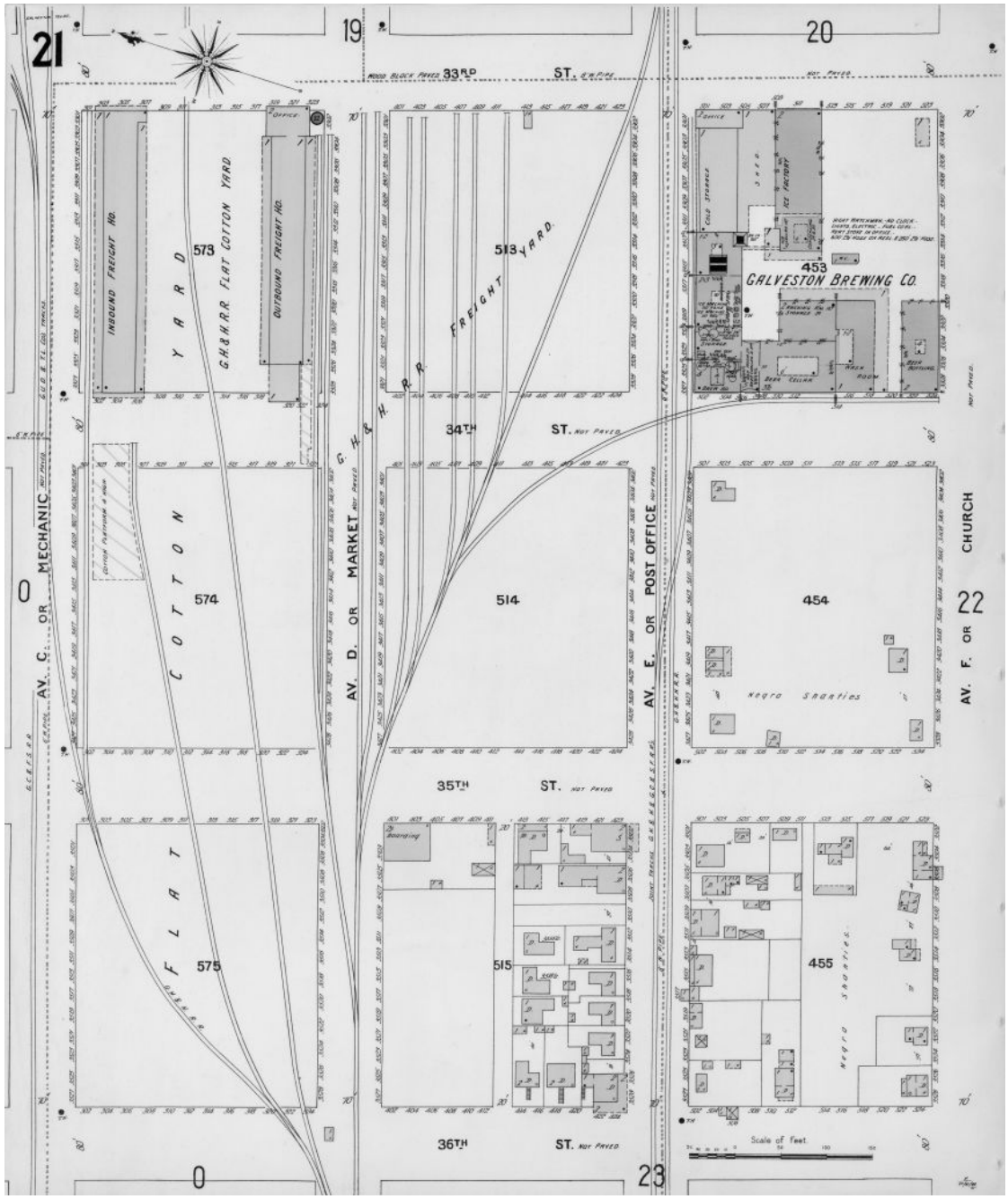

Figure 2. The Cotton Compress and Warehouse District depicted in the 1899 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. (Dolph Briscoe Center. University of Texas, Austin, Texas).

