

A Brief History of the Crescent City Homebrewers

by Carol Rice, ad hoc Historian

Crescent City Homebrewers is the oldest brew club in New Orleans, possibly in the whole Gulf region. After five years of very informal existence, members incorporated CCH with the state of Louisiana in 1983. The purpose of the club as stated in the By-Laws of the Corporation: Shall be a non-profit, informational organization to promote brewing of beers in the home for personal consumption as an alternative to commercial brews.

The country's Bicentennial in 1976 spurred a resurgence of interest in all colonial home crafts resulting in federal recognition of the craft of home brewing. In October of 1978, President Jimmy Carter signed a bill into law that made home brewing legal and exempt from excise tax, but still subject to state local options.* The law went into effect four months later. Eight guys curious about making beer decided to give it a try.

The intrepid eight began with Fleischman's yeast and Blue Ribbon Malt Extract from the A&P. They bought hops pellets (a delicate light brown color) from the homebrew shop on Oleander Street where the club met. "We started buying mail order because his stuff was not the freshest," generously stated Harold Hochhalter, 1985 CCH President. Until then, "we didn't know hops were supposed to be green." said John Dauenhauer, 1984 President. "The first recipes we had included three pounds of corn sugar per batch. Lots of alcohol, but very little flavor," said Harold.

They were fearless. They tried everything, ales and lagers. Rumor has it that the club's first lagers were aged in the cooler of a funeral home where one of the members worked. Too bad the name of that beer was lost – *Laid Out Lager*, perhaps. Eventually, they tried all-grain brewing.

Club members built equipment large enough to brew fifty gallons at a time. Each guy would take a share home to ferment. They called it a Brew-Off. Club brews are still called that today. The equipment has been upgraded several times, but the result is still the same. Ten brewers go home with five gallons of wort to ferment and finish. CCH may be the only club in the country to brew in large cooperative batches. No other club in Louisiana does, nor in the other Gulf states.

CCH has also partnered with craft breweries to do even larger Brew-Offs with Mystic Krewe of Brew (MKOB), the North Shore club. Zea Rotisserie and Brewery, Big Easy Beer, and Heiner Brau (now Covington Brew House) have all hosted joint brew-offs. The club uses brew-offs to introduce new brewers to all-grain brewing. Educating brewers in all-grain brewing is part of our Mission Statement. CCH has a continuous history of educating members about all aspects of beer. This began as a series of short articles in the *Hopline*, the monthly newsletter that began, sporadically, shortly after the club was formed. The *Hopline* was typed by the club president, mimeographed, and mailed to the membership. It was quite entertaining with crossword puzzles, brew-off recipes, topical jokes and quotes, and social notes. Considering the technology, which now seems soooo primitive, the *Hopline* was quite an accomplishment. They were exuberant testaments to the joys and camaraderie of beer and brewing. It was not typeset until 1988, probably on an early personal computer.

The short technical *Hopline* articles about beer morphed over time into year-long beer appreciation courses that cover beer making procedures from shopping to finishing; storing and serving; the sciences involved; history; styles (usually following the BJCP Style Guidelines); tasting and evaluating; and preparing for judging. Warren Chigoy, the first instructor, taught the

course for years. He has been followed by one of his students, Carol Rice. Both are BJCP certified.

CCH grew significantly over the years. By the early 90s, membership reached 150, and included several women. The first female documented as a member was Kathryn O'Brian, who joined in November of 1986. The following June, Kendra Bruno, owner of Dixie Brewery, joined the club. The first female officer was Marci Kraus, club secretary in '88 and '89.

Club members held internal competitions right from the start, but were thirsting for more feedback than their friends would give. So they went public. In 1991, CCH hosted its first invitational competition, the Crescent City Coast to Coast Competition (CCCCC). Invitations were sent nationwide. It grew to be an impressive event. New Orleans Mayor Marc Morial applauded the effort. "The Crescent City Competition for '95 has so many events, the visitors might want to come a day early and stay a day after so they can really see... New Orleans." (January 1995 Crescent City Competition Brochure) This competition settled down simply as the Crescent City Competition, part of the now defunct Gulf Coast Series of Homebrew Competitions. Clubs from four cities in the gulf region hosted four competitions that were amalgamated to name the Gulf Coast Home Brew Club of the Year, and the Gulf Coast Home Brewer of the Year. They were: Crescent City Competition in New Orleans, hosted by CCH; Bluebonnet Brew-Off in Dallas, hosted by several clubs including the North Texas Home Brewers Association and Red River Brewers; Dixie Cup Homebrewing Competition in Houston, hosted by the Foam Rangers; and the Sunshine Challenge in Orlando, hosted by the Central Florida Home Brewers. The traveling trophy, the C-Cup was designed and ("lovingly fashioned with his own hands" from a brassiere that size) by Louie Marino, a playful and talented member. The rivalries to take the prize home were intense. Bert 'n Ernie of CCH were always a challenge to the Sampsons of Central Florida Home Brewers. Unfortunately, the large competition became far too expensive for CCH to run alone. The club lost money every year. When no other Louisiana club would join in ("We aren't interested in losing money." Jack Schugg, President, MKOB), CCH abandoned the Crescent City Competition in 2005. That was the death knell for the Gulf Coast Series of Home Brew Competitions.

Katrina had a serious effect on the club. Before Katrina, Carol Rice described the club as "a social club with closet brewers." Now, the club is full of serious (out-of-the-closet) brewers who make stunning beers and don't mind socializing with them one bit. The cadre of Tulane students in the club were washed away by the hurricane to graduate elsewhere. No Tulanians have joined since the storm. Too bad, they were a fun lot. Our meeting place, Deutsches Haus, was inundated and closed for more than a year. The club became a band of vagabonds, bouncing from place to place for meetings with mixed results. When Deutsches Haus reopened, CCH was very happy to return home. After a few rocky post-Katrina years, membership is back up to 100. The new members are as enthusiastic and energetic as the original intrepid eight. They think outside the box when building recipes. The days of being in lockstep with BJCP are long gone. The results are gorgeous, rich, sumptuous, unique and challenging brews. They are well worth the experimentation.

CCH is a good group of feet-on-the-ground people getting to enjoy a fun hobby with a fun product. They are all responsible drinkers. Our tag line says it all:

For the responsible drinker there is always another party.

**Title 27, Part 25, Subpart L, Section 25.205 and Section 25.206
Beer for Personal or Family Use**

Discussion

§ 205 provides an exemption to the code permitting the production of beer for personal or family use. § 206 allows for removal of beer from the home for personal use as well as use at organized affairs and competitions. § 25.11 provides a definition for beer (see applicable statutory material). The Statute in Title 27, Part 25, Subpart L, Section 25.205 legalizing home production of beer, also appears in Title 26, Subtitle E, Chapter 51, Subchapter A, Part I, Subpart D, § 5053. The 1978 amendment to § 25.205 federally recognizing the home production of beer. Amendment XXI (1933) of the United States Constitution repealed the prohibition of intoxicating liquor (Amendment XVIII [1919]). However, section 2 of Amendment XXI and state police power gives states the authority to regulate the production, transportation and possession of intoxicating liquors. **Therefore the home production of beer is recognized by federal statute so long as such production is not in violation of state law.**