



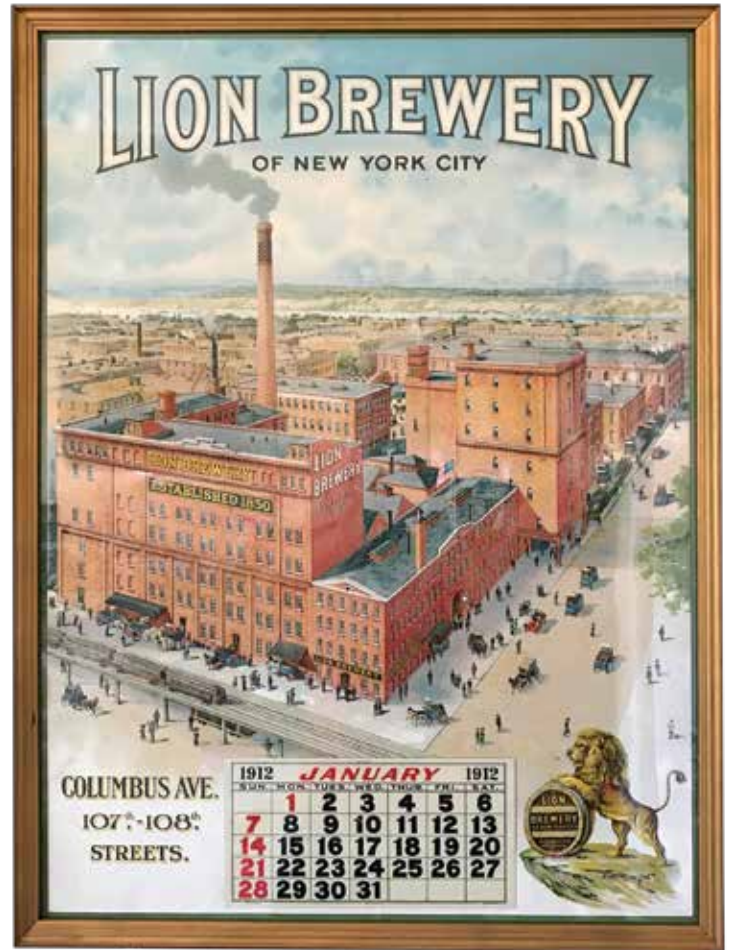
When the Lion Roared in New York City

The Lion was never king of the beer jungle in New York City, but it was a true beast among some of the Big Apple's most beautiful breweriana. From the pre-Prohibition era through the early 1940s, the Lion Brewery was a major power in the nation's largest city. As such, it was once one of America's biggest breweries.

Indeed, the Lion's beer sales once roared, and the brewery rose to the #2 position in New York (behind George Ehret) and #6 in the nation at its peak in the late 1890s. But in an all-too-familiar American brewery story, a once mighty company that began with visionary leadership fell when family inheritors lost focus.

In the Lion's case, these inheritors did much more to generate controversy and scandalous headlines than they did to create a future for their brewery.

A majestic rendering of the lion atop a beer barrel became an icon of the brewery, seen here in a rare pre-Prohibition tray made by H.D. Beach Co., Conshocton, OH. Collection of Ken Quaas.



A look at the extensive Lion Brewery complex in a colorful, beautifully-illustrated calendar lithograph from 1912. Collection of Ken Quaas.

"Established in 1850"

The Lion was born in the mid-1800s, when New York City was on its way to becoming America's largest brewing city. It had a booming German immigrant population and a fresh, abundant water source from the newly-built Croton Aqueduct.

In 1850, Swiss-German immigrants Emmanuel (Max) Bernheimer and Joseph Schmid became partners in one of New York City's first breweries on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, where German immigrants were settling in throngs to escape political upheaval in Europe. They called it

Constanz, after a brewery where Schmid had worked in Germany. The business became, according to the *New York Times*, “successful beyond the hopes of the partners.”