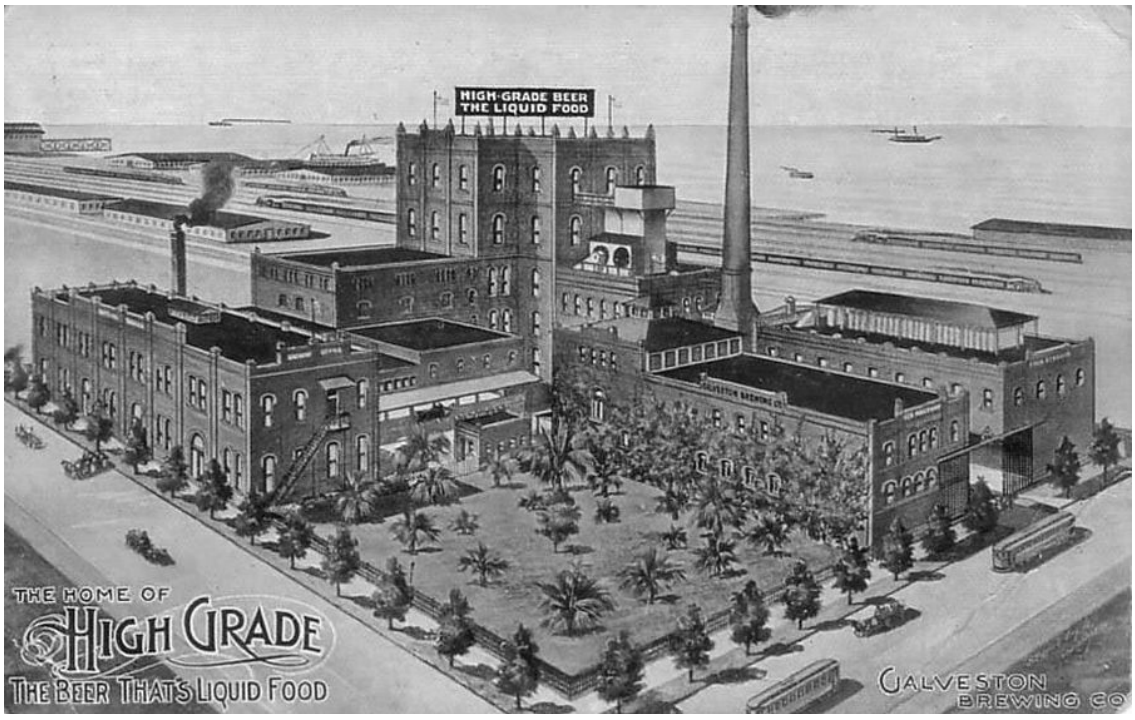

Figure 3. A pre-1918 postcard featuring the Galveston Brewery as seen from the corner of Church (Ave. F) and 33rd Street. Galveston Harbor is illustrated in the background. (Preservation Resource Center, Galveston Historical Foundation, Galveston, Texas).

1899 map of the factory district provides a survey of the city's industrial character.[9] Standing at the edge of the cotton compress facilities, the brewery is shown was the largest building in the district that was not directly related to the cotton trade.

Cotton's role at the center of the regional economy continued to develop during the first decades of the twentieth century despite the devastating effects of the 1900 Galveston Hurricane. Known locally as 'the Great Storm,' the hurricane destroyed large swaths of buildings on the island. Total deaths are estimated at 6,000-8,000 and the hurricane remains the deadliest natural disaster in U.S. history. Fortunately for Galveston, the storm occurred just as the Texas cotton industry was reaching a new level of productivity and increasing receipts helped to fund the city's reconstruction. In 1904, the Port of Galveston surpassed the Port of New Orleans to become the nation's leading cotton exporter for the first time. Total export receipts reached a pre-World War I apex of $281,457,858 in 1913. During this era, port leaders boasted that 'King Cotton rules supreme in Galveston and Galveston rules supreme as the cotton exporting port of the world'.[10] Meanwhile, local business leaders continued their efforts to diversify the cities

commercial activity. In addition to the Galveston Brewery, manufacturing industries of note at the beginning of the twentieth century included printing, ice and cold storage plants, iron works, and cement and pipe works. Most significantly, the exportation of wheat and sugar added to that of cotton in making Galveston a hub for agricultural processing.[11] With cotton traffic at an all-time high and new industries emerging, Galveston

businessmen found reasons for optimism in the years before World War I. Encouraged by upward trends, the Galveston Brewing Company expanded its complex twice in the first two decades of the century. First, in 1908, the company hired local architect George B. Stowe to design a new ice plant.[12] Five years later the

Figure 4. A post-expansion postcard image of the Falstaff Brewery of Galveston. (Credit Jeff Holt, http://www.texasbreweries.com).

company added a new bottling plant directly across from the Galveston Brewery on 34th Street.[13]

