

# Chapter 7

## Distilled Waters Run Deep: El Paso Distilled Water Companies



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## Chapter 7

### Distilled Waters Run Deep: El Paso Distilled Water Companies

Only four companies offered distilled water to thirsty El Paso residents. The earliest, the El Paso Ice and Refrigerator Co., opened in 1882 and was El Paso's largest operation until it merged with its only real rival, the Consumers Ice and Cold Storage Co. in 1954. Consumers Ice and Cold Storage Co. had opened more than a decade later, in 1896 and operated under that name until the firm reorganized as the Consumers Ice and Fuel Co. in 1931. After the 1954 merger, Consumers remained in business until 1983. Three smaller players – El Paso Pure Water Co. (1901-1906), El Paso Distilled Water Co. (1911-1920), Rio Grande Ice & Feed Co. (1915-1919) – were never threats to the two larger firms.

#### Histories<sup>1</sup>

##### **El Paso Ice and Refrigerator Co. (1882-1980)**

Although it was established in 1882 (El Paso Chamber of Commerce 1911:68), the El Paso Ice & Refrigerator Co. incorporated in 1885 with a capital stock of \$100,000. Initially, A. St. J. Newberry, of Cleveland, Ohio, was the president and treasurer with E.W.S. Neff as vice president and general manager and Edmund E. Neff as secretary (EPCD 1898-99). The company was first listed in the 1888 El Paso city directory as “El Paso Refrigerator, Ice Co.” with its plant on Campbell between Texas and St. Louis streets.

Apparently, the business moved to St. Louis and Virginia Streets later in the year as shown on the 1888 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. Along with a visual impression, the map also provided information about the operation of the establishment. The crews worked “Day & Night,” and the company provided a sleeping room next to the office, presumably for off-duty employees. Two ammonia pumps created the refrigeration effect, and the powering fuel was coal. A water tank was mounted on the roof of the boiler room to provide sufficient pressure to create ice and distill water. The plant contained 150 feet of hose, although we were not

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise cited, information came from the El Paso city directories.

informed as to whether it is permanently hooked up or loose. Even at this early date (1888), the lights in the plant were electric. A large set of scales was located near the center of the yard (Figure 7-1).

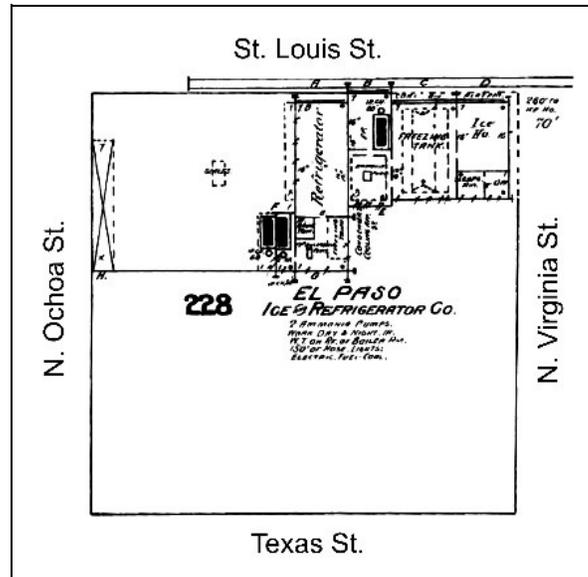


Figure 7-1 – El Paso Ice & Refrigerator (Sanborn Map, 1888)

By 1892, E.S. Newman, was the president, but the business was listed at the corner of Ochoa and St. Louis Streets.<sup>2</sup> The 1895 directory described the business:

The El Paso Ice & Refrigerator Co. is one of the pioneer manufacturing establishments of El Paso. Beginning with a small machine for the production of ice and refrigeration of rooms, specially built for the chilling of meats of all kinds, it has gradually grown until now its capacity is more than double the demand of the city and tributary territory. Not only this, but it has steadily

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<sup>2</sup> While the addresses seem confusing, it is instructive to note that the block involved was bounded by Texas, St. Louis, Virginia, and Ochoa Streets with the El Paso Ice & Refrigerator Co. property occupying the northern half of the block. The actual buildings faced St. Louis St. (the northern boundary) with the ice house to the east at the corner of Virginia. The company property extended west to Ochoa, but there were no buildings at that corner. The wagon yard and scales occupied the center of the northwestern quarter of the block.

improved its distilling apparatus until its ice is known for its superior qualities all through Western Texas, New Mexico and Mexico as far as the City of Mexico, and its distilled water is used by druggists, prescribed by physicians and drank [sic] by many citizens in their homes.

The buildings are located in the half block bounded by Virginia, St. Louis and Ochoa streets and are of brick. The machinery is of the best of order. The factory is connected with the main line of the Southern Pacific Railway System by a short switch.

The company obviously had begun producing distilled water prior to 1895, but an earlier date cannot be defined at this time.

By 1898, the El Paso Ice & Refrigerator Co. advertised itself as “The ‘Old Reliable’ Telephone 114 Wholesale and retail ice Factory on Main Line Southern Pacific Ry.” (EPCD 1898). The 1898 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map provides another cameo view of the plant. Although the size and essential layout of the plant were the same as a decade earlier, a wagon storage shed, hay storage shed, and two other general storage sheds had been added. The map showed a well that was not in evidence in 1888 with water drawn by a Deane fuel pump. Also added were Coal storage bins between the buildings and the railroad siding at the northwest side of the structures.

The map showed a well that was not in evidence in 1888 with water drawn by a Deane fuel pump. Also added were Coal storage bins between the buildings and the railroad siding at the northwest side of the structures.