Ultimately, the two partners had a stake in five other New York City area breweries, including a second named Constanz in Staten Island. Most importantly, this partnership soon included the Lion Brewery and their *Established in 1850* slogan actually dated the Bernheimer and Schmid partnership, as opposed to the physical Lion brewery.

Roaming the Upper West Side

While lower Manhattan became the most densely crowded place in America, Manhattan’s Upper West Side was, by stark contrast, still unpopulated and ripe for urban development—a good place to put a brewery. In 1858, a brewery known as Lion Lager Bier Brewery was built by brothers Albert and James Speyers, in association with Max Bernheimer. Schmid then bought out the Speyers and partnered once again with Bernheimer.

By 1868, Joseph Schmid’s son August had joined, and helped take the brewery to new heights. Their focus was on creating a high-quality beer, while Bernheimer had a talent for marketing. He oversaw advertising campaigns that touted the “surpassing quality and lasting flavor” of Lion’s increasingly-popular flagship beers—a lager and a Wuerzberger, which was a richer, darker, and maltier brew.

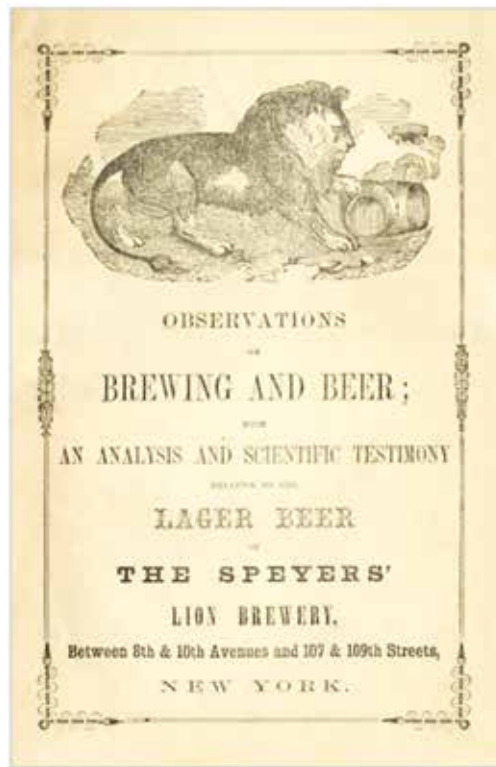
Bernheimer also was the first practitioner in New York City of the tied house system. He orchestrated the purchase-and-lease of some 50 taverns that carried Lion beers, which helped build the brand into a major force in the New

York area and enriched the partners with tavern rents.

A beacon of civilization

During the 1870s, the Lion Brewery grew into much more than just a beer-making plant. It evolved into a welcoming beacon of civilization, helping to draw New York’s German population (in particular) uptown. These immigrants were only too happy to escape the over-crowded Lower Eastside, where an increasing lack of elbow room was shared with more recent immigrants coming from Italy and Eastern Europe. The population of New York City had doubled to more than a million people between 1850-1870.

Bernheimer and Schmid recognized the growth potential of their neighborhood. They built a sprawling complex that extended from 107th to 109th streets, and across Ninth and Tenth Avenues (later re-named Columbus Avenue and Amsterdam Avenue in 1890). The brewery’s campus included its huge “Lion Park,” where concerts, family picnics, and even church masses were held, supported by a large meeting hall known as the “Lion Palace.” There was even a hotel.



Above: This colorful late 1930s chalk backbar piece stands 16.5 inches tall. Collection of Ken Quaas.

Left: The earliest known promotional piece from the brewery was issued about 1860 (when the Speyers still had ownership) and boasted of its quality and purity.



Tray Above: An unusual frontal image of the lion is featured on this pre-Prohibition tray from American Art Sign Co. in Brooklyn. Courtesy of Morean Auctions.



This vibrant calendar lithograph from 1908 (left) showcases the lion icon and some scenes of the massive brewery plant. Collection of George Arnold. By contrast, the (right) 1936 calendar shows the evolution of the lion to a simpler form, as well as the three styles of beer—pilsener, dark, and sparkling ale—brewed by Lion in the 1930s. Collection of Ken Quaas.

