

What Is Beer?

Greg Casey

In the summer of 1908 at a meeting to establish national standards for beer, a member of the newly created FDA stated a tombstone should be inscribed with the epitaph "*Hic jacet cerevisia malti*", Latin for "*Here rests all malt beer*". It was prompted by the opening statement made on behalf of the American brewing industry by Dr. Robert Wahl that "*the all-malt beer has become, in the minds of the brewers' Committee, almost extinct in America*". Why this extraordinary exchange occurred over **111** years ago between America's most prolific brewing scientist and the Federal Government is the very essence of "*What Is Beer?*" For while American brewers today – both macro and craft – take it for granted we have the freedom to use ingredients of our choice, the right do so was ever so close to being extinguished in the decades leading up to Dr. Robert Wahl's 1908 statement. But for the inspiring (and very, very public!) defense of the American brewing industry by our first generation of brewing scientists, an American Reinheitsgebot could have been enforced on our industry as early as 1890. No rice, no corn, no wheat, no rye, no grain other than barley, no fruits, no spices, no fodder for Super Bowl LIII commercials – nada. Time after time, in hearings held in the halls of Congress and State legislatures (especially New York) brewing scientists such as Dr. Robert Wahl, Dr. Francis Wyatt, Dr. Max Henius, Dr. Max Wallerstein, Anton Schwarz and Gallus Thomann successfully thwarted efforts focused on forcing the industry to produce beer made only of malt, hops, water and yeast. In language that could be understood by legislators – and which will be presented in *What Is Beer?* – they carefully explained the science behind *why* our National Beverage evolved as it did, and the role played by these "beer doctors" in enabling the development of the world's first beer to remain crystal clear when ice-cold. Many of these same men would in the years just prior to Prohibition go on to establish the ASBT – the American Society of Brewing Technologists – developing early generation test methods and standards for brewing materials and process samples which are core to the mission of today's ASBC.

What Is Beer? gives voice to the quintessentially American journey of this diverse group of brewing scientists, men whose legacies are shared today by every brewer and brewing scientist in the United States of America.

Gesundheit gentlemen – rest in peace.