

# Beer History: 3 Nearly-Forgotten San Diego Beer Pioneers

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While San Diego is known as a craft beer destination, being home to Stone, Ballast Point, AleSmith, and many more, there was a thriving brewing scene long before those breweries appeared. 19th- and early-20th century San Diego's breweries were a little smaller and rougher, but they were a key part of their city. And although San Francisco dominated early commercial brewing in California—major Bay Area breweries such as Fredericksburg and Philadelphia Brewery had outposts in San Diego—homegrown businesses made their own marks, not just on the industry, but on the city itself. Here is a brief look at **three nearly-forgotten San Diego beer pioneers**.

## San Diego Brewing Company

Alonzo Horton , who developed much of what became modern San Diego, founded San Diego Brewing Company in the late 1890s. Soon, business was thriving—demand was such that a 5-ton ice-making machine was installed, as well as a stand-alone bottling house ([pictured here](#) ).

By 1909, the company changed its name to the San Diego Consolidated Brewing Company, and was valued at more than \$500,000. But despite brewing a popular, successful product, the political climate was not favorable to the company's continued good fortunes—by 1913, Arizona had passed its own anti-alcohol law, and the company [filed suit](#) against the Atchinson, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad for refusing to carry their near-beer products to the now-dry state (previously a reliable consumer).

The suit was successful, but the brewery was still forced to close when Prohibition became the law of the land. San Diego Brewing Company re-opened in 1935, and had a brief rivalry with Aztec Brewing Company, but with the advent of the US entry into World War II, the brewery's location was commandeered by the Navy. The name was revived in the 1990s, and today's [San Diego Brewing Company](#). (no direct relation) is now a popular brewpub.

## Mission Brewing Company

Mission Brewing Company was one of the city's more short-lived beer businesses, but it has left an indelible mark on the skyline. In 1913, owner [August Lang](#), long a fixture of the San Francisco Bay Area brewing and bottling scene, commissioned a new brewery, designed by Chicago architect Richard Greisser; *The Western Brewer* [detailed the equipment](#) in the brewhouse (one capable of producing 30,000 barrels a year) as well as the company's intent to 'make a first-class bottle beer, which they will ship to the surrounding country as well as to foreign countries as soon as the Panama Canal is opened.'

The brewery produced Old Mission Lager with hops imported from Bavaria, but its commitment to quality did not help the bottom line. The building (still a San Diego landmark, pictured) only served as a brewery for five years before it was forced to shut down in advance of Prohibition, and it became first a [hospital annex](#) during the 1918 influenza epidemic, and then a seaweed processing plant until the 1980s. Mission Brewery's name was [revived in 2007](#), and its 1913 building is now home to [Five Points Brewing Company](#).

## Aztec Brewing Company

In contrast to the common story of a pre-Prohibition brewery going under thanks to the 20th Amendment, one of San Diego's largest local breweries was founded during the 'great experiment'—just across the border in Mexicali. Begun by San Diego natives, the brewery was aimed squarely at Americans coming to Tijuana for a legal drink, as well as at the domestic Mexican market (one of the founders, William H. Strouse, also had a hand in Tecate's origin).

When Prohibition was repealed in 1933, Aztec Brewing Company set up shop in San Diego. Soon after moving back stateside, it was [the third-largest brewery west of the Rocky Mountains](#), and was well-known for its Famous A-B-C beer, as well as for the brewery's distinctive pre-Columbian-style murals by Jose Moya del Pino.

The brewery was [canning its beer](#) by 1936, but like many other regional breweries, it was a victim of brewery consolidation; after its purchase by a Michigan brewery, in 1948, the San Diego plant was shut down, and the [Famous A-B-C](#) brand was sold to a Los Angeles brewery, which discontinued it in the 1950s.

Aztec's closing heralded the end of commercial brewing in San Diego until 1989, when Karl Strauss Brewing Company kick-started the craft brew revival in the city. Although the brewery building is long gone, the murals were preserved by the city, although they are (still) [awaiting conservation](#) and a permanent home.

Just this year, the [Aztec Brewing Company](#) was reborn—it seems [there is life](#) in the old name yet.

The more recent history of San Diego's brewery scene is more well-known, but Stone Brewing [keeps that legacy alive](#) through tours and beer history education. [The San Diego History Center](#) does its part as well, with a number of brewery-relating historical collections and photos. It seems only fitting that so many of the city's once-ubiquitous beer brands are making their way back into the public consciousness, thanks to the city's once-again-thriving beer scene.