For the Galveston Brewery Company, the timing of the expansion projects proved to be poor. The prohibition movement gained momentum during the war years and Texan voters were particularly supportive. In 1918 the Texas legislature ratified the 18th Amendment to prohibit the sale of alcohol. The following year, Texas voters approved a state prohibition law. With the full federal ban scheduled go into effect in January 1920, the Galveston Brewery closed in 1918. The same year saw the closure of over 400 other American breweries, nearly half the national total.[14]

During the prohibition era, the Southern Beverage Company and the Triple XXX Company used the complex as a bottling facility for non-alcoholic beverages.[15] Apparently, soda did not yield the same profits as beer. Soon after the repeal of prohibition, Robert Autrey, formerly the head of the Houston Ice and Brewing Company, purchased the company's assets and began brewing beer again. Autrey renamed his new business Galveston-Houston Breweries and he began to brew beer under the Magnolia and Southern Select brands.[16] He updated the equipment and architecture of the brewery complex, removing many of the Romanesque brick details.

Production increased throughout the late 1930s and 1940s, reaching a peak of 458,000 barrels in 1948, before declining in the early 1950s. Houston accountant Edward Stenzel purchased the company in 1953 for $2.7 million. He brewed and marketed Southern Sel ect beer for a short time before selling the buildings to the Falstaff Brewing Corporation in 1956.[17] *The Galveston Brewery: A Galveston Landmark*, written by Ralph W. Stenzel, Jr. in 1999, explores Edward Stenzel's tenure of ownership in detail.

Despite a few noteworthy developments, Galveston's industrial outlook during the middle of the twentieth century was bleak. The city had never fully overcome its geographical limitations in attracting major outside investment for manufacturing. The opening of the Houston Ship Channel to deep water traffic in 1919

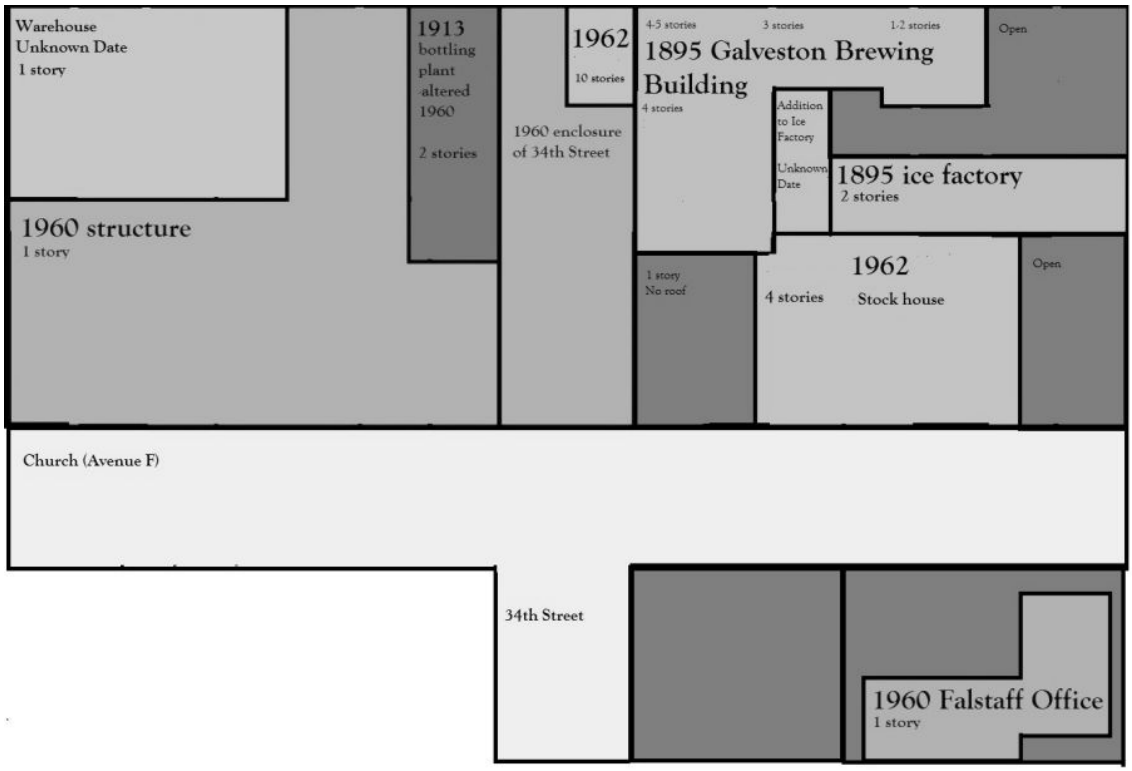

Figure 5. Layout of the existing components of the Falstaff Brewery of Galveston with construction dates listed. (Preservation Resource Center, Galveston Historical Foundation, Galveston, Texas).

