

A Short History and Guide to the Hammel Brewery and Hammel Museum (formerly the Illinois Brewing Company)

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THE COMPANY

THE HAMMEL MUSEUM started as a beer garden and, in the intervening century, because successively a brewery, an ice plant, a soda bottling plant, and finally ended as an active industry still making ice.

The museum is named in honor of the Hammel family, who came to Socorro in the early 1880s and built the brewery. Clarence Hammel was the 1st of the family to operate the business. He died in 1986. The structure was willed to the Socorro County Historical Society to become the Hammel Museum. The museum structure was built during the boom years in Socorro which began with the coming of the railroad in 1880 and ended with the closing of the mines in 1893. The museum chronicles the industrial and commercial history of those boom years.

Clarence's grandfather, Jacob Hammel, emigrated to the United States from Munich, Bavaria in 1848. He was accompanied by his friend Eberhard Anheuser, who wanted Jacob to join him in building a brewery in St. Louis. Jacob, in his infinite wisdom, decided to start his own brewery across the Mississippi River in Lebanon, Illinois, close to East St. Louis. The plant across the river in Missouri became, of course, the famous Anheuser-Busch company.

Nevertheless, Jacob did well with his brewery in Lebanon, calling it the Illinois Brewery. Relatives from Bavaria came over to work for the enterprising Jacob. Meanwhile, the company survived a spring flood even though survival required rebuilding the plant. In the early 1880s, Jacob's son, William G. Hammel, was sent to New Mexico Territory for his health. He was diagnosed as having developed blood poisoning as a result of dental surgery. Living in New Mexico was supposed to prolong his life. It did! He was joined in Socorro by his brother, Gustav.

The brother's first business was a bottling plant on Manzanares Avenue – the main street from the railroad depot to the plaza. In November 1882, William and Gustav acquired their first brewing license and by the Spring of 1883, the *Bullion*, one of the several local newspapers, reported the Hammel Brothers as “manufacturers and bottlers of Beer and Ale.” Before long they bought the property on Sixth Street where the museum now stands and started a beer garden. The site was a good one since it faced Sixth Street which was the main north-south road into Socorro [at that time]. Another paper, the *Chieftain*, reported on May 29, 1884 that

Hammel's beer garden will be quite a resort in the near future. Many trees have been planted and the place promises to be a perfect little park, where one may go, and in the delicious shade, quietly enjoy a cooling glass of the foaming beverage brewed but a few yards away.

[Note: in the 1880s, due to lack of refrigeration, beer was generally served at room temperature. Having a cold beer at the Hammel's was indeed a novelty upon which most of their early reputation was based].

Indeed, over the years it did become an informal park. Locals spread their picnics beneath the trees, often on the Fourth of July. In 1992, Mrs. Virginia Cuellar wrote fondly:

My family would have a picnic on [sic] the back of the building. My daddy had a little garden their [sic] ... and he planted chili and coarn for our picnic. My hasband and my kids and my sister and brothers would carry wash tubs with food that we were to eat from our house to the plant. I remember (the Hammels) had apple trees ... and my sister would bake them some pies ...

The newspaper report indicated that the beer garden was not yet opened and that the Hammels planned to brew their own beer on the site. When the Hammels did start making beer, they used a small adobe building here at the Sixth Street location. That building soon proved inadequate and it was replaced by a stone structure.

By the new year, 1886, the *Bullion* reported that the brewery had been enlarged with a shipment of “two carloads of machinery from the east, including boiler, engines, fans, mash tubs, fermentation tubs, etc.” The following month, the same paper reported that there were “three large coolers and three ice houses” and that Will Hammel had patented a cooling system that was ore efficient than previous systems. The paper enthusiastically pronounced that the local product was saving \$12,000 a year which would otherwise be spent on importing beer! The writer also pointed out that is was “the proper thing to patronize home industries.”