But amid this success, things started to get a little strange, setting the stage for what would become a soap opera-style struggle for control and money. Although the dynamic duo of Bernheimer and Schmid had seemed to have the Midas touch, they became over-extended after the Panic of 1873. That famous financial crisis triggered a depression in Europe

and North America that lasted until 1879.

Enter the lioness

The partners were getting old. They worried about protecting the brewery in case they went bankrupt from failed real estate investments. Late in 1878, Max Bernheimer and Joseph Schmid transferred their partnership

to their respective sons, Simon Bernheimer and August Schmid.

All went well for about 10 years, until August's sudden death in 1889. He left his share of the brewery to his 36-year-old wife, Josephine, with his assets to be divided equally among her and their two daughters. Simon Bernheimer would soon find out that his new partner—a woman no less—would prove as fierce as a lioness.

Josephine was by all accounts smart, stubborn, greedy, and a social climber. She was well-educated, extremely stylish and spoke German and French in addition to her native English. The daughter of a wealthy Cincinnati brewer who had her own ample inheritance, she too had beer running through her veins. By the time she took power, the expansive Lion complex was getting squeezed for what was by then valuable property in a neighborhood that it had helped transform. The neighborhood's rapid growth was fueled by a newly-constructed elevated railway on Columbus Avenue that ran right by the brewery.

By 1895, real estate developers were loudly complaining to city officials and the press

Josephine Schmid, "the only woman brewer," made headlines for many years, not only for her ownership of the Lion Brewery, but also for her flamboyant lifestyle and very public squabbles with her business partners and surviving daughter. At left from 1903, center from 1909 and right, from 1917.

THIS WORLD'S THUNDER

WOMAN TO MANAGE MONSTER BREWERY

MRS. JOSEPHINE SCHMID, THE ONLY WOMAN BREWER, AND HER MAGNIFICENT HOME.

STOCKS DULL WITH THE PRICES DOWN

BREWER'S WIDOW NOT A PRINCESS

Don del Drago, Who Married Mrs. Josephine Schmid, Comes, However, of a Noble Family.

SPANISH QUEEN'S GRANDSON

His Father, Prince del Drago, is Still Alive—Bridegroom Has Three Brothers Older Than Himself.

Mrs. Josephine Schmid, the wealthy widow of August Schmid, the brewer, who was married to Don Giovanni del Drago at the Church of the Sacred Heart, Brooklyn, last Saturday afternoon, does not become a Princess by this alliance, although she has married a member of a princely house.

MONDAY, MARCH 12, 1917.

BREWERY PRINCESS SUED FOR \$3,000,000

Daughter of Joseph Schmid Wants Reform in Management of Lion Brewery.

BUSINESS RUINED, SHE SAYS

Declares Profits Have Ceased Through Mismanagement, Graft and Antiquated Methods.

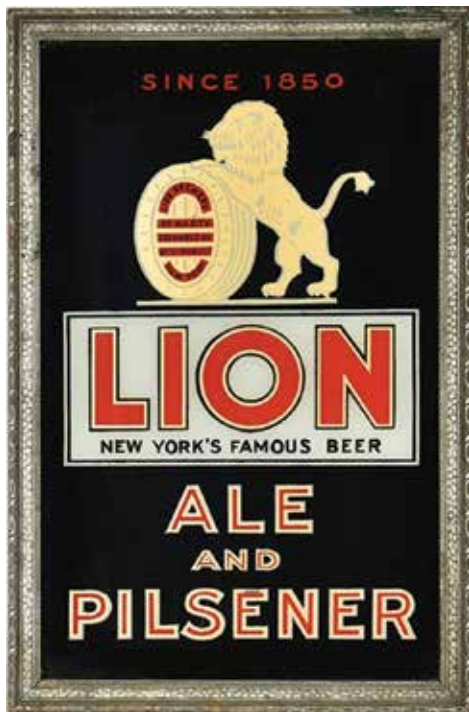
ments of competitors... the business to be... pert brewery and... has been acting... tion." She charges... have been lost by... prevalent among... honest subordinates... ted to remain in... breweries have incre... the past six years... his defendants have... ness that the sales... \$700,000 a year and... entirely disappeared... Mrs. Murray asks... on the ground that... \$4,000,000 in 1910, and... only \$1,000,000... Giovanni del Drago... Schmid and is now... the Hotel Gotham... country to attend... the Sout Castellane and...