The plant’s capacity was 25 tons of ice per day, and the plant was run day and night for eight months of the year. Although the plant had no watchman, the map noted that “some employees sleep on premises.” The location now had 200 feet of 1½ inch cotton hose that could be attached to two hydrants to provide its own fire protection. The company maintained 14 employees (Figure 7-2).

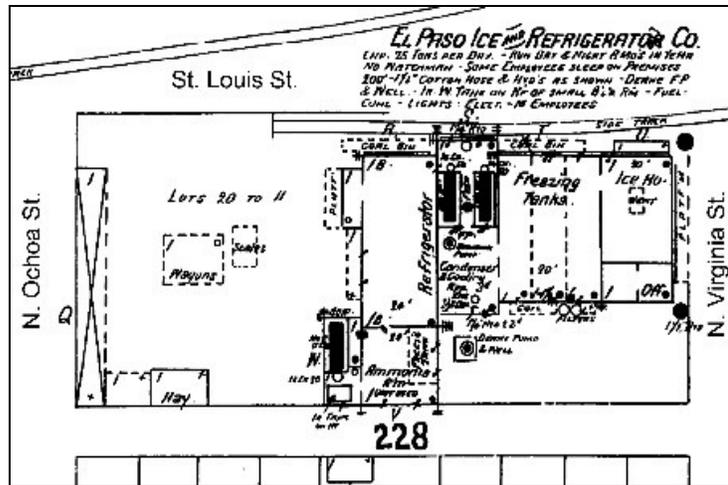


Figure 7-2 – El Paso Ice & Refrigerator (Sanborn Map, 1898)

John Selman, Jr., son of the noted El Paso gunfighter by the same name was an ice man for the firm and lived in the ice plant (see Metz 1966 for more on Selman). By the turn of the century, Alfred Courchesne was president of the corporation with M.B. Davis as his vice president. E.W.S. Neff, although no longer a vice president, remained as manager, and Edmund E. Neff maintained his position as secretary. The plant was virtually unchanged, but the railroad spur had been slightly rerouted and was farther from the plant's loading docks. The ice house was reduced in size to add a second, larger office. Although Davis soon disappeared from the vice presidency, no other notable changes in the board were recorded until E.H. Hale replaced Edmund Neff as secretary in 1905 (EPCD 1898-99-1906; Sanborn map 1900).

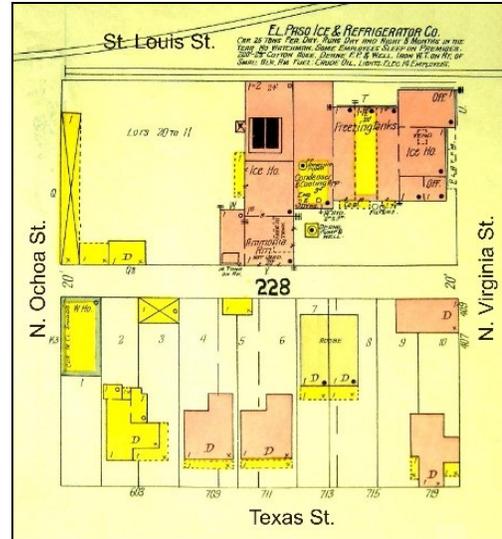


Figure 7-3 – El Paso Ice & Refrigerator (Sanborn Map, 1902)

Although the main infrastructure remained in 1902, there were subtle changes, mostly in the exterior (Figure 7-3). The 1902 Sanborn Map showed that the loading docks had been slightly rearranged, and both the wagon house and scale were gone from the yard. Half of the refrigeration space in the southwestern room was now a second ice house, and the plant had upgraded to the use of oil as a fuel. El Paso Ice & Refrigerator greatly expanded its plant between 1902 and 1905. The 1905 map noted that the plant was powered by steam created in a boiler fueled by oil. It is likely that steam power ran the plant from the beginning, even though it was never specifically stated before. The electricity was 115 volt, and the plant was in constant, year-round operation. The northeastern side of the building

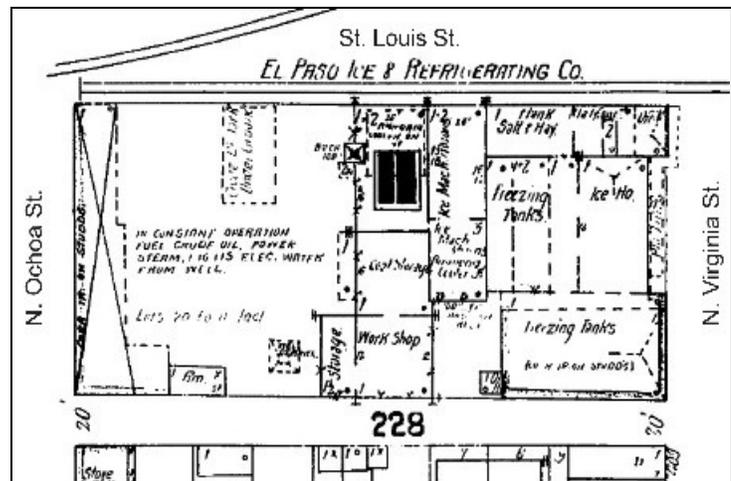


Figure 7-4 – El Paso Ice & Refrigerator (Sanborn Map, 1905)

was extended to the alley with a new set of freezing tanks. The rear office was absorbed into the ice house and a new salt and hay room was added at the front of the building. A new crude oil tank was being placed underground, and a new well had been drilled, both in the yard. The older wells were now within buildings and had apparently been sealed (Figure 7-4). Little had changed by 1908, except for the construction of a new wagon – much diminished – shed in the yard (Sanborn maps 1902, 1905, 1908).

