

WAGENER BREWERY

1865-1914

The 'Brewery in the Mountains,' with beer as pure as the breath of Spring and as delightful as the rays of noon-day sun.

— Wagener Brewing Company advertising brochure

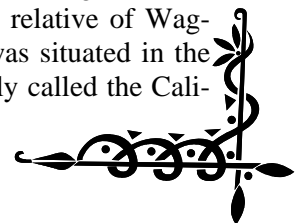
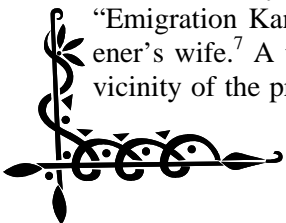
The Wagener Brewery, the largest brewery of its time in Utah and one of the largest in the West, was established in 1865 at the mouth of Emigration Canyon. Mountain spring water and a location outside of the legal grip of Salt Lake City's ever-changing liquor laws brought Henry Wagener and his brewery to this location. The brewery attracted soldiers, revelers, and families to enjoy a pleasant afternoon and a glass of ale under the huge trees at the canyon's mouth. Standing four stories tall, it was the dominant landmark at the mouth of the canyon from 1865 until its demise in 1914.

In 1865 there were over twenty small breweries and distilleries in Salt Lake City. Business was brisk, as liquor was both a commodity and a necessary household staple. It was widely used through the 1920s for medicinal purposes, including cleansing of wounds, mild anesthesia, and treatment of most medical complaints both major and minor. In addition to liquor, distilleries produced vinegar, which was a necessary item for preserving vegetables, cleaning, and cooking. Both Mormons and non-Mormons ran breweries and distilleries. Mormon patriarch Brigham Young even built one, which was leased and operated by Salt Lake City.¹ The tenets of the Mormon Church prohibited non-medicinal uses of alcohol, but the prohibition was not emphasized as official doctrine until well into the twentieth century. Drunkenness, gambling, and other liquor-associated "evils" were not tolerated. In spite of official church doctrine, however, many Mormons, especially recent converts (a dominant part of the population), continued to drink, and increasing numbers of non-Mormons who routinely drank liquors and wines already lived in or traveled through Salt Lake City.²

During its first two decades, the city council attempted to control drunkenness and other problems by licensing and controlling breweries and drinking establishments, which gave the city a sizeable revenue. In addition, the council enacted prohibition of alcohol a number of times, only to struggle with the financial and political issues this presented and repeal the prohibitions; ran liquor establishments themselves; and created such a set of schizophrenic liquor laws that the breweries and alehouses had virtually constant altercations with the city.³

It was in this political climate that Henry Wagener, a native of Germany and already a prominent California brewer, immigrated to Utah in 1864.⁴ He first applied to build a brewery near the Jordan River and received a license for a period of three months and a fee of \$200 per month, which was standard for large-scale breweries at the time.⁵ It does not appear that he ever built the brewery on the Jordan River. Instead, he set up shop to sell stationery, tobacco, and lagers (a light beer brewed by slow fermentation and matured under refrigeration) on the west side of East Temple Street.⁶

In February of 1865, Wagener applied for and received a permit to "manufacture lager beer in "Emigration Kanyon" for a term of six months" along with Paul Englebrecht, a relative of Wagener's wife.⁷ A two-storey wood-frame building was built for the brewery and was situated in the vicinity of the present east exit from This Is the Place Monument. It was originally called the Cali-



Photos were misfiled in the historical society, this is North Star Brewery in St Paul MN, change picture



Pure mountain spring water and a location outside the legal Salt Lake City and its ever-changing liquor laws brought the brewery to the mouth of the canyon. *(Used by permission, Utah State Historical Society, all rights reserved)*

ifornia Brewery, as the lager it produced was sometimes referred to as California Beer or California Lager. The brewery site was chosen because of an ideal source of spring water a few hundred feet up the canyon, which was gravity fed into a seven-thousand-gallon reservoir six hundred feet northeast of the brewery and then piped to the brewery itself.⁸ The cement reservoir, maintained and improved over the years, is still there as of this writing. The slope of the site worked to Wagener's advantage in another way as well. From an ice house built on the hillside, blocks of ice slid down two wooden chutes to the brewery where the beer was fermented.