DOUBTS KINGSE

The Rev. Dr. Blakely Ability to Handle C

The Rev. Dr. Paul took an active part in wiretapping controversy written for the America, the national article welcoming Commissioner of Ch that no Catholic org...

Mrs. Josephine del Drago, sometimes referred to as Princess del Drago, who married Giovanni, the fourth son of Prince del Drago of Italy and grandson of Maria Christina, Dowager Queen of Spain, has been sued in the Supreme Court for \$3,000,000 damages by her daughter, Mrs. Pauline Schmid Murray, on the ground that she has deliberately wrecked financially the Lion Brewery, at 100th Street and Columbus



The Lion commissioned a variety of beautiful lighted advertising in the 1930s and early '40s, but there are very few survivors. **Left:** Back-lit, reverse-on-glass, wood-framed sign by Lumin-Art Display Corp. **Above:** Lighted glass hanging sign with clock. **Right:** Back-lit reverse-on-glass with edge-lit neon. Collection of Chris Amideo.

that the brewery was “casting a blight” and stood as an obstacle to the new housing developments the elevated railway had been built to facilitate. The developers complained they could only build “cheap tenements” when they wanted to more profitably build “handsome apartment buildings.” The once popular Lion Park and the Palace properties were sold by 1898, shrinking the massive Lion holdings.

An ugly split

Founder Max Bernheimer had died in 1890, the year after August Schmid’s sudden death. Bernheimer’s son, Simon, recognized the real estate trends. He wanted to sell the valuable property and relocate the brewery west to the Hudson River.

But Josephine, already at odds with Simon over how to run the business, refused to let the brewery budge. She viewed the highly successful brewery facility (by then the sixth largest by volume in the country and #2 in New York) as an asset not to be touched.

Simon was frustrated, furious, and fed up with Josephine.

He wanted to dissolve the partnership. In 1900 he sued to force the sale of all the partnership’s assets—the land, buildings, and capital. But Simon was headed straight into the lion’s den. Josephine stood her ground, countersued, and won. This paved the way for her to eliminate her worn-down partner: She bought him out in 1902.

The lioness takes charge

Now it was Josephine’s brewery and she re-christened it The Lion Brewery of New York in 1903. Gone was the “Bernheimer and Schmid” name that had always been a part of the brewery’s full corporate name. A sad ending to a 50-year partnership.

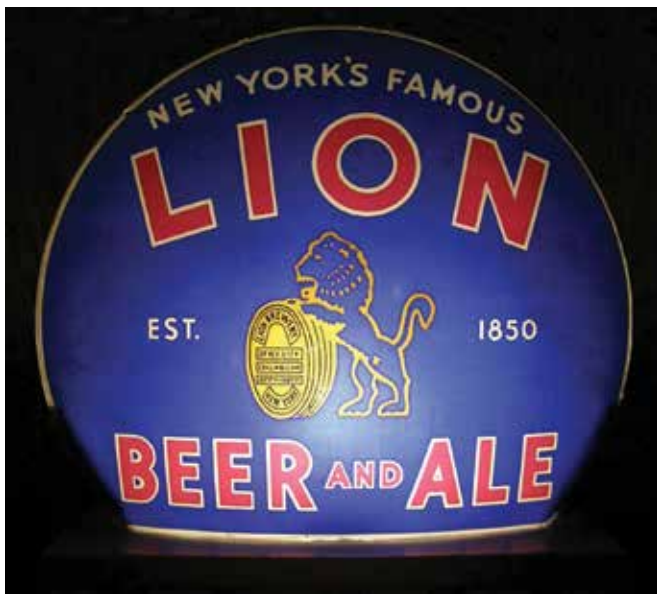
The mention of “New York” in the new name recognized that there were other breweries also named Lion, like the



Art deco-style neon, mounted on metal case with back-lit reverse-on-glass panel, seen unlit and lit. Collection of Chris Amideo.



