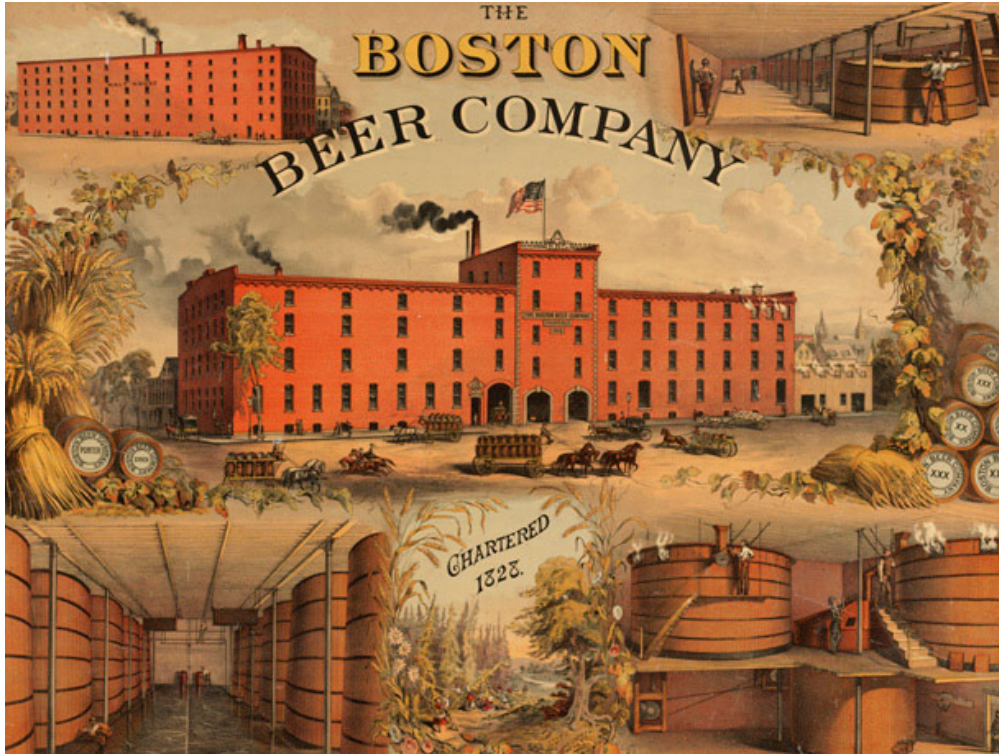


Beer History: Boston

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Modern beer drinkers may associate Boston with the Boston Beer Company and Samuel Adams, but beer has been an important part of the city's identity since its earliest days—and it's been home to more than one eponymous beer company.

In 1634, Samuel Cole obtained the first license for a tavern, very likely one that brewed its own beer, although unlicensed and thoroughly unofficial 'ordinaries' that provided a meal and an ale (or several) existed before that time .

Others, also located near the original city docks (now largely part of the Financial District) soon followed, and by 1637, Robert Sedgewick obtained a license to brew beer on a more commercial level, though it should be noted his business was established well before he applied for official sanction.

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The location of these early taverns and brewing operations near the docks was no accident; beer was needed to supply the ships sailing between Europe and the colonies, and much of Boston's commercial brewing in the late 17th and early 18th centuries was aimed at the maritime trade. Historian Gregg Smith noted that Sampson Salter, working in conjunction with Peter Faneuil (he of the Hall—a gift to Boston financed by his merchant activities, which included beer sales and slave trading) sold directly to many ships, and other successful brewers followed that model. A number of ships' captains also opened their own breweries near Boston's harbor.

Boston's popularity as a seaport meant that much of the beer consumed locally was actually produced elsewhere—it was so easy to import it from other cities that while taverns continued to brew their own beer on a small scale, the larger producers stayed focused on exports. But as the 18th century wore on and rumblings of revolution became more distinct, the taverns came back to the fore. [The Green Dragon](#), which originally opened as the Baker's Arms in 1665, had gone through [a number of changes](#) in name, ownership and location by the time it became a favored meeting place for the likes of Samuel Adams, Paul Revere, and the other Sons of Liberty. Despite the tavern's starring role in a number of iconic historical events, including the Boston Tea Party and Paul Revere's not-quite-as-successful-as-the-poem ride, it was [demolished in 1828](#) to allow for Union Street to be widened. Its modern namesake only opened [in the 1990s](#).

Larger-scale commercial beer production in Boston began to grow after the Revolutionary War, though, partially fueled by a 1789 '[Act To Encourage The Manufacture & Consumption Of Strong Beer, Ale & Other Malt Liquors](#)' which aimed to curtail 'the pernicious effects of spirituous liquors' by exempting brewers from many taxes. But despite the official support, it would take Boston another few decades before a truly long-lasting brewery was established.

The Boston Beer Company, no relation to today's home of Sam Adams, was [incorporated in 1828](#). By the 1830s, the brewery was successful well beyond the New England region, with beer being shipped as far away [as New Orleans](#). They continued to grow throughout the century, and even [sued](#) the state of Massachusetts after it passed an early alcohol prohibition law in 1869.

The Haffenreffer brewery also went from strength to strength in the 19th century. German immigrant Rudolph Haffenreffer quickly established a reputation as a brewer of quality lager beer, and its [Jamaica Plain](#) plant quickly became a center for the beer trade in New England. Although originally established as the [Boylston Lager Beer Company](#), waves of German immigrants, many of whom found employment at the brewery, meant that the more 'Boston' name was no longer required—a German name for a German-style lager would do.

Both the Boston Beer Company and Haffenreffer managed to survive Prohibition, and even thrived again for a time—the Haffenreffer family was instrumental in reviving Rhode Island's Narragansett Brewing Company in addition to bringing back their Boston-born Haffenreffer Lager and Pickwick brands. The Boston Beer Company could boast of being 'America's oldest brewery' in its post-Prohibition resurgence, but its [Light Ale](#) never regained a national spotlight. With a regional and national trend toward larger brands and [fewer opportunities for distribution](#), both companies ran out of steam within a few years of each other—Boston Beer Company closed in 1957, and when Haffenreffer sold what was left of their operation to their cousins at Narragansett (which managed to hang on until 1981—the current re-use of the brand is under new ownership), Boston no longer had a brewery.

The city remained brewery-less [until 1984](#), when Jim Koch started his own Boston Beer Company to produce Samuel Adams. While its flagship Boston Lager and other brands have not always been made within the city (especially as demand for the product has grown nationally), the former Haffenreffer brewery is 'home' for [brewery tours](#), as well as Boston Beer Company's research and development.

But bragging rights for the renewal commercial brewing within Boston's city limits must go to Harpoon Brewery, who are quite proud to hold [Massachusetts Brewery Permit No. 1](#), granted in 1987. Brewpubs like [Boston Beer Works](#) are also very much a part of Boston's modern brewery scene, as are those just across the river in Cambridge—[Cambridge Brewing Company](#) and the [John Harvard Brew House](#) are something of a hearkening back to Boston's first taverns.

It's hard to imagine American beer culture without Sam Adams, and it's worth remembering Boston's earlier brewing pioneers and patriots.