In June 1865 Margaret Englebrecht Wagener followed her husband to Salt Lake with a ten-month-old baby. A two-room house and a barn were built on the brewery grounds for the family, until they later moved to a permanent residence in the city.⁹

When asked if his was the only brewery in the city at the time, Wagener mentioned only a "small Mormon brewery operated by John Ed-dins." Perhaps his omission of the City Distillery and over twenty others in operation was related to the fact that they manufactured different liquors than the lager beer he produced.¹⁰

Besides access to good water, a major reason for situating the brewery at the mouth of Emigration Canyon was proximity to the city and acces-

sibility to supplies, while being legally outside the city limits. When asked if he was in any way hindered or bothered in his business, Wagener stated: "I had a little trouble at first, but not so very much. Of course, we dare not sell in the city, that was the reason we went out so far." Wagener did, in fact, sell liquor in the city whenever the fickle prevailing laws allowed.¹¹ The 152 acres on which the brewery was built were purchased from the federal government, but Wagener was engaged in a lawsuit with the city for three years before he could obtain title to his land. The city claimed it was part of the city town site and therefore city-owned land.¹² This led to the peculiar licensing issues surrounding the brewery. The city council had specifically noted that they had no jurisdiction outside the city limits, and Wagener apparently believed that he was outside of these limits. In spite of this, he applied for a permit for the brewery from the city, and the city granted his request. Very likely the reason Wagener was forced to litigate to prove he was outside city limits is that in 1865 the city council adopted one of its periodic prohibition policies. This would have forced Wagener to either close his brewery or assert that he was outside city jurisdiction.¹³

Wagener and Englebrecht still had to live with the city ordinances regulating their retail sales of liquor in the city. They applied for re-

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Enjoying the brew at Henry Wagener Brewing Company. (Used by permission, Utah State Historical Society, all rights reserved)

newal of their petition to sell lager beer at Dinwoody's Cabinet Shop in June 1865. The permit was denied as "not being authorized by law." Numerous petitions from other brewers or retailers were also denied or tabled indefinitely during 1865. Meanwhile, the city was the sole proprietor of liquor in town, operating its own distillery, liquor stores, and bars.¹⁴ Unable to sell liquor within the city limits, Henry Wagener built Wagener Grove at the mouth of Emigration Canyon to sell his beer.

Wagener Grove comprised a few shaded picnic benches where city folk could come up, take in the cool mountain air, and enjoy a little lager beer. It was advertised as a place where "parties desiring to spend a few pleasant hours 'neath the cool shade of magnificent trees, or within cosy buildings, and sip the fresh and foaming nectar, or delight the appetite with delicious edibles amid delightful surroundings, can do so undisturbed and untrammelled by the dictates of fashionable society."¹⁵ Dancing was an available indulgence on all holidays. In addition to arriving by way of the Utah Central Railway, pleasure seekers could take a mule-drawn streetcar or walk from nearby Camp Douglas.¹⁶

Philip Fishler would walk to the brewery from the city, buy two bottles of beer, tie each to the end of a string and hang them over his shoulders

while he walked up the canyon. Then he would put them in the stream so he could enjoy a cool draught later on.¹⁷ Wagener's Grove was particularly popular with the soldiers from Camp Douglas, just a short walk away. According to O. W. Hoop, "A couple of miles south of the post was a brewery where on Sunday one could buy a small keg of beer with tables, tin cups, and a bung starter thrown in without additional cost. The latter could be use for self-defense in personal combat."¹⁸

In 1866 it was pointed out that the city was exercising a double standard by selling liquor themselves but not allowing sales by private parties, and liquor licenses were again made available. Originally these city licenses were intended to be used only to help close out the substantial city stock of liquor before complete prohibition would again be enacted in the city. Wagener and Company lost no time in applying for a liquor license to sell beer in the city. Wagener and Englebrecht had recently renewed their license for the Billiard Saloon, not without difficulty, and had conceded to renewing the license without serving liquor.¹⁹ They now included a request to serve liquor at the Billiard Saloon, and it was granted.²⁰ Soon thereafter, they received a permit costing \$900 for three months to operate a "Dram Shop" or "Drinking Saloon" at their new building on Second South in

Check if this is really the Utah central RR, maybe should be the SL and Fort Douglas RR, see pg 5)