Extremely rare edge-lit “Lumilyte” glass sign by Lackner Co., Cincinnati, OH. Collection of Ed Johnson.



Two different back-lighted reverse-on-glass signs from Neon Products, Lima, OH. **Above:** Convex, reverse-enameled glass sign with metal base. Collection of Chris Reed. **Right:** Back-lit, metal-framed, reverse-on-glass sign, collection of Ken Quaas.



Above Left: A pair of rare, 1930s mirrored glass signs, each 14 X 9 inches. Collection of Chris Amideo. **Right:** A backbar light in similar style. Courtesy of Morean Auctions.

one in Josephine's native Cincinnati. But none were as large nor had a woman in charge. Josephine was suddenly one of the wealthiest women in the country.

An effective manager, Josephine understood the brewing business and the necessity to keep up with the times—like investing in a bottling line to build in-home consumption of her popular beers. She appointed herself both president and treasurer and showed up at the plant every day. Josephine Schmid was one of the few female business leaders of her time, and confidently managed 230 full-time employees. All of them were men.

Josephine also had an ambition that mushroomed to full-blown greed. She paid herself an enormous annual salary of

\$500,000 a year and continued to reap a sizable income from her real estate holdings, which included the 50 tied house saloons that Max Bernheimer had developed years earlier. She built her personal fortune to an estimated \$10 million, the equivalent of roughly \$270 million in today's dollars. Trying to impress New York's high society and enter its ultra-exclusive ranks, Josephine built a huge limestone mansion in the style of a French castle right in the middle Manhattan's most prestigious Fifth Avenue.

Perils of Pauline

Josephine's oldest and namesake daughter had died suddenly in 1893, at age 21, when she

was supposed to come into her share of the inheritance. The following year, her younger sister (Josephine's only surviving child) Pauline, turned 21. It wasn't enough that Josephine already had her late daughter's inheritance. She also decided to go after the lion's share of what was rightfully due her youngest cub.

Josephine convinced her daughter to sign over her portion of the estate inheritance for a lump sum of \$343,000. What Josephine didn't tell her daughter was that the estate had reportedly grown in value to about \$10 million. This meant Pauline was cheated out of what should have been in excess of



1930s tap knobs. **Above:** (left) Fisher-made ball knob with enamel insert and (right) a Krest-made knob with porcelain face. **Top Right:** A rare knob for the short-lived Gold Label Ale from Lion. **Right:** Newman-made aluminum knobs. Collection of George Arnold.



day-to-day management—leaving the details to her attorney, George Mott, whom she had named treasurer after her daughter’s lawsuit.

Mother/daughter catfight

Under Mott, the Lion began to bleed sales. It was bitten hard by Jacob Ruppert, which had become #1 in New York largely by gaining market share from Lion. Unlike the Lion’s heritage, however, Ruppert had been energized by its second generation and was led by Jacob Jr., the son of the founder, who proved a brilliant marketer.

Less than 10 years after her first settlement, Pauline, clearly her mother’s daughter, sought more revenge on her flamboyant mother and decided to stage a coup. The duo once again made headlines in 1917 when Pauline accused Josephine of “deliberately wrecking” the company. Pauline claimed that her position as “director” gave her no influence. She sued her mother for \$3 million in damages and control of what she described as a failing business. She accused treasurer George Mott of mismanagement and he promptly resigned.

The exact details of the mother/daughter settlement are fuzzy. But by 1919 just before Prohibition, Hugh A. Murray, not Josephine, was noted as president of the Lion Brewery. Murray was in fact the stock broker who happened to be married to Pauline. The Lion Brewery had a new lioness in the pride.

