

Breweries
and
Beer Bottles
at
El Paso, Texas

<i>Office of the Proposed</i>			
Tannhauser Brewing Co.			
<i>"EL PASO'S HOME BREWERY"</i>			
Frank Brenk, G. W. Griem and associates promoters	312 Bassett Tower	Phone M-706	NO PROMOTION STOCK
A. W. Franke in charge of sales	EL PASO, TEXAS		Every Investor on an Equal Footing

Bill Lockhart
2012

Chapter 6
Tannhauser Brewing Co.

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Chapter 7

Tannhauser Brewing Co.:

The Brewery That Never Was¹

On September 16, 1933, at 4:00PM, “more than 300 ‘beer-minded’ El Pasoans cheered the turning of the first spade of dirt for construction of the proposed \$125,000 Tannhauser Brewing company plant in the lower valley.” County Judge E.B. McClintock was master of ceremonies for the occasion, and Judge W.H. Pelphrey was “the spade wielder.” McClintock explained that at least four months would be required to build the brewery, and it would take approximately eight months before they could begin production. El Pasoans, however, could not expect to drink Tannhauser beer for another four months after brewing to allow for aging. The building site was owned by C.W. Griem “just off old valley road on Clark road” in the Collingsworth Addition (*El Paso Times* 9/17/1933).²

As noted in the earlier chapters, Texas Prohibition began in 1918, so the national enactment in 1920 was rendered moot. The constitutional amendment (as well as Texas law) was withdrawn, and alcoholic beverage sales resumed in El Paso at precisely 12:01 AM on September 15, 1933, exactly 15 years and five months after the town went dry and just one day prior to the ground-breaking ceremony for the Tannhauser Brewery. The timing of the ceremony cannot have been accidental.

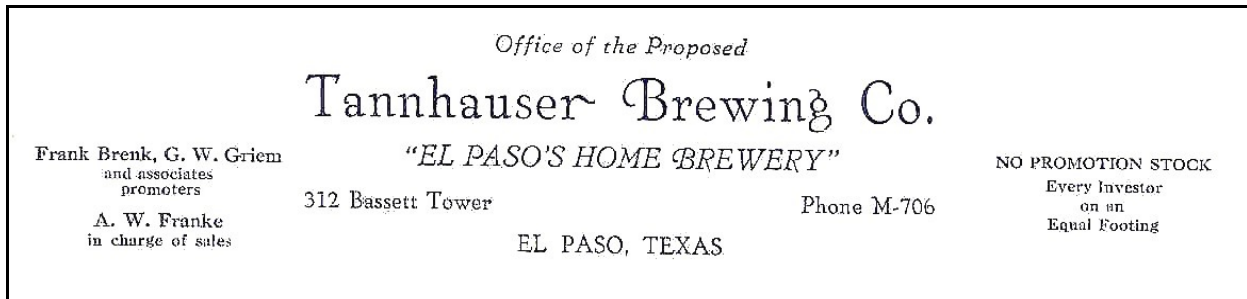
According to the *El Paso Times* on September 15, 1933, “Thirsty El Pasoans were on hand to do their part. There were more people walking about the streets of the city at that time than has [*sic*] been seen in several years.” On sidetracks, nineteen railroad carloads of beer awaited the opening. Sixteen of those cars contained bottled beer, a total of 268,000 bottles (2.5 bottles for each person in the city). Many people were ready for the return. “As the hands of the street clocks reached the dead line the more thirsty El Pasoans lifted their voices to cheer. It was an advent in the history of the city for many. It meant the legal sale of beer.” The promoters for the Tannhauser Brewing Co. intended to take advantage of the city’s enthusiasm.

¹ Most of this chapter was originally published as Lockhart (2004).

² Also see *El Paso Herald-Post* 9/15/1933.

