

CITY OF BRANTFORD

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Doug Mannen

Holme's Brewery

The Brantford Expositor Anniversary Number (1877 to 1927) talks about John Read's map of 1824 which showed a distillery and brewery site in the village of Brantford near the bridge which crossed the Grand River at Colborne Street. It says that they were both located on the north side of Colborne Street in what today is still referred to as Holmedale.¹

In October of 1836, William Holme had his brewery advertised for rent and the ad indicated that it had been erected about two years previously.² It consisted of a brewery, malthouse and granary and was, according to the ad, about a half mile from the Town of Brantford. It is unknown who, if anyone, took it up but by the 1840s it was occupied by Philip Austin. He brewed in it until it was destroyed by fire in October of 1844.³ The fire left him penniless, having had no insurance on the contents. William Holme did not rebuild. Philip Austin remained in Brantford and may have worked in William Spencer's brewery. He died in a St. Catharines hotel in March 1846 of unknown causes.⁴

William Spencer's Brewery

William Spencer was born in Lancashire, England, in about 1788.⁵ He had emigrated to Upper Canada in the early nineteenth century where he settled in the Village of Brantford. On the twentieth of August 1833 he received the crown patent for lot 23, south of Colborne and east of Market Streets (Plan of the City of Brantford).⁶ By the mid-1830s, he had a dry goods and grocery store as well as a brewery built on this lot and did seasonal ale and porter brewing here for twenty years.

In 1855, he and his two sons Hugh and Thomas built a large, new brewery in West Brantford and the old Colborne Street factory was shut down.⁷ It was used as a tannery by William Spencer for some time in the middle of the 1860s.⁸ On August 16, 1867, he died at seventy-nine years of age and the brewery was rented to George Ashworth, a stocking weaver by trade.⁹ In October of 1869, it was advertised for sale as a brewery and from this ad we get a general description. It was a substantial, stone building complete with malting floors, kiln and fire proof cellars.¹⁰

Ellen Popplewell, as Spencer's executor, sold the property in 1874 to Ignatius Cockshutt, a trustee of the Y.M.C.A., and the old brewery was torn down in preparation for the construction of Brantford's new Y.M.C.A. facility.¹¹

West Brantford Brewery

Hugh and Thomas Spencer had received their brewing and malting training from their father William early in the century. They had worked in his old Colborne Street brewery until around 1847 when they rented Sarah Lefferty's brewery in East Ward. In July of 1854, they purchased a four and one-half acre parcel of land just outside the westerly limits of the then Town of Brantford (part of Brant Farm, Block F)(see map).¹²

Construction had begun on their new brewery that summer and had been completed to such a degree by the following spring as to allow production of ale and porter to begin.¹³ Their father had financed the venture but that seems to have been his only connection while the day to day operations were performed by Hugh and Thomas. In the summer of 1858, the Brantford Weekly Expositor gave a revealing account of Spencer & Sons West Brantford Brewery. The main building was fifty feet wide by one hundred and twenty feet long, three storeys high in front and four in the rear, all of brick. The cellars extended under the entire building. There was also one other cellar under what was termed the old brewery which measured thirty by sixty feet. The reporter commented that the cellars were all filled at the time of his visit in order to accommodate the summer trade as it was difficult to brew in the hot summer months. About 4,600 barrels of beer could be stored at any one time. The whole manufactory was powered by a twelve horse power steam engine manufactured by Ganson, Waterous & Co. Water for brewing was provided by an overflowing spring near the top of a hill at the back of the brewery and was conducted inside by pipe, allowing gravity to be used for distr-

ibuting it throughout the premises. There was a wagon road along the hill which matched the upper storey of the brewery and all materials were loaded and unloaded from here. Around four and one-half tons of hops were used here annually to produce about \$35,000.00 worth of ale and porter.¹⁴

On August 16, 1867, William Spencer died at seventy-nine years of age.¹⁵ Hugh and Thomas carried on business as Spencer & Sons following his death until the twenty-fifth of October of that year when Hugh withdrew from the partnership.¹⁶ He bought into a merchandizing business in Brantford which was destroyed by fire after only seven months. He then took up brick and drain tile manufacturing until 1877 when he purchased a farm near Langford where he spent the remainder of his life.¹⁷ Henceforth, the brewing business was carried on by Thomas Spencer as Spencer & Son. Some of his products at this time were X, XX, and XXX ale and porter put up in kegs and stone bottles.¹⁸