Billiard saloon, do we have an address



“A couple of miles south of the [Fort Douglas] post was a brewery where on Sunday one could buy a small keg of beer with tables, with tables, tin cups, and a bung starter thrown in without additional cost. The latter could be used for self-defense in personal combat. (Used by permission, Utah State Historical Society, all rights reserved)

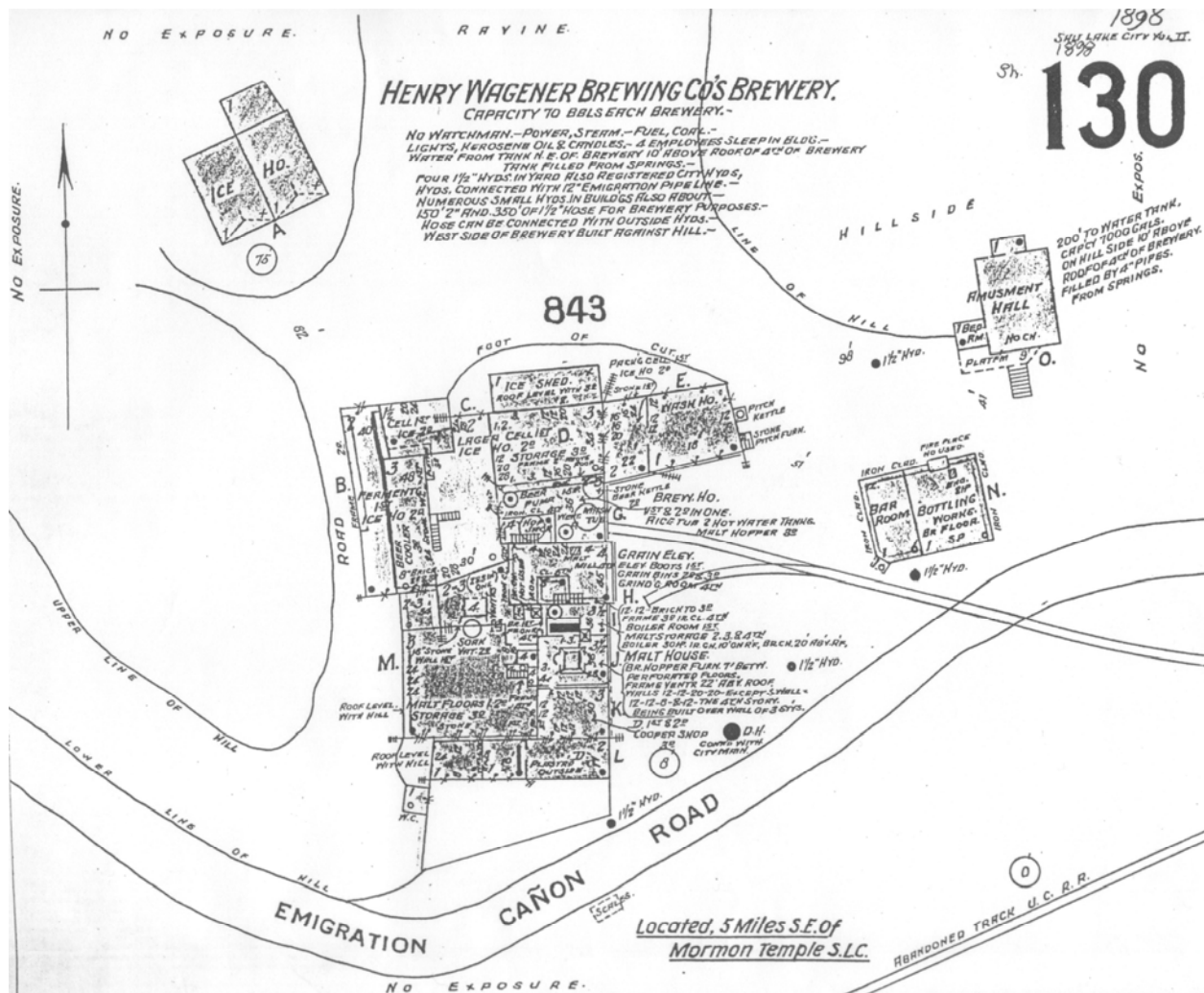
front of John Young’s private residence.²¹ In the next month, the city granted at least twenty more permits to other proprietors. These permits did not specify that the sales were limited to close-out liquor from the city stock, as originally intended. In fact, Wagener was clearly manufacturing beer, although after applying for his first permit in 1865, he no longer sought permits to manufacture liquor since he had proven he was legally outside the city limits. On paper, the city was toeing a hard line on liquor, but in practice it appears that it was once again overflowing with spirits. City revenues included over \$116,000 from liquor licenses, which was a substantial part of its total revenue of \$186,444.²²