The group must have known that Harry Mitchell was also planning to build a brewery in El Paso. Mitchell had sent word to the El Paso newspapers at least as early as May 22, 1933, that he intended to build a new, modern brewery in the city. El Paso was too small at that time for any of the promoters to have been unaware of Mitchell’s activities. More than a month ahead of Tannhauser (August 5, 1933), Mitchell, along with Los Angeles millionaire, Will Keller, and El Pasoans, Charles M. Grider and William W. “Dick” Cunningham, held a groundbreaking ceremony at the ruins of the old El Paso Brewery as a sign to begin the construction of the Harry Mitchell Brewery (see Chapter 7 for the history of Harry Mitchell). Tannhauser was hurrying to catch up.

Frank Brenk, the former brewmaster for the pre-Prohibition El Paso Brewery, joined with G.W. Griem, A.W. Franke, and undisclosed others to form the new brewery in El Paso as a challenge to Mitchell. Brenk was scheduled to run the plant, while Franke was to be in charge of sales. The group conducted business from Judge McClintock’s office at 312 Bassett Towers (very near Griem’s offices – 302-306). They called themselves “El Paso’s Home Brewery” and boasted that there was no promotional stock, “Every Investor on an Equal Footing” (Tannhauser letterhead – Figure 6-1).



Tannhauser Brewing Co. letterhead

Franke wrote prospective stockholders inviting them to “invest in an El Paso enterprise that will keep hundreds of thousands of dollars at home that is (*sic*) now going to out of state breweries[.] Will you help in building an industry that will give employment to El Paso residents and keep the beer industry on this side of the Rio Grande?” He bragged that “no manufacturing organization today is on a better going basis than the brewing industry,” and El Paso was the best spot for such a business. He noted that “the proposed Tannhauser Brewery in El Paso will serve a territory in a radius of 300 miles and sell beer at prices the public can afford.” Franke further

enjoined each prospective investor to “become a charter member of its organization” and promised that “subscribers to this co-partnership will be on an equal footing, their voting power in proportion to their subscriptions” (undated letter – Rick Chavez collection). Despite the encouraging letter, it is apparent that Tannhauser could not gather the necessary capital to compete with the rapidly-forming Harry Mitchell Brewery.

An undated, unsigned financial statement indicates that the promoters had done their homework. They listed all of the projected costs for building the brewery:

Buildings, building sites, Architectural plans, Engineering, including Right-of-Ways	\$44, 500.00
Brewing Machinery, Motors, and Machinery Supplies	25,560.00
Brewing Equipment, Storage Vats, Coolers, etc.	20,801.00
Water plant, including deep Well and Building	8,000.00
Roads to be built to and from Brewery	1,000.00
Supplies, including Raw Materials, Barrels, Bottles, Operating Expenses	17,164.00
Trucks for Brewery and hauling	1,500.00
Reserve for Licenses, Taxes, Permits, etc.	<u>6,475.00</u>
Totals	\$125,900.00

The above figures include labor charges in the building, placing and installing of items mentioned (undated financial statement – Rick Chavez collection).

On October 22, Tannhauser advertised a \$25 award for a suitable slogan for the new beer. They had rejected two offers: “Home Brewed for Home People” and “El Paso Beer is Better Beer” and were looking for something more “snappy.” The brewery was to be entirely financed and run by El Pasoans (a possible slap at Will Keller’s involvement with Mitchell – see Chapter 7a), and the beer was to be an affordable pilsner “at better than shipped in prices.” In other words, beer brewed in El Paso would be cheaper and better than beer imported from other U.S. cities. The promoters stressed that the new brewery would keep El Paso money within the city and would provide jobs for local people (undated article – Rick Chavez collection).

Brenk topped the list of promoters for the Tannhauser Brewing Co. He worked for the El Paso Brewery from 1909 until the business ceased operations (and later moved to Juárez) and continued on with the Tri-State Beverage Co. After the Tannhauser Brewing Co. fizzled, Brenk briefly served as brewmaster for the Harry Mitchell Brewery in 1939. For more information on Brenk, see Chapter 4.