After having purchased Hugh's interest in the property in 1872, Thomas took a mortgage of over \$10,000.00 from Humphrey Davis.¹⁹ This new money was applied toward the addition of increased capacity. Despite this, his heavy debt burden seems to have been the undoing of his business for by February 1875 he was in receivership.²⁰ All of his property and equipment was sold on March 7, 1875, by auction to Humphrey Davis and Ignatius Cockshutt, as principal creditors.²¹ Thomas Spencer left Brantford shortly after for St. Marys, Ontario where he took up the Spring Hill Brewery.²² He died there on September 30, 1875, at fifty years of age.²³ His oldest son William returned to Brantford, eventually taking up employment in his father's former brewery.

By the first of May of 1876, George White had moved here from Stamford, Ontario and had rented the factory for three years, apparently on a profit sharing scheme since Peter J. Pilkey was managing the company.²⁴ Some of the Brantford Spring Brewery or Brantford Brewing and Malting Company (names used interchangeably) employees at this time were Miles Hogarth (Harriston Brewery), Andreas Rau (his Formosa Brewery had burned in 1874), Clinton VanBroeklin, Edward Dennis, Frederick Eden (a former Kastner Brewery employee), George White Jr., George Lambert and Hugh Smith.²⁵ Joseph Jackson, a Brantford bailiff, and Abram N. Duncombe (Joseph Jackson & Co.), trading as the Brantford Brewing and Malting Company, had taken a lease from Humphrey Davis by 1879.²⁶ Around the end of 1880 or the beginning of 1881, Abram Duncombe had withdrawn from the firm and in February, Joseph Jackson was advertising for a partner with two or three thousand dollars to invest.²⁷ He was evidently unsuccessful since by July of the following year he was offering his business and lease for sale.²⁸ This ad also drew a negative response and brewing was carried on by Jackson until about 1884.

The buildings went through a succession of different leasees, including Robert McGill, Robert H. Laid and F.J. Young, all soda water manufacturers.²⁹ John C. Palmer had come into possession of the property in 1890 and he would eventually lose it to the Royal Loan and Savings Company in 1899.³⁰ In May of 1900, the Royal Loan and Savings Company sold the brewery and property to the Bixel Brewing and Malting Company Limited for \$1,705.00.³¹ It is not clear if they in fact did some brewing and malting here or had simply bou-

ght it to prevent a competitor from opening a rival brewery. In any event, their tenure was short-lived as they sold it to Fred Westbrook and Charles Hacker in June of 1903.³² Fred Westbrook had undoubtedly been familiar with the brewery since Humphrey Davis had been living with his father for a number of years prior to his death in November of 1888.³³

Westbrook and Hacker had little firsthand knowledge or experience in the brewing and malting industry. Westbrook had been born of Oakland Township farming parents in 1864.³⁴ He and Charles Hacker of Providence, Rhode Island had teamed up as performing bicycle riders and had been touring North America and Europe with P.T. Barnum's Circus.³⁵ Fred Westbrook had married his partner's sister in 1887.³⁶ By the fall of 1903, extensive alterations and repairs had begun on their brewery in order to prepare for the resumption of brewing.³⁷ Their first brewing took place in late December and their ale and porter was considered first rate.³⁸

On January 31, 1906, Fred Westbrook and Charles Hacker had the Brantford Brewing Company Limited provincially chartered. It was capitalized at \$100,000.00 and the first provisional directors were Fred Westbrook, Charles Hacker and Hiram Thorne Westbrook (Fred's father). Mattie Westbrook and Norman and Charlotte Hacker were also shareholders.³⁹ Fred Westbrook served as President while Charles Hacker held the position of Vice-President. Ten men and a few women as clerical staff were employed here at this time.⁴⁰ A new malthouse was constructed in 1908 and malt became one of their products for the first time.⁴¹

