



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS
HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

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**A TALL COOL ONE:
AMERICAN BREWING COMPANY LISTED ON THE NATIONAL REGISTER**

A former brewery in Providence's Valley neighborhood has received federal recognition for its contributions to the history of architecture, engineering, and industry. Edward F. Sanderson, Executive Director of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission, announced that the National Park Service has added the American Brewing Company to the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register is the Federal Government's official list of properties throughout the United States whose historical and architectural significance makes them worthy of preservation. Built in 1892 and expanded ca. 1900 and in 1911, the American Brewing Co. Plant is significant as a fine example of an urban, industrial-scale, gravitation brewery that conducted brewing process in vertically arranged spaces.

The American Brewing Company occupies a corner parcel of approximately 1.5 acres at the northeast corner of Harris Avenue and Eagle Street in Providence. The property includes three contributing buildings: a 3-story, brick brewery (1892), an ice plant (ca. 1900), and a boiler house (1911). The massive, three-story, German Romanesque Revival-style brewery is clad in brick with rough-faced granite trim atop a rough-faced granite ashlar foundation. This single building contains seven separate "houses"—or spaces—devoted to phases of industrial brewing: the malt mill, brew house, stock house, lager racking room, lager wash house, drying house, and engine/refrigeration room. The ice plant is a two-story brick building attached to the north elevation of the brewery. The boiler house is a two-story, flat-roofed brick building with granite trim.

In 1891, Providence brewer James Hanley (1841-1912) and partners received a charter for the brewing of lager beer under the name American Brewing Company. Born in Ireland and raised in Rhode Island, Hanley had decades of experience in beer and liquor production and sales. He worked with Philadelphia-based architect and brewery engineer Adam C. Wagner (1860-1912) on a project to refurbish the Rhode Island Brewery in Downtown Providence for the brewing of ales. Hanley hired Wagner again, this time to design a plant for brewing lager beer, which was gaining popularity at the time, especially among Providence's growing Irish and German populations.

Born in Germany, Wagner was part of an emerging international movement of engineers and scientists focused on brewing chemistry, the role of temperature control, and the danger posed by environmental contaminants. He was one of the pioneers in using mechanical refrigeration to support large-scale production of lager beer. With his designs, modern brewing equipment, and two state-of-the-art De LaVergne refrigeration machines, Wagner claimed that Hanley's American Brewing Company Plant would rank "among the foremost of the complete and well-equipped breweries in the United States." Nathan B. Horton, who had built several of Providence's most prominent buildings such as Union Station and the State Normal School, served as contractor. Construction was complete by 1892, and by 1893 the plant was in full operation with a staff of 55 operatives and an annual brewing capacity of 70,000 barrels (2,170,000 gallons).

The firm, renamed Providence Brewing Co., erected the ice plant ca. 1900. Additional capitalization in 1910 made it possible to erect a new freestanding boiler house, expand the main building, and triple the brewery's output to 200,000 barrels per year. James Hanley died in August 1912, but his business kept growing. By 1917, there were 108 operatives employed by the Providence Brewing Co.

The brewery's fate was sealed in 1919, when Congress passed the Volstead Act prohibiting the manufacture, sale, and transport of alcoholic beverages. Providence Brewing Co. turned to making "Puro," a non-alcoholic cereal beverage; however, the business was not sustainable, and the plant was dismantled in the mid-1920s. The building was put to a new use as the Providence Storage Company and later served as headquarters for Green Brothers Moving and Storage from 1936 to 1976. The Greens were eventually succeeded by Capital Records Management.

The National Register nomination for the American Brewing Company was prepared by preservation consultant Ned Connors. The brewery's current owner, Freedom City Properties LLC, has applied for State and Federal historic preservation tax credits towards a \$10 million conversion to 32 apartments and commercial spaces. RIHPHC's Executive Director Edward Sanderson commented, "The American Brewing Company building is an eye-catching artifact of Providence's burgeoning economy and multi-national immigration at the turn of the 19th century. Its rehabilitation for business and apartments is an example of the current trend for urban revitalization through historic preservation."

In addition to honoring a property for its contribution to local, state, or national history, listing on the National Register provides additional benefits. It results in special consideration during the planning of Federal or federally assisted projects and makes properties eligible for Federal and Rhode Island tax benefits for historic rehabilitation projects. Owners of private property listed on the National Register are free to maintain, manage, or dispose of their property as they choose. As the state office for historic preservation, the Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission is responsible for reviewing and submitting Rhode Island nominations to the National Register.

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