ended Galveston's greatest commercial advantage over Houston. During the 1920s and 30s, Houston surpassed Galveston to became the nation's leading cotton port and one of the busiest ports overall. Galveston never again seriously challenged Houston for commercial supremacy in the region. Economic studies of Galveston completed early in the second half of the century did not give the city cause for optimism.[18] Consequently, Falstaff's purchase and expansion of the Galveston Brewery in 1956 provided a badly-needed stimulus for the city's economy and sense of identity. The Falstaff Company immediately embarked on lengthy construction campaigns, which became the definitive developments in the commerce in the city. Unbeknownst to many in the city, the Falstaff brand had links to Galveston in its origins.

William Lemp created the brand in 1903, eight years after co-founding the Galveston Brewery. He chose the Falstaff name in honor of Sir John Falstaff, the Shakespearean character who made appearances in *Henry IV Part 1*, *Part 2*, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. William Lemp, Jr. inherited the trademark upon his father's death and sold it to fellow St. Louis brewing magnate Joseph "Papa Joe" Griesedieck in 1917. Griesedieck adopted Falstaff as the name for his entire brewing company and by the time they purchased the Galveston Brewery in 1956, Griesedieck and his son, Alvin, had developed Falstaff as one of the most successful brewing companies in the U.S.[19] They followed a strategy of aggressive national expansion. Between 1952 and 1956, they purchased breweries in Galveston and El Paso in Texas, San Jose in California, and Fort Wayne in Indiana. These acquisitions added to the empire that the company had built in the prior decades through the purchases of two facilities in St. Louis and one each in New Orleans and Omaha. In 1950 Falstaff was the nation's seventh largest brewing company and by 1960 it has risen to third.[20]

In acquiring the Galveston Brewery, Falstaff sought to more ably supply beer throughout the state of Texas as previously the company had made shipments to Texas from San Jose, Omaha, and New Orleans.[21] To double production capacity at the Galveston complex, the company launched two construction campaigns in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The first phase, completed in 1960, included the construction of a large new bottling and storage plant, a tall granary on the opposite side of Postoffice Street (also known as Avenue E), and a one-story office building on the opposite side of Church Street. The granary allowed the company to salvage and resell by-products from the brewing process. The used grains were enriched with nutrients and sold as cattle feed. The office building had an adjacent park leased to the City of Galveston for $1 per year.[22]

The second phase of construction, completed in 1962, included the construction of a ten- story addition to the brewhouse, a large, four-story stock house near the corner of Church and 33rd streets, the demolition of the 1895 bottling building, and the purchase of a pre-existing warehouse on 37th Street.[23]

To design the projects, the Griesediecks hired St. Louis engineering firm Svedrup and Parcel, which also designed an expansion for the Anheuser-Busch brewery in St. Louis around the same time.[24] The general contractor for the project in Galveston was Fruin-Colnon Construction Company, also based in St. Louis.[25] With the expansion, the Galveston facility became the largest of Falstaff's eight breweries.[26]

In updating the Galveston Brewery shortly after acquiring it, the Griesediecks followed a well-established template. Their facility in San Jose, purchased from the Wieland Brewing Company in 1952 and renovated circa 1955, demonstrates the shared architectural template: alternating use of stucco and brick and a unified compound of new and older, renovated buildings. In the 1950s, Falstaff also renovated and expanded its Omaha facility, which the company had purchased in 1937 from Fred Krug.[27] In this case, as in Galveston, they covered existing buildings with stucco and segmented the facades with white pilasters.

The brewery also bears similarities to the Anheuser-Busch facility in St. Louis, which underwent a 1963 expansion and renovation project also engineered by Svedrup and Parcel. The Anheuser-Busch plant, while lacking stucco, has pilasters dividing facades in the same proportions as seen in Galveston. The project represents the same effort to streamline the presentation of industrial processes through a unified exterior architecture of both old and new buildings.

The breweries in St. Louis, Omaha, and San Jose share distinctive characteristics with the Falstaff Brewery of Galveston that give insight into the operation of large breweries during the mid-twentieth century. As brewing operations expanded in the decades following the end of prohibition, large brewing companies updated their facilities, including those newly purchased from smaller, regional brewers. These renovation projects were characterized by the connection of existing buildings with new additions, resulting in interconnected masses of buildings taking up whole city blocks, the application of one scheme of exterior finish materials to unify new and pre-existing buildings, and the use of stucco or brick pilasters to give depth in large, windowless facades.