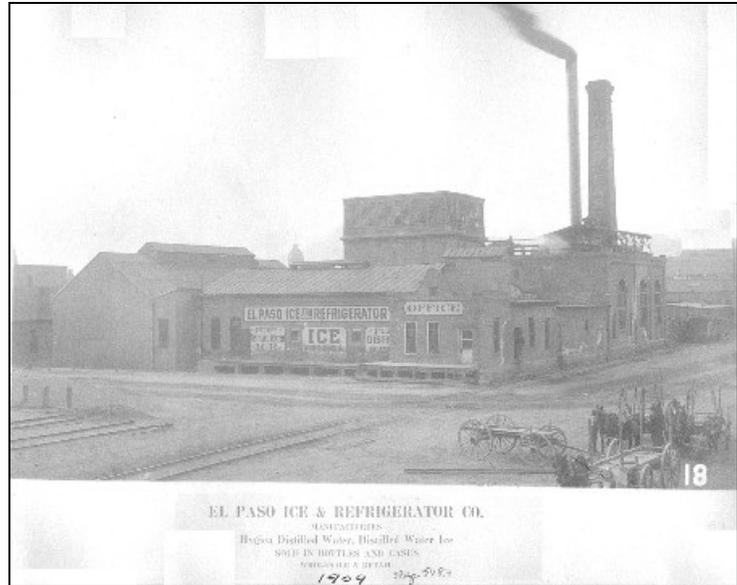


Figure 7-5 – El Paso Ice & Refrigerator (El Paso Chamber of Commerce 1909)

In 1907 El Paso underwent a change in its telephone system with two competing phone companies. El Paso Ice & Refrigerator Co., like many other El Paso businesses opted for the use of both lines advertising its phones as “SW [Bell] 114, 642 Auto 1114.” In the long run, Southwestern Bell triumphed, and its competitor vanished from the El Paso directories by 1914. A new board appeared in 1909 (Figures 7-5 & 7-6). Although Courchesne retained the presidency, W.F. Payne became the new vice president with R.E. Huthsteiner as secretary and treasurer. Although the location remained the same, the address was now listed as 215 N. Virginia (EPCD 1907-1910).

The El Paso Chamber of Commerce (1911:68) noted that the plant

occupies half a block with frontage of 300 feet on the railroad [Galveston, Harrison & San Antonio Railway] with which it is connected by private switches. The plant has a capacity for 65 tons of ice a day, while its cold storage rooms cover a total of 18,000 square feet of floor space. The company has its own artesian well 450 feet deep, from which in one day they have pumped 1,500,000 gallons. W.W. Fink is lessee and manager, assisted by Grover Smith, and in its equipment the plant is thoroughly modern.

A major upset occurred later in 1911. Huthsteiner left the corporation to become the manager of the El Paso Distilled Water Co., a new competitor. For reasons, currently unknown, Courchesne reduced his activities and left the presidency. In his place, W.W. Fink simultaneously filled the positions of president, treasurer, and manager. The next year, however, Courchesne was back in the president's slot with no other officers listed. In 1913, W.P.B. McSain was manager, and Courchesne added the secretary's job to his list of duties (EPCD 1911-1913).

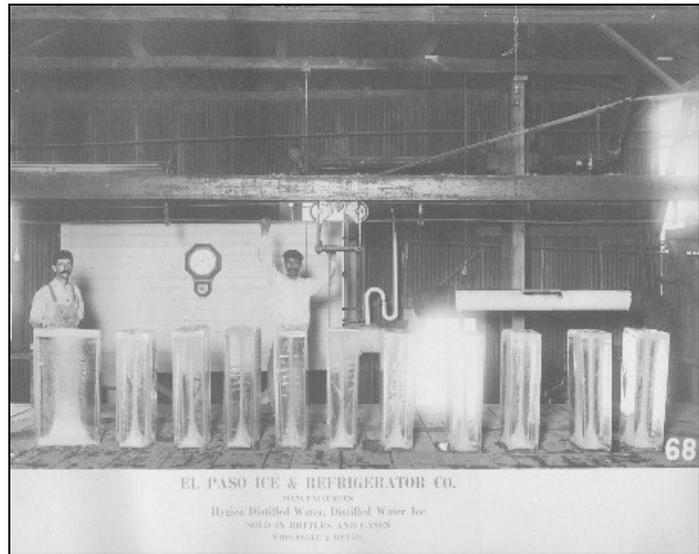


Figure 7-6 – Inside El Paso Ice (El Paso Chamber of Commerce 1909)

A new group purchased the company in November 1913. J.C. Peyton served as president and treasurer with W.F. Payne returning as vice president and C.H. Golle serving as manager (EPCD 1913-1914). In an ad in a 1914 magazine (EPMI), the new owners claimed to have “spent \$60,000 in building a new plant, in order that we may give you better service, better water and BETTER ICE.” They added that the plant was “owned entirely in El Paso, we solicit your business upon the basis that every dollar spent with us remains in El Paso.” The *El Paso Times* (6/20/1915) noted that distilled water from the plant “is absolutely free from chlorides and nitrates . . . It stands the nitrate of silver test and doctors recommend [it] as being absolutely pure.” In 1916, the company offered its customers coupon books for ice. Its ad noted that “they are a Big Convenience and Save You considerable Money” (*El Paso Times* 7/23/1916).

El Paso seems to have had a water problem in 1917. This may have been connected to influenza epidemics that were common (and deadly) during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (including the world-wide Spanish Influenza epidemic in the winter of 1918) or may have been due to some other disease vector. In any event, a June 1917 ad from the firm (*El Paso Times* 6/17/1917) indicated a problem when it stated that





Figure 7-8 – Embossed plate, El Paso Ice & Refrigerator (eBay)

chemical cart for fire fighting. There was no watchman, probably because the plant was in continuous operation (Figure 7-7). William E. Cooley became president in 1943, and the directory listed E F. Marner as the chief engineer. Cooley was also noted as manager by 1949 (EPCD 1939-1953).