G. William Griem, the second-named promoter of the proposed brewery, was a superintendent of construction for J.E. Morgan from at least 1916 until about 1918, when he disappeared from the El Paso city directories. He again appeared in 1930 but listed no work. The following year, he was a contractor. In 1933, he was again without work but was engaged as a “poultry man” from 1935 to 1938 before he returned to contracting in 1939 and remained in that occupation until 1947. He retired the next year and had died by 1951 (EPCD 1916-1951).

Armin W. Franke was an important link in the promotional chain as the one “in charge of sales.” Franke and his wife, Ruby, apparently moved to El Paso to create Tannhauser and were first listed in the 1934 directory. With the failure of Tannhauser, he became a salesman for the El Paso Times. The next year, he moved to the copy department, but he was not listed in any occupation in 1936 – his last appearance in the city directories (EPCD 1934-1936).

Edward B. McClintock (master of ceremonies for the ground-breaking celebration and owner of the office named on the letterheads) first appeared in the El Paso city directories in 1905 as the District Clerk’s assistant deputy. In 1909, he joined with J. Porter Bender to form the firm of Bender & McClintock, special agents for the legal department of the El Paso & Southwestern Railway System.” The next year, he became a Justice of the Peace with an office in the courthouse basement and became the County Clerk of El Paso County by 1916. He was elected County Judge the following year and held that position until 1932, when he was listed as a lawyer at 312 Bassett Towers. He had moved his office to Room 753 in the Caples Building in 1935 and remained a lawyer at that address for the rest of his life. In 1926, the first year the city directories listed wives, McClintock’s wife was Blanch F. McClintock. Edward B. McClintock died in late 1943 or early 1944 (EPCD 1905-1944).

McClintock’s partner in the ground-breaking ceremony, the spade-wielding William D. Pelphrey, began his law career as a clerk for L.W. Malone in 1914. The next year, he was practicing on his own with an office at 319 Trust Building. He was a partner with Edmund B.

Elfers in the law firm of Elfers & Pelphrey in 1916. By the following year, the partnership had disbanded, but Pelphrey remained listed as an attorney. In 1919, he became a county attorney with an office on the second floor of the courthouse. Apparently ambitious, he joined with R. Ray Kelley to form Pelphrey & Kelley Realty Co. in addition to his law practice in 1921, although the partnership dissolved the next year. He retained his practice at the courthouse until at least 1934, when he became chief justice in the Court of Civil Appeals and retained that position until his death in late 1936 or early 1937. His wife, Alma, was also listed in 1926 when the directories first mentioned wives (EPCD 1914-1937).

Unfortunately, we will probably never know what happened to the Tannhauser Brewing Co. As with many new businesses, the requisite capital may never have been found. It may be that wealthy local backers discovered the combination of Mitchell and Will Keller and decided that competing against Keller's money and Mitchell's reputation would not work. It was clear that the city was on Mitchell's side when the city council voted to relinquish a ten-foot easement on September 15, 1933, to allow Mitchell more railroad access to the brewery. In addition, the city released another 21-foot strip of property on September 29. Mayor R.E. Sherman conceded, "We want to do all we can for the enterprise" (*El Paso Times* 9/15/1933, 9/29/1933). In any event, no further evidence of the Tannhauser Brewing Co. has been located after October 22, 1933, and the company became just another footnote in the history of western brewing.

Acknowledgments

My thanks to Richard L. Chavez, long-time breweriana collector in El Paso, Texas, for giving me access to his files. His collection included undated articles about Tannhauser from the El Paso newspapers, a letter from A.W. Franke to potential stockholders, and a financial statement for the company.

Sources

[EPCD] El Paso City Directories

The directory publishers changed frequently, especially in the early days. Copies of the directories are available at the El Paso Public Library, UTEP Library, Special Collections, and the office of the El Paso County Historical Society. Many are also available online.

Lockhart, Bill

2004 "The Brewery That Never Was." *American Breweriana* 128 (March/April):31-33.