

The Paul Wheeler Dairy

By Brandon DeWolfe

In 2018, I dug a small trash pit in Galveston, Texas. It was only a few feet deep and perhaps 18 inches in diameter but was so packed with bottles that there was very little dirt between them.

I pulled out all the classic spoils of a late 1890s trash pit; a few W.O.G. Hutch sodas (Walter Otto Grempczynski), a Wells “Cave Man” Hutch soda from Galveston, a Bitterquelle, and a few slicks.

Laying against the “Cave Man” Hutch soda was a hand-blown pint milk bottle embossed in a slug plate on the front “Paul Wheeler Dairy Absolute Purity Guaranteed 113-20th St.,” on the base “Creamery Package Mfg. Co. #2Ideal Chicago” and on the rear “This Bottle To Be Washed And Returned Not To Be Bought Or Sold.”

I had never seen such a milk bottle, but a quick search of the Galveston business directories showed that it was indeed a Galveston bottle from a dairy that existed for just a handful of years in the late 1890s and early 1900s.

I did not research any further, and the bottle has languished on my shelf since.

Pint size Paul Wheeler Dairy bottle. An article from 1899 indicates that quarts were also sold, and I confirmed that via shards dug recently, though I know of no intact examples.



The 1900 Galveston Hurricane, known regionally as the Great Storm of 1900, was the deadliest natural disaster in United States history. The strongest storm of the 1900 Atlantic hurricane season left between 6,000 and 12,000 fatalities in the United States; the number most cited in official reports is 8,000. Most of these deaths occurred in and near Galveston, Texas, after the storm surge inundated the coastline and the island city with 8 to 12 feet of water. It remains among the deadliest Atlantic hurricanes on record. In addition to the number killed, the storm destroyed about 7,000 buildings of all uses in Galveston, including 3,636 demolished homes; every dwelling in the city suffered some damage. The hurricane left approximately 10,000 people in the city homeless out of a total population of fewer than 38,000. The disaster ended the Golden Era of Galveston, as the hurricane alarmed potential investors, who turned to Houston instead. In response to the storm, three engineers designed and oversaw plans to raise the Gulf of Mexico shoreline of Galveston Island by 17 feet and erect a 10 mile seawall.

PURE MILK AND CREAM.

WE WILL BE READY TO

**Resume Business
About November 20**

and will deliver Milk and Cream as before to all parts of the city. You, can look for well handled Pure Sweet Milk and Cream and good service. Send us a postal or 'phone.

**Paul Wheeler
Dairy Co.**

**113 20th St.
Phone 689 or Phone 400.**

Pure Milk and Cream. We will be ready to resume business about November 20. Paul Wheeler Dairy Co., Galveston Tribune. (Galveston, Tex.), Vol. 20, No. 304 (November 12, 1900)

"WHEELER LUCK."

Big Ex-Governor Has a Splendid Crop of Rice.

Gov. Hiram C. Wheeler has returned from a tour of inspection of his rice plantation—ertwhile swamp and "milk cow ranch"—in Jefferson county. He reports that this year's crop of rice is looking just as fine as a thousand dollar banknote. From present prospects he will in due season harvest about ten bags of rice from every one of the 1000 acres he has planted with this cereal, and the rice sells for about \$3.50 per bag.

In addition to turning a valueless swamp into a profitable rice plantation, Gov. Wheeler says there are now four wells being sunk around his place by people who hope to strike oil. This fact has caused the big ex-Iowan to grow less harsh when he speaks of those who have forsaken the beaten paths of agriculture to dabble in oil speculation. When asked if it was his intention to bore for oil on his place, Gov. Wheeler replied he was not talking for publication. Two months ago he pooh-bahed such a thing. In the event he does bore for oil it would be "Wheeler luck" for him to strike the biggest and the best gusher yet found in America.