The directories seemed to show a merger between the El Paso Ice & Refrigerator Co. and the Consumers Ice & Fuel Co. in 1954; however, the 1941 Sanborn map indicated both names at the Ochoa location. Cooley also became the manager of Consumers. The old plant was apparently closed down in 1955, and El Paso Ice operations moved to the 1621 Texas address. The old address was no longer listed in the directories. The final listing for the company was in 1980 (EPCD 1954-1980).

### Bottles and Artifacts

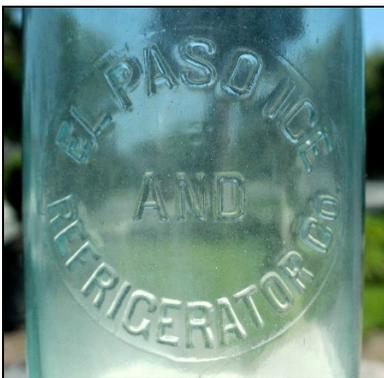


Figure 7-11 – Distilled water label (eBay)

The El Paso Ice & Refrigerator Co. used at least two sizes of embossed bottles for distilled water. The largest was a gallon jug that was embossed “EL PASO ICE / PHONE 114 (both arched) / AND (horizontal) / REFRIGERATOR CO. (inverted arch)” in a round plate on the front (Figure 7-8). In the eBay photo (Figure 7-9), the slightly tilted and uneven neck indicates that the bottle was mouth blown.



Figure 7-9 – Gallon distilled water jug (eBay)



Figure 7-10 – Half-gallon distilled water bottle (eBay)

The half-gallon bottle was in a more traditional champagne beer or soda form, tall with a long neck (Figure 7-10). The front was embossed “EL PASO ICE (arch) / AND (horizontal) / REFRIGERATOR Co. (inverted arch)” in a round plate (Figure 7-11). The top was sealed with a porcelain Hutter stopper (Figure 7-12), patented on February 7, 1893. These were used until the 1920s, setting a range of 1893-1920s for the bottles. Although the eBay photo showed no labeling on the stopper, both half-gallon and gallon bottles were usually stamped with “EL PASO ICE & REFRIGERATOR Co. • in a circle around a “\*” symbol (Figure 7-13).



Figure 7-12 – Finish & stopper (eBay)



Figure 7-13 – Hutter stoppers

The El Paso Ice & Refrigerator Co. also carried steel ice tongs. The set described below (Figures 7-14 & 7-15) were probably too small to have been used by delivery personnel and were probably either sold or given as promotional items to customers. The tongs were 14 inches long, and the handle was embossed “EL PASO ICE & REFRIGERATOR Co. / — TELEPHONE 114 —“ on a flattened area.



Figure 7-15 – Ice tong handle



Figure 7-14 – Ice tongs

## Consumers Ice and Cold Storage Co. (1896-1931)

## Consumers Ice and Fuel Co. (1931-1983)

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the ice competition in El Paso became fierce. Houck & Dieter, one of El Paso's earliest liquor and beer wholesalers and the first soft drink bottler in the city, began selling "natural ice" (probably cut in the mountains) in 1881. El Paso Ice and Refrigerator Co. challenged Houck & Dieter in 1885, and R.F. Johnson & Co. joined the competition by at least 1896. The Consumers Ice and Cold Storage Co. entered the rivalry in 1895<sup>3</sup> and incorporated on March 5, 1896, with a capital stock of \$30,000. Richard Caples was the initial president and manager with John P. O'Connor as his secretary and treasurer (El Paso Chamber of Commerce 1911:68; EPCD 1898-99).

Consumers advertised itself as "ice mfrs, cold storage" with "office and factory s 1<sup>st</sup> c S. Campbell, Florence" (EPCD 1896-7). The Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of 1898 showed a smaller operation than the older El Paso Ice & Refrigerator Co. The plant faced Florence St., intersecting with First St. – with the railroad siding actually running through First St. The capacity of the plant was 18 tons per day and was run day and night. The company used city water and had no hoses for fire protection. The plant was powered by coal (Figure 7-16).

By 1900, the capacity had risen to 22½ tons of ice per day, and the plant was now powered by wood. In addition, two artesian wells were operating on the property (Sanborn Map, 1900). By the end of the century, the ads included "Manufacturers of Distilled Water Ice [-] Carload shipments and re-icing of cars a specialty. Ice delivered throughout the city." The phone number was 88. As the century turned, John Phillip Dieter took the helm as president and manager with Fred G. Lemly (and associate from Houck & Dieter) as

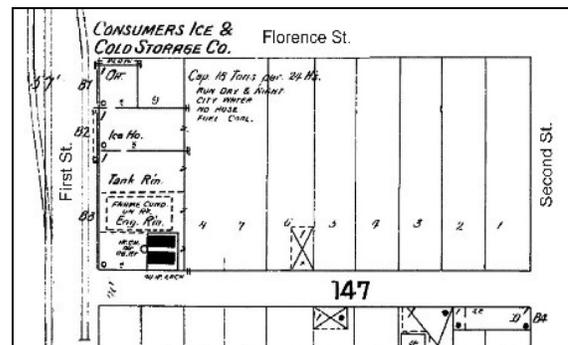


Figure 7-16 – Consumers Ice & Cold Storage Co. (Sanborn Map, 1898)

<sup>3</sup> The Chamber of Commerce, in 1911, claimed that James A. "Uncle Jimmy" Smith, president of the El Paso Dairy Co., had started the company in 1895.

secretary/treasurer and Dieter, Lemley, J.B. Clem, James H. Smith, W.W. Fink as directors (Fink would assume the presidency of the greatest rival, El Paso Ice & Refrigerator Co. in 1912) (EPCD 1900-1906).