Westbrook and Hacker's brewery came to an untimely end on July

23, 1910. Between eleven and twelve o'clock in the morning, a fire in the malt kiln jumped to the surrounding factory. Fred Westbrook was in the area and when the alarm was sounded by one of the workmen, he proceeded to the malting department at full speed but by this time the fire had spread beyond control. Fortunately, some of the employees in the Brantford Screw Works just down the street had seen the flames and by eleven twenty-five had put in a general alarm. By the time the firemen had arrived, the entire building was in flames and to add to an already desperate situation, the only hydrant nearby had its connection broken in the excitement. When it was over, only the walls remained with losses exceeding \$50,000.00 of which \$17,000.00 of insurance was available. Some office books and furniture was all that was rescued.⁴²

Their brewery was never rebuilt and the company was eventually dissolved. Charles Hacker went into the hotel business, buying the Imperial Hotel on the corner of King and Dalhousie Streets in Brantford.⁴³ Fred Westbrook, on the other hand, moved to St. Thomas, Ontario in 1914 where he bought the Rudolph and Begg Brewing Company's brewery.⁴⁴ After it was closed by prohibition he returned to Brantford and purchased the Belmont Hotel.⁴⁵

John Warren Lefferty of Drummondville C.W. bought the brewery lot on the east side of Alfred Street, north of the Canal (see Plan), from Mary Ann Kerr's estate in the 1840s.⁴⁶ After his death, Sarah Johnston Lefferty (spinster) became owner and it was from her that Hugh and Thomas Spencer rented the brewery in 1847.⁴⁷ They were the sons of William Spencer who had been brewing on Colborne Street since the 1830s and had undoubtedly learned their trade from their father. They worked this brewery until the spring of 1855 when their new brewery on Strawberry Hill (west side of Brantford) was completed at which time they moved there.⁴⁸

In May of 1855, Sarah Lefferty advertised her brewery for rent and from this ad comes a brief description of the property. The main building was made of brick and had a malt room, full cellars and employee's kitchen and bedrooms on the premises. Excellent spring water was available on site.⁴⁹ It is unclear if it was rented that year but certainly was by 1856 when George White had taken it up.⁵⁰ In fact, when Sarah Lefferty of Drummondville sold her property to James Oswald of Stamford C.W. in 1857, George White and a Mr. McCleash (Buffalo brewer) were still renting it.⁵¹ George White had ceased to brew here in about 1860 and the brewery was subsequently rented to Thomas Tate.⁵² He seems to have operated it for about a year then it sat idle for a few years. In October of 1863, John Lowes, Oswald's agent, had it advertised for sale. Here, we get a more concise description of the brewery. It measured sixty feet long by fifty wide and had one malthouse which was one hundred feet in length. It was all situated on one acre of land on the canal in East Brantford.⁵³

On May 28, 1864, James Oswald sold it to Samuel McCulloch who had it converted into a tannery shortly afterward.⁵⁴ He carried on tanning and curring for over ten years until the buildings were destroyed by fire in October 1874.⁵⁵ By 1878, McCulloch had lost the property in chancery to Alexander Bell.⁵⁶ He sold it on the first of October to George White who had been working in Spencer's West Brantford Brewery since the 1860s.⁵⁷ White had the old brewery rebuilt, probably using the original walls which had been spared by the fire. Between 1880 and 1882, the assessed value of the property had increased from \$500.00 to \$1,500.00 suggesting that the buildings had been rebuilt and were on stream.⁵⁸ The Brantford Spring Brewery (probably named after Stamford Spring Brewery) produced only lager beer.⁵⁹

George White, along with his sons John and William, brewed here until July of 1886 when the premises was leased to Joseph Luke & Sons of Tilsonburg, Ontario.⁶⁰ They had apparently leased it to overcome the effects of the Scott Act which had recently been accepted in Oxford County. By 1886, they were advertising ale and porter from their City Brewery which was only capable of brewing lager beer.⁶¹ Perhaps, they had refitted part of the factory as an ale and porter brewery, but it seems more probable that they were merely selling their Tilsonburg products from this factory. In the meantime, Matthew and Cyrus Bixel of Strathroy, Ontario had purchased the brewery in September of 1886.⁶² By the fall of 1888, William Cooper of Strathroy had received the contract for the erection of a new lager beer brewery to be built alongside the old brewery.⁶³ It was completed that winter and in March of 1889, Oscar and Arthur Bixel moved here from Strathroy and resumed prod-

uction of lager beer.⁶⁴ Both of Matthew Bixel's sons had come to Brantford with many years of experience in the brewing and malting business. As boys, they had learned their trade in Ingersoll before following their father to Strathroy. They had been exposed to the brewing of ale and porter in the early years, but since the mid-1870s had only been brewing lager.