A man who can turn a dismal swamp into a rice farm that will pay many thousands of dollars annual profit is the sort of a person who is apt to get whatever he goes after. Gov. Wheeler is that man. If he bores for oil his past luck—or was it business sagacity—will have to do back action somersault to prevent him from finding oodles of oil.

"Wheeler Luck." Big Ex-Governor Hiram C. Wheeler Has a Splendid Crop of Rice., Galveston Tribune. (Galveston, Tex.), Vol. 21, No. 166 (June 4, 1901)

Recently, after many years of assuming the bottles were only sold in pints, I dug a sadly broken quart example of the Paul Wheeler Dairy bottle embossed identically to the pint. I decided to do some more research and discovered that there was a fascinating yet tragic story that lay behind this bottle and the dairy it came from.



Hiram Cyrus Wheeler (illustrated) was born in Hopkinton, New Hampshire, on May 10, 1835, and passed away destitute at his daughter's home in Chicago on September 25, 1909. His family moved to Chicago when he was around one year old, then moved to California in 1854, where he dealt in real estate.

Wheeler moved between Chicago and San Francisco for several years, but his history during this period is a bit hazy. One early article indicates he was an "early member" of the San Francisco Stock Exchange, which wasn't founded until much later. Another newspaper article suggests that he came by a substantial amount of insurance money due to his grain elevators being destroyed during the Great Chicago Fire (the Hiram Wheeler who owned some of Chicago's grain elevators was not the same Hiram Wheeler that is the subject of this article). Basically, it appears that Hiram Cyrus Wheeler may have been a bit of a "self-promoter," which was easier in the days before the Internet.

In late 1871 or 1872, Wheeler purchased roughly 10,000 acres of land near the present town of Odebolt, Iowa and started a massive farm there known as one of only two "Bonanza Farms" in Iowa. In 1877, he donated land to start the town of Odebolt and, in 1882, was noted to have 60 head of cattle, 40 Clydesdales (raising draft horses was one of his specialties), and a steam plow for his farm that plowed ten furrows at one time. He had an early telephone system set up at his farm in the early 1890s that was satirized in a cartoon in *Puck* magazine, and focused on dairying after the workhorse market declined.

Hiram Cyrus Wheeler ran for political office several times, including a failed run as the Republican nominee for Governor of Iowa in 1891. In the early 1890s, he also stepped back from his farm operation and spent much of his time in Chicago while his son, Hiram Paul Wheeler, ran the operations at the farm. In 1896, Hiram sold the farm to William Phipps Adams and the farm became known as the Fairview Farm. It remained largely intact until 1978 when it was sold in several parts to other local farms.

On September 20, 1896, Hiram ran an advertisement in the *Galveston Daily News* looking for 5,000 to 10,000 acres of land within 50 miles of Galveston or Houston. That advertisement must have been successful, for in late 1896, with the money he made selling the Wheeler Ranch to Adams, roughly \$50,000 or \$200,000, depending on which news article you believe, he bought some 5,000-6,000 acres of land in Hampshire (Jefferson County), Texas. Reports at the time indicated

the land was 30 miles northeast of Galveston, but it is closer to 50 miles in a straight line and 60+ miles by train. The land was along the proposed Beaumont to Galveston (Gulf & Interstate) Railroad corridor and Wheeler planned to provide the city of Galveston milk and butter via the railroad and ferry. Various newspapers in Texas speak of his past political endeavors, refer to him as “Governor” or “Colonel” though there are no indications he served in the military and was never a governor, and speak of his plans to build the largest dairy farm in the world. In 1897, the *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette* even called him a “missionary” for milk in Galveston.

On September 13, 1897, as Wheeler was building the dairy, a storm struck the area. The 1897 hurricane caused damage to Port Arthur, Winnie, and everywhere in between despite being a small Category 1 hurricane. It destroyed his three newly built 60' x 160' barns and badly damaged the creamery such that it had to be rebuilt.