In May 1887, the name changed from the Hammel Bros. & Co. to the Illinois Brewing Company. The officers of the re-named enterprise were: Jacob Hammel, president; William G. Hammel, treasurer; and Gustav A. Hammel, secretary. It was truly a family business.

By June of that year, the newspaper again praised the up and coming Illinois Brewery with the headline “Ice manufactured in Socorro.” The new company laid out \$10,000 cash, according to the paper, for new machinery. The reported for the *Bullion* was conducted through the plant by Mr. J. Curry, “superintendent of construction of the machinery and representing the St. Louis Iron and Machinery Company.” (The steam engine and ammonia compressor are still on the brewery grounds).

The reporter described how the “massive 35-horsepower engine” pumped hot and cold water through “thousands of feet of iron coils to various departments of the establishment.” He also saw how the engine was connected to the ammonia compressor which, he said

... was sufficient for use in the manufacture of 600 pounds of ice, which is cast ... into cakes weighing 200 pounds each, 88 of which are turned out every 48 hours. There are two storage rooms for beer on the ground floor, each containing 6 coil(s) of pipe connected with the receiver, which also has connection with the accumulator and ammonia compressor.

After the beer fermented, it was transferred to storage rooms in the tallest section of the plant. It was then ready for all those parched throats in Socorro.

The Illinois Company was obviously doing very well and had earned a reputation beyond Socorro. Stories abound of travelers from across the country making it a point to pass through Socorro for a taste of the company's [cold] beer. The *Chieftain*, in a style of the booster spirit, poured on the accolades in an article June 6, 1893:

One of the home institutions of the city of Socorro is the Illinois Brewing Company. They make the best beer made anywhere in New Mexico, and an article that is far superior to any export beer shipped into Socorro from the east. The reason for this is evident when it is understood that they use nothing but pure spring water, the best hops and malt in the making of their brew. With this brewing plant they have an extensive ice plant and furnish daily, clear crystal ice to their customers here in Socorro. If you are a lover of fine beer, go to the brewery and sample their product, and forever after you will eschew eastern imported beer, for the product is much better than anything that can be imported!

This was all well and good. The business had even survived a fire a couple of years before. But 1893 was the beginning of the end of the boom years in Socorro. The mines in the mountains to the west were closing. The repeal of the Silver Purchase Act that year took the Federal Government out of the silver business. The price of silver collapsed and the mines and smelters closed. People left Socorro and the population dropped from a high of over 4,000 to just over 1,000. Even some of the Hammel brothers left town, but the brewery and ice plant stayed open.

In 1903, Jacob Hammel died and was succeeded as president of the company by his son William. William was born in Illinois and was the first Hammel in Socorro. In 1889 he married Lulu Rattinger of St. Louis and in time they had five children: Edna, William R., Edwin, Clarence, and Francis, the youngest. The large clan also became the core of "The Socorro Coronet Band," with Will Hammel as leader. Clarence said that during World War I the band escorted the young men to the Santa Fe railroad depot to be sent off to the service. He also said that the band then played its way back to the plaza, visiting bars enroute. At the plaza, the band would serenade the town into the week hours of the morning.

About 1904, a larger boiler was installed in the machine room on the south end of the building. That one came from a St. Louis company. The new boiler was rated at about 150 pounds per square inch. By that time the remodeling of the building and the installation of a more powerful boiler was completed, and the structure took on its present shape and size.

The brewery, then as now, consisted of four sections. The three-story center section (it actually has four levels) was used for storage on the two upper levels. The fourth level is beneath the roof and was seldom used/ On the first floor were the mast tub and kettle. The machinery space is an adobe structure with stone facade, on the first floor, and frame with metal siding on the second. This upper level contains feed water and condensation tanks.

The two-story section was the brew house where malt and hops were cooked and mixed. The cooker and sifter were driven by a second, smaller engine powered from the larger boiler. On the very north end of the building is the office.