Simultaneous with the physical expansion, Falstaff embarked on a successful public relations campaign to win the support of the local Galveston population. First, as a means of garnering support for the brewery, company policy encouraged brewery employees to be active in Galveston community affairs.[28] Second, the top floor of the new stock house had a hospitality patio to serve local and out-of-town guests. Large glass windows enclosed the eastern portion of the space. Characteristic of Modern design of the period, the windows emphasized the relationship between the interior and exterior environments. Lastly, the company gained community support by offering steady employment. By the end of the 1960s, the plant employed 400 people, had a $2.5 million annual payroll, produced about one million barrels of beer annually, and offered one of the city's most fashionable leisure settings.[29] Against the backdrop of a declining city, Falstaff loomed large architecturally, economically, and culturally, creating a significant impact on Galveston's sense of identity.

After purchasing the Galveston facility, Falstaff continued its national expansion efforts. Alvin Griesedieck's son, Joseph, took control of the company upon his father's death in 1961. Joseph Griesedieck II made financially unsuccessful efforts to establish brewing

Figure 6. The south façade of the Falstaff Brewery photographed in June 2016. After the brewery's closure in 1981, the complex sat in a blighted state until rehabilitation projects began in 2016. (Preservation Resource Center, Galveston Historical Foundation, Galveston, Texas).

Figure 7. Remnants of the hospitality patio atop the 1962 stock house, photographed in 2015. (Preservation Resource Center, Galveston Historical Foundation, Galveston, Texas).

operations in the northeast. One attempt resulted in an antitrust lawsuit brought forward by the State of Rhode Island. Griesedieck won the lawsuit, but legal fees amounted to a heavy financial burden and caused the eventual dismantling of the company. In 1975, Griesedieck sold a controlling interest in the company to Paul Kalmanovitz, a Polish-born beer entrepreneur with a reputation for 'ruthless consolidations.' He relocated Falstaff's headquarters from St. Louis to California and began closing various breweries. The Galveston brewery closed in 1981.[30]

After Kalmanovitz' 1985 death, trustees of his company made an attempt to restart brewing operations under the Pearl Beer label in 1988. The company filled the chilling tanks atop the cold storage section of the 1895 Galveston Brewery before abandoning the project with the tanks still full. Ultimately, the structure failed to support the weight of the filled tanks and the cold storage building collapsed in 1991.[31,32] Later owners sold the brewing equipment during the 1990s and, to access the tanks, contractors removed large sections of the brewhouse walls.

As Galveston found renewed economic success through heritage tourism beginning in the 1970s, former industrial sites like the brewery were often left behind. For decades, the brewery stood as a towering blight in the city's depressed north side neighborhood. The expansive size of the complex and the underwhelming value of the underlying land disincentivized demolition, so the facility sat in a deteriorating condition. In the 2010s, Galveston's revitalization began to make serious impacts in the old factory district for the first time, and the success of adaptive use projects in the area sparked new interest in the Falstaff Brewery. In 2016, new owners began redeveloping the site as a multi-use facility with space for parking and long-term storage. The ongoing project includes rehabilitation of the storage warehouses and the replacement of missing sections of the brewhouse façade.

Conclusion

When Adolphus Busch, William Lemp, and local investors built the Galveston Brewery in 1895, they located it inside the city's factory district dominated by vast cotton compresses and warehouses. In this original context, the brewery stood out as one of the few factories that rivaled the cotton facilities in size. The brewery business met with some degree of early success, but the local economy saw greater dividends in the second half of the twentieth century. By then, cotton had yielded its central role to oil and Houston had surpassed Galveston as the chief regional port. These changes had cemented Galveston's status as a small city relying upon a few specialized industries. The emergence or expansion of any of these industries, such as the growth that occurred in the brewing industry after Falstaff acquired the Galveston Brewery, offered a massive stimulus in regards to both commerce and self-identity. This stimulus was vital to the city during the 1960s when the city reached its economic nadir. As the brewery declined in the late 1970s and 1980s, a new industry centered on the city's historic resources emerged. As the heritage tourism fuels the revitalization of the factory district, the brewery serves as a focal point and Galveston's old investments in the brewing industry are once again paying new dividends.

Authors note

This article is adapted from an application for tax credit incentives for the brewery complex. Application files are filed with the Texas Historical Commission in Austin, Texas and the National Park Service in Washington, D.C., but they are not otherwise published. Jami Durham and W. Dwayne Jones assisted in research for the project. Ralph Stenzel and Robert Hebert also provided helpful insights.

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