In 1898 Hiram was listed in the Galveston directory as a dairyman living at 1620 Tremont. He started extensive advertising of the Paul Wheeler Dairy in the October 31, 1898, *Galveston Tribune*, and this advertising continued with some lulls, mostly in the summer months, through late 1900, with a brief break after the devastating 1900 hurricane.

In 1899, he was listed as the proprietor of the Paul Wheeler Dairy with an in-city address of 109 20th Street. This may be an error, as newspaper advertisements from 1899 indicate his address as 113 20th St. In 1901, Hiram is listed as living in the Tremont Hotel while the Paul Wheeler Dairy is managed by Daniel J. Moore, still at 113 20th Street. Hiram C. Wheeler disappears from Galveston from that point forward and moved back to Chicago sometime before 1903. He does show up in various north and west Texas newspapers from time to time (especially in 1903) promoting the sale of land in Louisiana and Texas for rice farming.

Hiram C. Wheeler lived in Chicago with his daughter and her husband until he died in 1909. The last listing in the Galveston directories for the Paul Wheeler Dairy is in 1903, where it is listed once again at 113 20th Street.

Some questions remained...who and where was Paul Wheeler?—and why was the dairy named after him even though it does not appear that he ever managed the dairy? Why did Hiram, with his supposed wealth, die destitute in Chicago?

Hiram Paul Wheeler (who went by Paul), namesake of the dairy and son of Hiram Cyrus Wheeler, was born in 1871 and died on May 7, 1897, in Beaumont, Texas. In the *Lime Springs Sun* newspaper of Lime Springs, Iowa, on Friday, May 21, 1897, there is a brief note that his mother was notified of his death of Malarial Fever. It is apparent that he and his family were working towards getting the Texas dairy up and running when he passed away. I can only imagine his father's heartbreak. I suppose the dairy was named the “Paul Wheeler Dairy” in memory of his only son, who died carrying out Hiram Sr.'s vision of a massive dairy in Texas. It is interesting to note that Paul's son, also named Hiram Paul Wheeler, born April 28, 1896, in Iowa, and Paul's wife, Sarah

Waggoner, both remained at the dairy in Hamshire, Texas, for at least a few years after Paul's death and both remained in Texas through their lifetimes.

The answer to my second question can be found in the *Houston Daily Post* on September 26, 1900, in an advertisement for the sale of the Paul Wheeler Dairy, complete with 300 selected high grade cows, cold storage, horses, wagons and bottles. The advertisement notes that the reason for the sale was the wreck and destruction of the Gulf & Interstate Railway on the Bolivar Peninsula due to the great hurricane, which prevented transport from Hamshire to Galveston of the dairy's products. The advertisement notes that the storm destroyed nearly all other dairies serving Galveston. A second identical advertisement was run on September 30, 1900. After the storm, advertisements in the *Galveston Tribune* indicate that the dairy was preparing to restart delivery in Galveston on November 20, 1900.

Interestingly, advertisements starting in 1901 indicate that the dairy was in Alvin, Texas, rather than the original location in Hamshire. In April 1901, the dairy was incorporated by Hiram Cyrus Wheeler, Daniel J. Moore, James E. Moore, and Forster Rose, with a capital stock of \$20,000. It appears that investment was needed to keep the business afloat. In March 1904, a dairy named “Winston Brothers” was listed as the successor to Paul Wheeler Dairy Co. and was listed at the 113 20th St. address. This is where the saga ends. Today we are left with a handful of bottles as a physical indicator of Hiram Cyrus Wheeler's dream to have the largest dairy in the world.

At the time of his death in 1909, it is noted that Hiram's wife was running a boarding house in Seattle; it appears that he died so broke that he was asking the townspeople of Odebolt for money to cover his doctor's bills.

I have not seen Wheeler bottles intact in any size except a pint. An article from 1899 indicates that quarts were also sold, and I confirmed that via shards dug recently, though I know of no intact examples. Although there may be some debate regarding this assertion based on the base embossing on the bottles, I believe the bottles pre-date the 1900 hurricane.

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