Between 1884 and 1889, the name of the brewery was changed from the California Brewery to Henry Wagener Brewing Company, which was incorporated in 1897.²³ The original wood-frame buildings were torn down and replaced by modern brick structures in 1885.²⁴ The brewery proper had grown into an 80 x 180 foot, four-storey brick building, with its west side built into the hillside. Most of the building was taken up by grain storage, fermentation vats for aging beer, and ice to keep it cool. A large ice house on the

hill sixty feet north of the brewery stored the supply of ice, which by 1891 was made using the latest mechanical device—a freezer.²⁵ When the brewery was remodeled, the old ice house across the road from the brewery (the road was then south of its present location) was converted into a large saloon and dance hall that became part of Wagener’s Grove. At some point, the name of this saloon was changed to the Emigration Inn, by which it was known at the turn of the century.²⁶

An early historical reference to bicycles in the canyon occurred in connection with Wagener’s Grove. In 1894 a local bicycle club stopped at Wagener’s Grove for lunch, and many cyclists proceeded several miles up the canyon. The advantage of newly developed rubber bicycle tires over the solid “old wheels” was touted on this trek, as the road was rough and unpaved at this time and the rubber tires provided a more comfortable ride.²⁷

Wagener’s was advertised as the “Brewery in the Mountains,” and its beer as “pure as the breath of Spring and as delightful as the rays of the noon-day sun.” Four varieties were available:



Sanborne insurance map (used to insure for fire and other disasters) of the Henry Wagener Brewery. (Special Collections Department, J. Willard Marriot Library, University of Utah)

Wagner's Imperial Beer: A Special Family Brew. Invaluable as a tonic. A perfect food—liquid bread.

Wagner's Beer: The Beer of the Year. Made after the old German formula, with a rare, delicious tang.

Wagner's Brown Stout: A mild tonic for Invalids and Convalescents. We believe it is the Best Stout on the market.

Wagner's Malt Tonic: Recommended by physicians because of its purity. A strengthener and appetizer.²⁸

Wagner Brewery sold its beer wholesale or

retail. In 1878 a cold glass was available at the Fountain Saloon, one door east of the main branch post office, for five cents. Wholesale orders were transported by mule cart until October 28, 1888, when Henry Wagener delightedly announced to the *Salt Lake Tribune* that “the first whistle ever blown in Emigration Canyon blows at his brewery at 2:35 pm today, when one of John W. Young’s locomotives will sound its note there.”²⁹ The locomotive belonged to the Salt Lake and Fort Douglas line of the Utah Central Railway, which had just been extended as far as the brewery. Shipments of brewers’ products from the Wagner site were made to Utah, Idaho, and Wyoming. The railroad carried coal, barley, hay, and other raw products to the brewery and returned with barrels of beer to the Union Pacific

Rescan color post-card, Jeff's note: confirm. Photo doesn't appear to be South of the Road, we can discuss with Randy Dixon.



When the brewery was remodeled, the old ice house was converted into a large saloon and dance hall, becoming part of Wagener's Grove. At some point, the name was changed to the Emigration Inn, which it was called at the turn of the century. *(Private collection of W. Randall Dixon)*



Interior of the Emigration Inn, August 29, 1909. *(Used by permission, Utah State Historical Society, all rights reserved)*

Rescan in color



Wagener beer label. (Collection of Stan Sanders)

Depot for shipping. In 1890 the Salt Lake and Fort Douglas Railroad went bankrupt,³⁰ and the brewery had to rely on carts once again for transportation.