Consumers continued to expand. By 1902, a new condenser room was added, along with a small building across the alley. Two new hay and wagon storage sheds were constructed at the south end of the lot. The facilities now extended to cover the entire eastern half of block 147, along Florence St. (Figure 7-17). The plant was fueled by oil with the storage tanks across the alley on First St. by 1905. The lights were electric, and the capacity had increased to 85 tons per day. A meat cold storage section had been added along Florence St. A photo from the H.G. McKinney collection – probably early 20<sup>th</sup> century – showed the intersection of First and Florence (Figure 7-18).

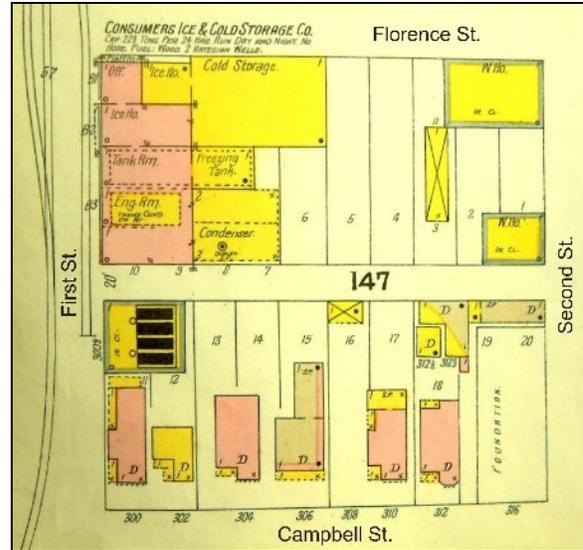


Figure 7-17 – Consumers Ice & Cold Storage Co. (Sanborn Map, 1902)

When Dieter died in 1907, the board of directors underwent a dramatic change. Charles Lemp of St. Louis, Missouri, became the new president with J.H. “Uncle Jimmy” Smith – the very successful founder of the El Paso Dairy Co. and local politician – as vice president. Until his death, Dieter managed the operation. Like most El Paso businesses, Consumers added a second telephone to reflect the two competitive communication companies. Along with the older SW 88, the firm added auto 1088 (EPCD 1907).



Figure 7-18 – Consumers Ice & Cold Storage Co. (H.G. McKinney collection)

E.J. Peterson replaced Dieter as manager in 1908, and the wagon sheds, shown on the earlier Sanborn maps, had disappeared. The capacity of the plant had again increased – to 130 tons per day. The plant had switched to coal for fuel, and the oil tanks now sat empty. Just west of the oil tanks, a new coal storage shed had been built (across the alley from the main section of the operation). The office remained at the corner of First and Florence (Figures 7-19 & 7-20).

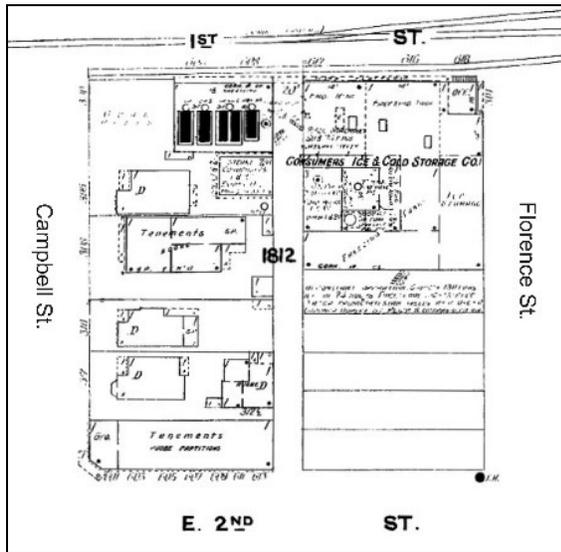


Figure 7-19 – Consumers Ice & Cold Storage Co. (Sanborn Map, 1908)



Figure 7-20 – Consumers Ice & Cold Storage Co. (Moeller 1908:43)

The plant connected with the Texas & Pacific railway and had the capability to manufacture 130 tons of distilled-water ice in 1911 (El Paso Chamber of Commerce 1911:68). By 1911, the company conducted a great deal of business with the surrounding states and Mexico. Consumers shipped

ice in carload quantities to many points in Chihuahua on the Mexican North-Western and the Mexican Central Railroads, while small towns along the [El Paso & Southwestern Railway] in New Mexico and Arizona are also supplied. 300 (sic) feet of switch trackage enables the company to unload coal and ship ice at a minimum of expense (El Paso Chamber of Commerce 1911:68).

At that point E. J. Peterson, a fourteen-year veteran with the company, was the manager.

Ads in the teens (e.g., *El Paso Herald* 1/17/1914) alerted readers to look for Consumers route men – the “Man in the Green Uniform.” The upper guidance remained very stable until the firm created a new rearrangement in 1919. Joseph A. Wright moved into the position of president and general manager; George G. Sauer became vice president; P.S. Ford took over as secretary; and L.J. Gilchrist became treasurer. For the first time, the firm used the street number for their address: 301 S. Florence. The phone number changed to 2250, and the company advertised “Pure Ice and Distilled Water” (EPCD 1919).

