

NEW YORK CITY MUNICIPAL ARCHIVES
31 CHAMBERS ST., NEW YORK, NY 10007

Guide to the Manhattan and Brooklyn liquor licenses, 1895-1896

Collection REC 0058

Processed by Alexandra Hilton, 2019.

Summary

Record Group: RG 089.004: New York State government agencies

Title of the Collection: Manhattan and Brooklyn liquor licenses

Creator(s): Brooklyn (New York, N.Y.). Board of Excise; New York (N.Y.). Board of Excise

Date: 1895-1897, bulk 1895-1896

Abstract: On March 23, 1896, during the 119th session of the New York State Legislature, the "Liquor Tax Law," was passed, establishing a new taxation policy for the trafficking of intoxicating liquors. Liquor licenses set to expire after the law went into effect on April 30, 1896, were eligible for a refund upon surrendering the license. This collection contains those licenses that were yielded for return in Manhattan and Brooklyn.

Collection #: REC 0058

Extent: 16 cubic feet (16 boxes)

Language: English

Physical Location: Materials are stored onsite at 31 Chambers St.

Repository: New York City Municipal Archives, Department of Records and Information Services, 31 Chambers St., New York, NY 10007

Access and Use: Collection is open for research. To preserve the condition of original records, patrons are requested to use access copies when available. Advance notice is required for using original material. Please contact research@records.nyc.gov to arrange access.

Existence and Location of Copies: The entirety of this collection has been digitized. Images of licenses, without their associated rebate documents, are available to view through our online gallery. The fully digitized collection of both licenses and rebate documents are available to view onsite at 31 Chambers St.

Preferred Citation: Identification of item, date; Manhattan and Brooklyn liquor licenses, 1895-1897; REC 0058; Series name; box number; folder number; Municipal Archives, City of New York

Processing Note: In 1997, the licenses were catalogued by historian Richard McDermott, and rehoused. In 2019, the existing descriptive data was standardized and a finding aid was written by staff archivist Alexandra Hilton with assistance from staff archivist Nathalie Belkin.

Key Terms

Names

Anti-Saloon League of New York
Consumers Brewing Co. of New York City, Ltd.
Ehret, George, 1835-1927
F. & M. Schaefer Brewing Co.
New York (State). Alcoholic Beverage Control Division
New York (State). Metropolitan Board of Excise
New York (State). State Liquor Authority
Raines, John, 1840-1909
Ruppert, Jacob, 1867-1939
S. Liebmann's Sons Brewing Co.
William H. Frank Brewing Company

Places

Brooklyn (New York, N.Y.)
Manhattan (New York, N.Y.)
New York (N.Y.)
New York (N.Y.) -- Social conditions

Subjects

Alcoholic beverage industry
Bars (Drinking establishments) -- New York (State) -- New York
Brewing industry
Hotels -- New York (State) -- New York
License system
Liquor laws -- New York (State)
Municipal government -- New York (State) -- New York
Social problems
Taverns (Inns) -- New York (State) -- New York
Vice control

Occupations

Government employees
Legislators
Mayors

Material Types

Correspondence
Financial records
Licenses
Notes (documents)
Warrants

Biographical/Historical Information

Beginning in the 1830s, the United States found itself embroiled in a fervor of reform which, in large part, focused on anti-alcohol movements. This stemmed from the rising consumption of alcohol by those over the age of fifteen, and primarily by men who, at the time, were the sole providers for their families. With many other states in the union passing various types of liquor laws, New York followed suit.

On March 23, 1896, during the 119th session of the New York State Legislature, the “Liquor Tax Law,” was passed, establishing a new taxation policy for the trafficking of intoxicating liquors. Colloquially known as the “Raines law” after its author and chief promoter, Senator John Raines, it went into effect on April 30, 1896. All licenses issued prior to May 1 were set to expire on June 30, 1896, unless a ten months’ certificate was taken out. Since licenses were good for a year, a license holder with time remaining after June 30, 1896 was due a refund for the excess time. However, in order to obtain the refund, the license had to be surrendered to the Board of Excise.

The act marked the introduction of higher liquor license fees, the abolishment of local excise boards and commissioners, and the creation of a state excise department to collect all liquor taxes. The annual liquor tax, originally \$75 for establishments selling beer-and-ale-only and \$300 for standard saloons, rose to \$800 for all liquor-dispensing establishments in New York City, including private clubs. A storekeeper’s license, which allowed the sale of liquor but not for consumption on the premises, was \$500. Revenue from liquor taxes was to be split between the State treasury, who received one-third of it, and the city or town of business, who received two-thirds. (This would later be amended to an equal division of the net revenue in 1903.)

While “liquor tax” was in the name of the act, Raines’ true intention for the new regulations was to curb alcohol consumption. Provisions in the law prohibited the sale of alcoholic beverages on Sundays except in hotels. Saloons were required to take out a “performance bond,” or insurance policy, equal to double the amount of their tax. Other restrictions dictated by the act included raising the drinking age from 16 to 18; prohibiting bartenders from serving liquor to “intoxicated persons,” “habitual drunkards,” or to “Indians”; and requiring that saloons keep their curtains open on Sundays to give policemen an unobstructed view into their empty barroom.