On the first of February 1890, Matthew Bixel passed away in Strathroy.⁶⁵ Within months of his death, the Bixel brothers had made application for and had received on May 6, a federal charter for the Bixel Brewing and Malting Company Limited. It was capitalized at \$150,000.00 issued in shares of \$100.00 and the provisional directors were Cyrus, Oscar and Arthur Bixel. Emily, Dora and Emma Bixel were also shareholders.⁶⁶ By June of 1890, they had sold both their Strathroy and Brantford breweries to their new company, the latter selling for over \$80,000.00.⁶⁷ Cyrus became President, Oscar Vice-President and Arthur the Secretary-Treasurer. They carried on business in both locations until the early part of 1896, then the Strathroy brewery was sold.⁶⁸ Cyrus moved to Brantford that same year and together, they brewed here until prohibition had reduced their business to a trickle in 1920. They were closed until 1924, then reopened under the former name but Frederick Bixel had become President and General Manager.⁶⁹ Their company was re-organized in 1929 with a new federal charter at which time James Cooper became a major shareholder.⁷⁰ The new Bixel Brewing and Malting Company Limited brewed here until 1943 when they were bought out by Canadian Breweries Limited.⁷¹ The factory was closed around 1945 and was used for diverse business purposes until March 12, 1979, when it was burned to the ground.⁷²

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- I. The Brantford Expositor, Anniversary Number 1877 to 1927, printed at the Daily Expositor, July 1, 1927, page 6.
2. The Patriot, Toronto, November 1, 1836, page 3.
3. British Whig, Kingston, November 5, 1844, page 3.
4. St. Catharines Journal, March 26, 1846, page 2.
5. Brantford Weekly Expositor, August 16, 1867, page 2.
6. Crown Patent, dated August 20, 1833, Brantford Plan, Land Registry Office, Brantford.
7. Semi-weekly Brantford Expositor, July 16, 1858, page 2.
8. Tax assesment roll for 1867, Brant Ward, Town of Brantford.
9. Brantford Weekly Expositor, August 16, 1867, page 2.
10. Brantford Weekly Expositor, October 1, 1868, page 3.
- II. Instrument N7406, (Agreement), dated February 19, 1874, Brantford Plan, Land Registry Office, Brantford.
12. Instrument 324, dated July 19, 1854, Spencer's Survey, Brantford, Land Registry Office, Brantford.
13. History of the County of Brant, Toronto: Warner, Beers & Co., 1883, page 601.
14. Semi-weekly Expositor, Brantford, July 16, 1858, page 2.
15. Brantford Weekly Expositor, August 16, 1867, page 2.
16. Brantford Weekly Expositor, November 15, 1867, page 2.
17. History of the County of Brant, Toronto: Warner, Beers & Co., 1883, page 601.
18. Lovell's Province of Ontario Directory for 1871, printed and published by John Lovell & Son, Montreal, page 49.
19. Instrument 5416 (Mortgage), dated January 5, 1872, Spencer's Plan, Brantford, Land Registry Office, Brantford.