The new decade began with a second plant opening at 1629 (probably actually 1621) Texas in 1920 and the board changed slightly in favor of nepotism when John A. Wright replaced Sauer as vice president. Will Kellett joined the group in 1922 as assistant manager to Joseph Wright. Kellett almost certainly managed the new substation at 310 S. Campbell (in operation by 1923). A 1924 ad showed major changes in the building from the early photo (Figure 7-21). Another change took place in 1927 with J. Walker Morrow as the new president, Kellett advancing to vice president and general manager, W.C. Strickland becoming the new assistant manager, and J.S. Dickson taking the secretary and treasurer positions. The 1927 directory confirmed that the main ice plant was at 1621 Texas St. with the fuel yard (the original unit) at 301 S. Florence St., and the substation on Campbell (EPCD 1920-1927).

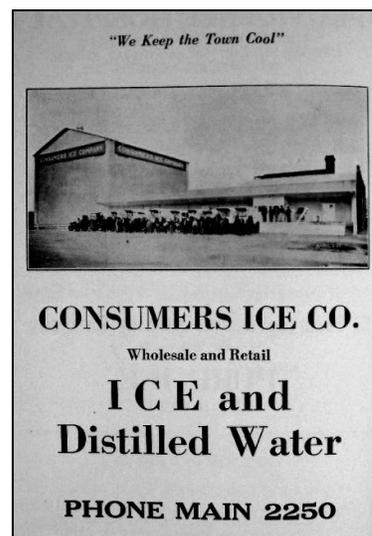


Figure 7-21 – Consumers ad (El Paso city directory, 1924)

The 1927 Sanborn map showed little change from 1908, although there were extra units along First St., and the hay and wagon buildings had been replaced by tenements (Figure 7-22). The Texas St. plant was operating day and night, including seven days a week in the summer. Two 150-horsepower boilers powered the plant, along with a 125 horsepower engine run by coal. The lights were electric, and the firm had both city water and its own well. The plant operated an 80-ton ice machine along with a double ammonia condenser refrigerator. An engine for stirring the brine also ran a 45-kilowatt generator to power the electric lights (Figure 7-23).

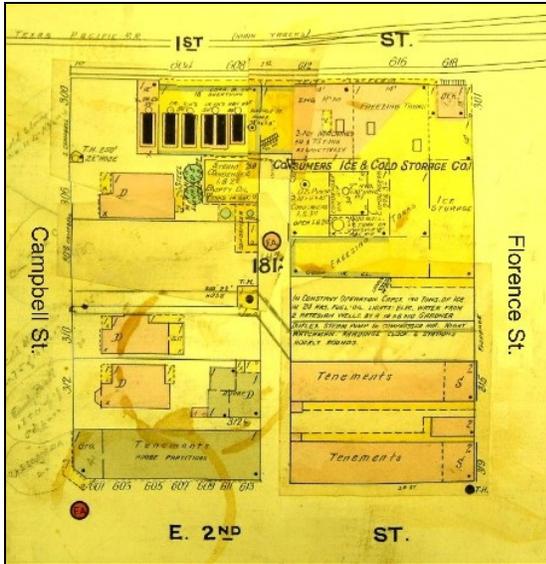


Figure 7-22 – Consumers Florence St. location (Sanborn Map, 1927)

It would be interesting to know what caused Morrow and Kellett to change places in 1928, although Kellett maintained his managerial role along with the presidency. In 1931, Morrow regained the presidency, and

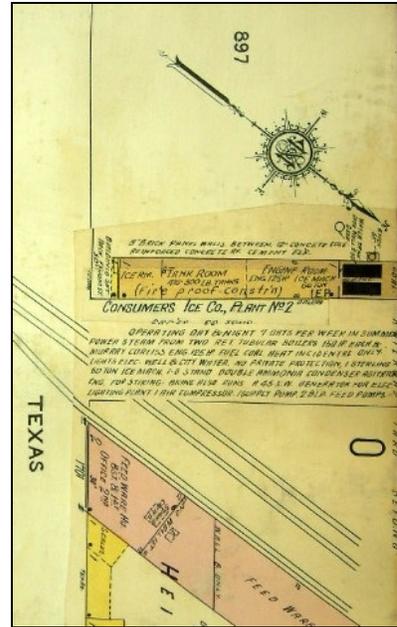


Figure 7-23 – Consumers Texas St. location (Sanborn Map, 1927)

Kellett vanished from the records. J.S. Dickson remained as secretary/treasurer, and W.P. Guilder became the manager of the main ice plant on Texas Street. The big 1931 change, however, was in the name. The renewed corporation was called Consumers Ice & Fuel Co. To reflect the importance of the automobile and fuel in the economy of the 1930s, Consumers added five more fuel yards (probably gas stations). Station No. 1 remained at First and Florence with its substation at 310 S. Campbell. Station No. 2 was located at the corner of Latta and the T.&N.O. Railway;<sup>4</sup> No. 3 was at Durazno and San Marcial; No. 4 at 3230 Alameda; No. 5 at Ascarate, and No. 6 located at W. 7<sup>th</sup> and Canal. Station No. 3 also carried “whol wood.” H.B. Harris replaced Dixon as secretary and treasurer in 1933 (EPCD 1928-1933).

A regular advertiser in El Paso newspapers, Consumers congratulated Harry Mitchell on the opening of his brewery in the *El Paso Times* on November 21, 1934, and included a bit of its own endorsement when it said, “Nothing cools a bottle of Harry Mitchell’s Special Beer to that proper drinking temperature like ice. Ice is the cheapest all year around refrigerant.” At some point in the 1930s, Consumers developed a portable display of refrigerator units (probably ice boxes) that it towed around behind a sedan (Figure 7-24).

<sup>4</sup> This makes no sense. The only T.&N.O. Railway I can find was in Canada!