Closing saloons on Sundays, the only day a week working men had off and could visit the saloon during the day, was a calculated move. Supporters of the law hoped it would lead to the closure of about 2000 saloons in the city. However, it was not long before saloons found a loophole in the law. Hotels could only serve alcohol to hotel guests, and only during meal service or in the bedrooms. At the time, a hotel was defined by the state as having ten rooms for lodging and a sandwich constituted a meal. As a result, saloons figured out that they only had to add a few furnished bedrooms, usually on the floor directly above the saloon, in order to apply for a hotel license. Rooms at these “Raines law hotels,” if they actually existed, were primarily used by sex

workers and unmarried couples. Their meals were usually a façade, as witnessed by Jacob Riis in 1902, who wrote that some saloonkeepers set out “brick sandwiches” – two pieces of bread with a brick in between – as their meal so liquor could legally be sold.

In a bid to abolish Raines law hotels, members of the New York Anti-Saloon League founded the Committee of Fourteen on January 16, 1905. The Committee sought to amend the law to close the loophole by making on-site investigations of Raines law hotels. Violations found were presented to the New York State Department of Excise, New York City Tenement House Department and New York Police Department, the brewers supplying the hotels, and other stakeholders. Most of the Raines law hotels were shuttered by 1911, but the Committee remained active focusing its efforts on the suppression of commercialized vice and crime prevention, until it ran out of money in 1932.

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Scope and Content Note

This collection contains liquor licenses surrendered for refund by license holders in Manhattan and Brooklyn, after the passage of the Raines law in 1896. New York City and other municipalities in the state lost their ability to issue liquor licenses with the passage of the law. New York City, which consisted only of Manhattan and the lower Bronx at that date, issued liquor licenses through March of 1896. Thus, licenses issued as late as March 1896 had an expiration date of March 1897. Although there are over 4,000 licenses contained in this collection, they cannot represent all the drinking establishments that existed in 1895-1896. Some likely had little to no refund value, or had gone out of business before the expiration date. Others may have been kept as memorabilia. Today, there are New York City establishments like Old Town Bar on East 18th Street and Fanelli's Café on Prince Street, that still have their 1896 licenses on display.

The licenses are approximately 12 by 14 inches in size and contain the name of the holder, the dates of issuance and expiration, the address of the establishment, and the identity of the financing agent. Many licenses have legal documents attached to them. These documents include information on the individuals and breweries that financed the cost of the license. Other documentation represents claims or transfer requests made on behalf of a deceased license holder's estate.

The collection provides a snapshot of one aspect of the social and economic life in New York during the late 1890s. The establishments with Saloon Ale and Beer licenses point to a concentration in working-class neighborhoods. Additionally, the names of license holders suggest various ethnic enclaves. For example, a great many names of Irish descent are on Manhattan's West Side, with Italian names present in what today we call Little Italy. It is also worth noting that women held a significant number of these licenses. Moreover, the collection identifies breweries which were active in financing saloons in exchange for product promotion by the saloonkeeper. Names such as Jacob Ruppert, George Ehret, Budweiser, and F. & M. Schaefer Brewing are among those most frequently represented.

Arrangement

The Manhattan and Brooklyn liquor licenses are arranged into five series, based on location and type of license, and then numerically by license number within each series.

[Series I: Manhattan saloon liquor licenses, 1895-1896](#)

[Series II: Manhattan hotel liquor licenses, 1895-1896](#)

[Series III: Manhattan restaurant liquor licenses, 1895-1896](#)

[Series IV: Manhattan saloon ale and beer licenses, 1895-1896](#)

[Series V: Brooklyn liquor licenses, 1895-1897](#)

Series List

Series I: Manhattan saloon liquor licenses

Date(s): 1895-1896

Size (Extent): 12 cubic feet (in 12 boxes)

Scope and Content: This series contains surrendered Class 2 saloon liquor licenses. A Class 2 license allowed proprietors to sell liquor, wine, ale, and beer for consumption on or off the saloon's premises.

Location: 31 Chambers St., Shelf 15151-15168

Series II: Manhattan hotel liquor licenses

Date(s): 1895-1896

Size (Extent): 1 cubic foot (in 1 box)

Scope and Content: This series contains surrendered Class 1 hotel liquor licenses. A Class 1 license enabled the keeper of a hotel to sell liquor, wine, ale, and beer, to be consumed on or off the hotel's premises.

Location: 31 Chambers St., Shelf 15145-15147

Series III: Manhattan restaurant liquor licenses

Date(s): 1895-1896

Size (Extent): 0.7 cubic feet (in 1 box)

Scope and Content: This series contains surrendered Class 2 restaurant liquor licenses. A Class 2 restaurant license allowed restaurant owners to sell liquor, wine, ale, and beer for consumption during a meal on the property.

Location: 31 Chambers St., Shelf 15145-15147

Series IV: Manhattan saloon ale and beer licenses

Date(s): 1895-1896

Size (Extent): 0.3 cubic feet (in 1 box)

Scope and Content: This series contains surrendered Class 3 saloon ale and beer licenses. The license allowed proprietors to sell ale and beer for consumption on or off the saloon's premises.

Location: 31 Chambers St., Shelf 15145-15147

Series V: Brooklyn liquor licenses

Date(s): 1895-1897, bulk 1895-1896

Size (Extent): 2 cubic feet (in 2 boxes)

Scope and Content: The licenses in this series were issued by the Brooklyn Board of Excise; prior to the consolidation of New York City in 1898, Brooklyn was an independent city. Unless otherwise noted, all licenses in this series are surrendered Class 2 saloon liquor licenses. A Class 2 license allowed proprietors to sell liquor, wine, ale, and beer for consumption on or off the saloon's premises.

Location: 31 Chambers St., Shelf 15148-15150