20. Brantford Weekly Expositor, February 19, 1875, page 3.
21. Brantford Weekly Expositor, January 7, 1876, page 1.
22. Tax assesment roll for 1875, South Ward, Town of St. Marys.
23. St. Marys Argus, September 30, 1875, page 3.
24. Sleeman Papers, dated May 1, 1876, University of Western Ontario.
25. Tax assesment rolls for 1876-77, Kings Ward, Town and City of Brantford.
26. History of the County of Brant, Toronto: Warner, Beers & Co., 1883, page 283.
27. Globe, Toronto, February 19, 1881, page 1.
28. Globe, Toronto, July 25, 1882, page 1.
29. Tax assesment rolls for 1884 to 1886, Kings Ward, City of Brantford.
30. Instruments I3708, dated February 8, 1890 and I7842, dated December 30, 1899, Spencer's Survey, Brantford, Land Registry Office, Brantford.
31. Instrument I7843, dated May 30, 1900, Spencer's Survey, Brantford, Land Registry Office, Brantford.
32. Instrument I9585, dated June 8, 1903, Spencer's Survey, Brantford, Land Registry Office, Brantford.
33. Brantford Weekly Expositor, November 30, 1888, page 8.
34. History of the County of Brant, Toronto: Warner, Beers & Co., 1883, page 545.
35. Brantford Expositor Souvenir Number, October 21, 1895, pages 28-29.
36. The Daily Expositor, Brantford, April 19, 1887, page 4.
37. Brantford Daily Expositor, October 3, 1903, page 6.
38. Brantford Courier, January 6, 1904, page 4.
39. Provincial Charter of Incorporation (Liber 88, Folio 74), dated January 31, 1906, Company Branch, Ontario Ministry of Consumer

40. Brantford City Directory for 1906, Union Publishing Company, Ingersoll, page 301.
41. Brantford Expositor, June 13, 1981 (Yesterdays, by Doug O'Neil), page 10.
42. Brantford Daily Expositor, July 23, 1910, page 1.
43. Brantford Expositor, July 22, 1980 (Yesterdays, by Doug O'Neil), page 15.
44. Instrument 40233, dated April 24, 1914, Paul Plan, St. Thomas, Land Registry Office, St. Thomas.
45. Brantford Expositor, July 22, 1980 (Yesterdays, by Doug O'Neil), page 15.
46. Instrument 308 (Power of Attourney), dated September 19, 1840, Brewery Lot, Land Registry Office, Brantford.
47. History of the County of Brant, Toronto: Warner, Beers & Co., 1883, page 601.
48. Same as 47.
49. Semi-weekly Expositor, Brantford, May 29, 1855, page 2.
50. History of the County of Brant, Toronto: Warner, Beers & Co., 1883, page 283.
51. Instrument 1597 (Mortgage), dated March 16, 1857, Brewery Lot, Land Registry Office, Brantford.
52. Tax assesment roll for 1861, East Ward, Town of Brantford.
53. Brantford Weekly Expositor, October 16, 1863, page 3.
54. Instrument 3429, dated June 24, 1864, Brewery Lot, Land Registry Office, Brantford.
55. Brantford Weekly Expositor, October 30, 1874, page 3.
56. Brantford Daily Expositor, July 23 , 1878, page 3.
57. Instrument 12069, dated October 1, 1878, Brewery Lot, Land Registry Office, Brantford.

58. Tax assesment rolls for 1880 to 1882, East Ward, City of Brantford.
59. History of the County of Brant, Toronto: Warner, Beers & Co., 1883, page 283.
60. Tax assesment roll for 1887, East Ward, City of Brantford.
61. Brantford Weekly Expositor, July 9, 1886, page 5.
62. Instrument I5449, dated September 23, 1886, Brewery Lot, Land Registry Office, Brantford.
63. London Free Press, September 10, 1888, page 8.
64. Guelph Weekly Mercury, March 14, 1889, page 1.
65. The Age, Strathroy, February 6, 1890, page 5.
66. Federal Charter of Incorporation (Liber I32, Folio 72), dated May 6, 1890, Company Branch, Federal Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, Ottawa.
67. Instrument I9776, dated June 30, 1890, Brewery Lot, Land Registry Office, Brantford.
68. Instrument 8404, dated February 10, 1896, Strathroy, Land Registry Office, Glencoe.
69. Vernon's City of Brantford Directory for 1925, published by Henry Vernon & Son, Hamilton, page I22.
70. Federal Charter of Incorporation (Liber 33I, Folio I00), dated July 4, 1929, Company Branch, Federal Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, Ottawa.
71. Vernon's City of Brantford Directory for 1944, Vernon Director-ies Limited, Hamilton, page 375.
72. Brantford Expositor, June 13, 1981 (Yesterdays, by Doug O'Neal), page 10.