G. Fulton Robinson became the division sales manager in 1939 and advanced to general manager of the ice division the next year, with Tom E. Rogers moving into the sales manager position. Rogers became assistant manager in 1942 and advanced to general manager by 1945. Harry Perkins became his assistant about 1947. Although no personnel changes took place, a 1952 ad touted “PURE DRINKING WATER[,] OZONE DISTILLED[,] ICE AND ELECTRIC COOLERS FURNISHED.” Indeed, Consumers was the only company listed under the Distilled Water heading in the city directories from 1929 until 1949, when the category was eliminated (EPCD 1939-1953).



Figure 7-24 – Consumers ice box trailer (H.G. McKinney collection)

A major change occurred in 1954 with a merger between El Paso Ice & Refrigerator Co. and Consumers. William S. Cooley, manager of El Paso Ice also became the manager of Consumers. In 1959, the company stopped advertising ice coolers and only offered electric ones. By this time, the company advertised “Pure Bottled Water (Deming or Distilled) Taste Free[,] Odor Free.” Fireplace logs became a new addition to the 1968 ad, and the company offered “All Ice Services[,] Bottled Drinking Water[,] and] Electric Water Cooler” in 1970. (EPCD 1954-1970).

The company advertised “Sparkling Crystal Clear Deming Drinking Water” in 1976 to take better advantage of the highly valued, good-tasting water available at Deming, New Mexico. The company also bragged that it carried “Distilled[,] Mineral[-]Free Water, Water Coolers and Dispensers” and offered “City-Wide Route Delivery.” Good drinking water was becoming a national obsession by this time. Cooley apparently retired in late 1980 or early 1981.<sup>5</sup> There was no listing for Consumers in the 1981 directory. When the company

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<sup>5</sup> A search of the Social Security Death Index produced no William Cooley who died in El Paso County within ten years of 1980. Although he could have died somewhere else, it would

reappeared in the 1982 directory, things had changed. Renamed Consumers Ice Co., the plant was now managed by Alanso N. Sandusky. The plant was on longer listed in the 1984 directory. After 88 years in business, Consumers was no more (EPCD 1971-1983).

### Bottles and Artifacts

I have only found a single, gallon-sized water jug from Consumers. The one offered on eBay was embossed “CONSUMERS (arch) / ICE / CO. (both horizontal) / EL PASO, TEXAS (inverted arch)” in a round plate on the front. The plate was read with the finish pointing down. The bottle was obviously intended to be used in a water cooler (Figures 7-25 & 7-26).



Figure 7-25 – Consumers gallon bottle (eBay)

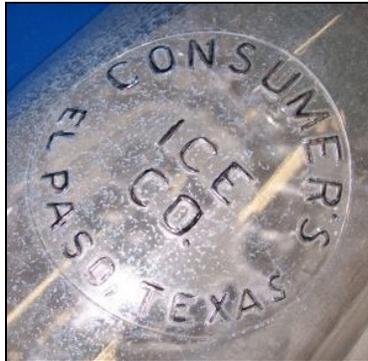


Figure 7-26 – Gallon bottle plate (eBay)

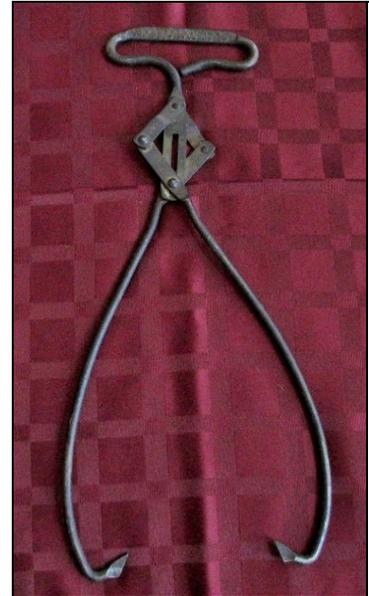


Figure 7-27 – Consumers ice tongs



Figure 7-28 – Ice tong handle

Consumers also offered the same type of ice tongs as those described for the El Paso Ice & Refrigerator Co. above (Figure 7-27). The handle was embossed “CONSUMERS ICE / AND COLD STORAGE CO” (Figure 7-28).

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have been after he left the business.

## El Paso Pure Water Co. (1901-1906)

On January 5, 1901, the *El Paso Herald* announced that the “El Paso Pure Water Company is erecting a plan on Texas street near Caples lumber yard. Water will be brought from the Mesa by the White Oaks Railroad and will be further softened and purified. The plant will have a daily capacity of 12,000 gallons.” The paper noted on January 7 that the firm “was chartered today with a capital of \$20,000.<sup>6</sup> The incorporators are S.S. Newman, E.M. Skeates, and C.O. Lagerfelt.” On October 9 the *Herald* added that the company “proposed to furnish the schools with drinking water at 1¼ cents per gallon” – although an El Paso doctor said the plan was foolish because half of the children in the city “were in the habit of drinking hydrant water at home.”

El Paso Pure Water Co. was first listed the city directory in 1902. E.M. Skeats was listed as the president, and the business was located at 1007 Texas. Skeates remained president in 1903, with E.E. Russell as secretary and treasurer. The company phone number was 612. The 1905 listing noted the presence of the firm’s laboratory at 1007 Texas, and the following year, Mrs. M.S. Russell took over the secretary/treasurer position. Apparently, the rivalry from the larger competitors was too strong; 1906 was the last listing for El Paso Pure Water.

The 1905 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map showed the El Paso Pure Water Co. as a modest firm. Its single small building was next door to the El Paso Sash and Door Co. The structure contained a gasoline engine, water tanks, and filters, although no other information was given on the map (Figure 7-29). By 1908 (the next map), even the building was gone.