In 1912, William Hammel acquired a soft drink franchise which, along with the ice business and brewery, kept the plant busy. The bottling works were housed in the building across the street to the west.

Then disaster struck in 1919! Congress and the states amended the Constitution to prohibit the production, distribution and consumption of alcoholic beverages. The Illinois Brewery was shut down and William Hammel died a year later, bankrupt. Within a few years, two of his sons also died, leaving the ice and bottling operations to Clarence.

Clarence carried on successfully with the ice and bottling businesses. Both did very well. Electric refrigerators were introduced in the 1920s but were not widespread, so the ice business prospered. Similarly, the introduction of cola drinks, combined with prohibition of alcoholic drinks, stimulated the soft drink industry to Clarence's benefit. In this time his plant bottled for Pepsi Cola, 7-Up, Nesbitt, and various Grapette flavors. Indeed, in 1925, Clarence was the first bottler of Pepsi Cola in New Mexico. In the meantime, the ice plant turned out two tons of ice per day!

When prohibition was repealed in 1933, Clarence did not try to re-open the brewery. The machinery was too deteriorated and the cost of restoration to operation was too expensive. He did go into various operations until the mid-1950s. Then he began to sell off portions of the business or simply to close them up. Modern refrigeration, coin operated ice machines, centralized distribution by the soda pop companies, and the death of his wife Marcella made Clarence call it quits. In 1986, he bequeathed the building to the Socorro County Historical Society as a museum. The Society is honored to preserve in the Hammel Museum the memory of the remarkable family.

THE BUILDING

The Hammel Museum building is remarkable for a number of reasons. Like the business, the building started small and, like the business, grew as the business grew. From the original adobe building on the south end, to the right as you face the building, the structure was added on to and the material altered from adobe to stone. The individual rooms are numbered to correspond roughly with the additions to the building.

Room 1, the Office

The office where Mr. Clarence Hammel would handle business and visit with friends and watch television. He spent a lot of time here after the death of his wife. Visitors are encouraged to enter the building through the office to the mash room

Room 2, the Mash Room

This is the biggest room and was used for making the beer. There are three different cookers. Each is bigger than the other. As business grew each cooker was replaced with a larger one. The largest is located on the second level. The flour sifter is from the Golden Crown Mill located on the south side of town. Other displays are appropriately labeled. The upper stories were for storage and a belt driven sifter. Note the one belt drive wheel is still in place in the ceiling. There was probably another, smaller, steam engine for power.

Room 3, Main Entrance

The original main entrance to the building and access to Room 4, the Cold Rooms. During the ice making years, the ice was sold from room 3. There was a modern, electric ice grinder in this room.

Room 4, Cold Storage

The tallest section of the building were cold storage rooms for the beer. The beer was stored here after the brewing process, and the new beer was placed in large wooden tanks to age. Notice the thick stone walls, and triple glazed windows, also the cooling pipes which were connected to the St. Louis Company compressor in

Room 5, Engine Room

The room was once dominated by the Steam Engine and Ammonia Compressor which were built by the St. Louis Iron and Machine Works in 1887. The ammonia compressor supplied the cold for cooling the beer and making ice. The steam engine was replaced later by an electric motor and compressor. That equipment is located toward the rear of the room. The area upstairs held the feed water-tank, heat exchanger, and cooler for the ice business.

Room 6, Boiler Room

The boiler is also from the St. Louis Iron and Machinery Works and is dated 1904. It was installed about that time.

Room 7, Freezing Room

Ice was made here in molds. Each mold produced a block of ice weighing 125 pounds. There was a loading dock where customers picked up their blocks of ice. There are many of the old ice molds still on the property.

Room 8, Cold Room

This was also a cold room for storage. A ramp from the loading dock led down to the cold room in order for the blocks of ice to slide down to the entrance to Room 8.

There is a missing room in the rear of the building located between the two wings. This was the “wash room” for the cleaning of equipment and ice molds. This was removed by Mrs. Hammel in the early 1970s.