Then Prohibition hit in 1920. Although many smaller New York City breweries simply shut down for good, the Lion soldiered on, making near-beer. By 1925, Pauline had emerged victorious as the sole owner of the brewery, while her husband Hugh remained president.

\$3 million—her third of the empire. Poor Pauline had never imagined that her own mother would feed her to the jackals this way.

Josephine soon became a favorite headliner in newspaper gossip—something frowned upon by the high society of which she so desperately wanted to be a part. In 1908, Pauline sued her mother for her rightful share of the family fortune. At this point, Pauline was married to a stockbroker, who must have been financially savvy enough to make her realize she’d been utterly robbed by her mother. A bitter and very public trial ensued, resulting in a settlement for Pauline. Her mother remained president but could no longer be treasurer—and Pauline became a director.

More scandal

Josephine hit the headlines yet again in 1909. At 50 years old, the “Brewer’s Widow” (as the press indelicately dubbed her) got married to an Italian royal with the flamboyant name of Prince Don Giovanni Del Drago of Rome.

Embarrassingly, it turned out the prince was virtually penniless, and the *New York Times* ran a front-page story debunking the idea that Del Drago was really a prince at all. They mockingly referred to Josephine as “The Brewery Queen.” As the story that she essentially had bought her royal title circulated more widely, she was dubbed, “Dollar Princess.” Undeterred, Josephine the lioness kept her pride and haughtily insisted upon being called “Princess Del Drago” for the rest of her life.

Josephine and her prince began spending more time in Europe. She sold her Fifth Avenue chateau. She loosened her grip on the Lion Brewery—no longer involved in its

Tragedy strikes

Tragically and just as Prohibition was drawing to a close, Pauline and Hugh were killed in an automobile accident (1931). More sensational headlines for the Lion. Once again, the only heir



1930s coasters. Collection of George Arnold.



The Lion was one of the few Manhattan brewers to survive Prohibition and invest in canning. Here are some rare examples, including an extremely rare quart cone top (auctioned in Feb. 2019 for \$11,760), a crowntainer, and "instructional" cans for beer and ale, circa 1936-37. Courtesy of Morean Auctions.

was a married daughter who inherited the \$4 million estate. What's not clear is how the corporate ownership evolved from that point. But in 1933 the Lion came roaring back as one of the first breweries in New York City to be licensed to brew real beer again.

Meanwhile, the once-mighty lioness, Josephine Schmid Del Drago, died in 1937. She left a million-dollar estate that was no longer affiliated with the brewery that helped make her rich and (in)famous.

The Lion's demise

The Lion's roar became more like a yawn as sales declined into the 1940s. The brewery got caught up in what became a downsizing wave of mergers and brewery closings in New York City. All ultimately operated under the banner of the Greater New York Brewery, Inc. The Lion was acquired by Greater New York in May 1941 and by February of 1942, the brewery was closed and put up for sale. Not surprisingly given the increased costs of brewing beer in New York City, there were no buyers and the equipment was auctioned.

Still, the old empty brewing facility managed to do its lion's share for the war effort. In 1942-43, New York City was on a big steel drive for war manufacturing. The city rounded up steel for recycling from old streetcar tracks (which had been replaced by subways and elevated trains), structures left over from the famed 1939 World's Fair, and the remains of the Peter Doelger and Lion breweries.

The Lion products continued to be produced by Greater New York at various breweries it owned until 1950—100 years after the beginning of the Bernheimer and Schmid partnership. Today, the site of the Lion Brewery of New York proudly hosts the Booker T. Washington Junior High School.

Author's Note: As a collector of New York City breweriana, I have always admired pieces from the Lion Brewery for their striking "lion on the barrel" logo. And although the Lion produced a variety of beautiful advertising, it doesn't seem it was made in great quantity, and much of it today is quite rare. To assemble the wide array of breweriana and depth of information featured in this article, I had the generous assistance of NABA friends Chris Amideo, George Arnold, John Bain, Scott Brown, Ed Johnson, Dan Morean, and Chris Reed.

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