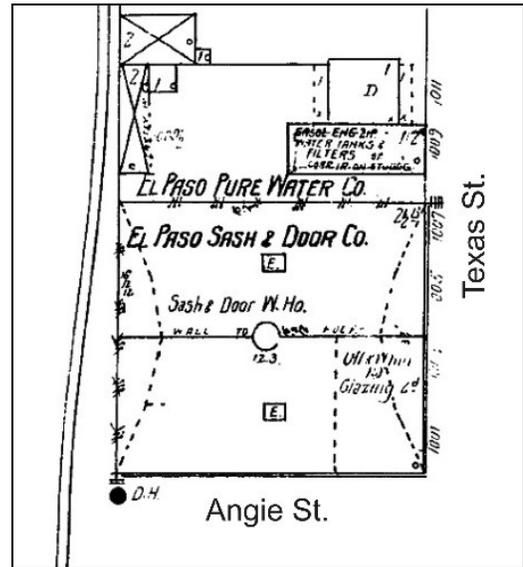


Figure 7-29 – El Paso Pure Water Co. (Sanborn Map, 1905)

<sup>6</sup> The date was actually January 4, 1901 (Tod 1902:29).

## El Paso Distilled Water Co. (1911-1920)

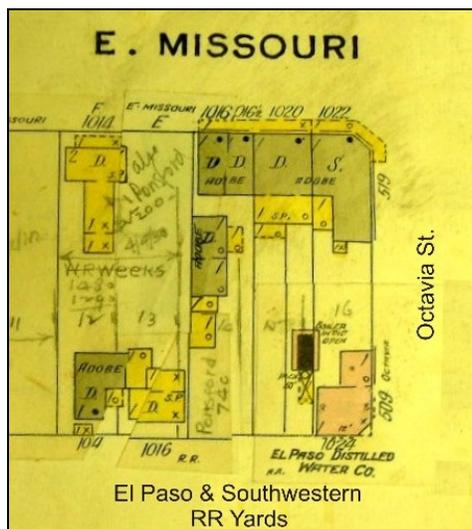


Figure 7-30 – El Paso Distilled Water Co. (Sanborn Map, 1927)

business in 1914 and continued to operate the firm until its dissolution in 1920. Wilder’s 1915 ad offered “pure distilled water in sterilized bottles” (EPCD 1911-1920). The plant may have gone unlisted for a few years. The plant was still shown on the 1927 Sanborn map (Figure 7-30).<sup>7</sup>

### Bottles and Artifacts

The only bottle I have seen from the El Paso Distilled Water Co. resided in the collection of David Cole. The container was a tall, half-gallon, champagne beer or soda bottle embossed “THE EL PASO (arch) / DISTILLED (horizontal) / WATER CO. (inverted arch)” in a round plate on the front (Figure 7-31). These could have been used any time during the life of the company.

In 1911, R.E. Huthsteiner resigned as secretary/treasurer of the El Paso Ice & Refrigerator Co. to become the manager of the new El Paso Distilled Water Co. The new plant was located at the northwest corner of Octavia (507 Octavia) and the El Paso & Southwestern Railway. As with most El Paso businesses during the 1907-1914 period, the company adopted both the Auto (1613) and Bell (489) telephone systems. Two years later (1913), the directory listed C.A. Tooke and E.H. Homan as the owners. The Auto phone was already gone. J.W. Wilder bought the

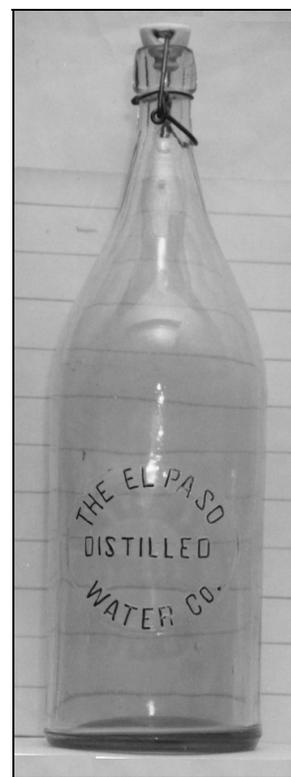


Figure 7-31 – El Paso Distilled Water Co. (David Cole collection)

<sup>7</sup> This map was created by pasting numerous updates over the 1920 map. The El Paso Distilled Water Co. location was pasted in.

## **Rio Grande Ice & Feed Co. (1915-1919)**

Joseph A. Wright opened the Rio Grande Ice & Feed Co. in 1915. The business advertised “wholesale and retail ice and distilled water” at 308 S. Florence (southwest corner of First St.). Although details are currently lacking, it appears that Rio Grande Ice & Feed Company’s larger competitor, Consumers Ice and Cold Storage Co., absorbed the smaller firm, when Joseph Wright became president of Consumers in 1919 and held that position until 1927 (see above). The short life of the Rio Grande Ice & Feed Co. was apparently sufficient for its owner (EPCD 1915-1919).

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

The histories of the El Paso ice and distilled water firms are more complete than those of many of the drug stores. Two of these firms were in business for many years, and all of them undoubtedly used many more containers than I have found. Most of these were probably generic, only identified by paper labels. Many more of these should eventually surface in collections, antique stores, and/or excavations.

## **Acknowledgments**

The colored Sanborn Maps were made available by the El Paso County Library, and the library website contributed photos from the 1909 Chamber of Commerce book. The other Chamber of Commerce citations were for publications located at the El Paso County Historical Society, who also provided the Moeller (1908) book of photos.

## **Sources**

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[EPCD] El Paso City Directories 1895-96 - 1983.

[EPMI] Ad in unidentified 1914 local magazine.

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