Wagener's hosted a "merchant's exchange" and provided a premium catalog, through which customers could exchange beer labels for discounts on everything from clothing, jewelry, dishes, and musical instruments to harnesses, buggies, and farm implements.³¹ The brewery also sold yeast to individuals and professional bakeries. One pioneer child recalled his trips to the brewery: "One chore or errand I always dreaded was being sent by my mother to a very prominent business firm at the mouth of Emigration Canyon, called Wagener's Brewery, to get yeast for the family bakery. This was when cow herds were always rambling over the country, along the roadways and water ditches, and they

were wild cows to a boy like me." Fortunately, he could often hitch a ride with a passing wagon. "It was a frequent occurrence for the brewery wagon to run over a snake and cut it in two. There was no fear about that, because we would rather see two dead snakes than one live one."³²

The capacity of the brewery was eighty barrels a day, and it produced a total of eight thousand barrels a year. The Wagener Brewing Company was careful to point out the importance of the brewery to the Utah economy. In 1911 it purchased 1,500,000 pounds of barley, 150,000 pounds of oats, 5,000 pounds of bran, and 172 tons of hay (for packing ice) from Utah farmers, paid \$70,684.82 in wages to Utah employees, and bought \$8,733.65 worth of hops, the only ingredient not available in Utah.³³ Steam powered the brewery, coal heated it, and oil (coal, lard, and kerosene) lanterns and candles provided



Advertising on delivery trucks for Wagener Brewing Company (*Used by permission, Utah State Historical Society, all rights reserved*)



“Utah’s Oldest and Best Brewery.” (*Used by permission, Utah State Historical Society, all rights reserved*)

light. Clearly fire was a concern, because numerous small hydrants were placed throughout the building, and several water tanks were placed on roofs.³⁴

It appears that in later years the brewery got into financial difficulty. In 1891, the same year the ice-making machinery was added, Henry Wagener took out two mortgages, one for \$12,000, and the other for \$14,000. In 1893 he took an additional \$15,000 mortgage. By 1897 the brewery was near bankruptcy, and a six-month extension was given on an unspecified loan amount. Six months later, apparently unable to pay the debt, the Wagener Brewing Company went into receivership.³⁵ The Wagener Brewing Company retained some of their investment, and much of the rest was purchased by the Deere Company. Henry Wagener died July 11, 1903.

After fifty years, "Utah's Oldest and Best" brewery burned down on December 27, 1914, and was never rebuilt. The cause of the fire was unknown. There was conjecture that the fumes from alcohol varnish used to coat several vats ignited, but this could not be decisively determined. The flames spread quickly, a huge alcohol tank exploded, and floors covered with large amounts of sawdust (probably used for insulating ice and beer) ignited instantly. The brewery had prepared for fire by placing several huge tanks of water on the hill above, with lines running directly to the buildings. The heat from the inferno broke the water lines, and the water poured out, uncontrolled, emptying the tanks and leaving no reserve for the fire department when it arrived. The firefighters could do nothing to stop the blaze, so they concentrated on removing what furniture and valuables they could, including a piano and a collection of guns. Reports stated that the fire engines returned to town while the

flames were still at their highest, as there was nothing more they could do. The buildings were valued at \$200,000 but were insured for only \$95,000. With Prohibition in the offing and the significant lack of capital funds for rebuilding, the brewery was abandoned and never rebuilt.³⁶

For years, the old bottling house that had been converted into a beer and

dance hall at Wagener's Grove stood empty, fal-

ling into disrepair. In spite of its broken windows and the door off its hinges, the dance hall was still home to a large and beautiful, though slightly off-key piano, which stood in the building as a memory of the happy days at Wagener's Grove. Teenagers thought the building made a wonderful location for a haunted house, but the only ghosts the piano saw were of the Wagener Brewery.³⁷

The area that was once the bustling Wagener Brewery and that held dreams of even more lucrative commerce has been preserved as open terrain at the top of This Is the Place State Park. The abandoned roads near the brewery, the bed of the Salt Lake and Fort Douglas Railroad, and the roads of the Oak Hills subdivision provide hiking and biking trails. The canyon road was moved to make space for the parking lot at Hogle Zoo and now runs almost directly over the location of the brewery. All that remains of the Wagener Brewery are the old water tanks, some musty advertisements and other records, and a few bittersweet memories, including those of an out-of-key piano standing in memory of a canyon landmark.

Jeffs note: confirm Wag-
eners grove