

The Seven-Up Company and 7-Up Bottles

The Real Story

A Look at the Myths, the Mystery, and the Magic



By Bill Lockhart and Bob Brown

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Author's Preface – Bill Lockhart

Like most happenings in my life, I fell into the study of bottles by accident. A late bloomer, I began college at the age of 44 (after flunking out directly out of high school) and met John Peterson because he had his packages delivered to the Unity Church next door where I worked as the bookroom manager. A historical archaeologist teaching at the University of Texas at El Paso, John hired me as a work study when I transferred to UTEP from El Paso Community College. His first job for me was the cleaning and cataloging of 379 bottles bulldozed illegally from the parking lot of the El Paso Coliseum.

When I took a class with John, he let me write the report on those bottles, along with another student, Wanda Olszewski (not my Wife, Wanda Wakkinen). Wanda O. and I made a good team, cranking out a 99-page paper that the University published. Not long after that, Wanda O. and I were working on an excavation in nearby San Elizario along Bill Fling (specializing in faunal material), when someone discovered a bottle pit and yelled out, “Where’s Bill?” John answered, “Which Bill, Bone Bill or Bottle Bill?” The die was cast. Wanda O. and I finished excavating the bottle pit and wrote an article published in *The Artifact*, the journal of the El Paso Archaeological Society.

Although I went on to become a professor at the Alamogordo campus of New Mexico State University, teaching sociology, most of my research centered around historical archaeology, specializing in glass artifacts – historical bottles. Initially, my focus was on soda bottles at El Paso and Southern New Mexico, but I branched out into milk bottles, beer bottles, prescription bottles, and just about any other kind from those two areas. But, my interest in soda bottles never flagged. Somehow, I always seem to return to those.

When Bill Lindsey – a grassland specialist with the BLM with an interest in old bottles – contacted me, we became life-long friends, dedicated to the study of bottles. Soon, Carol Serr, a general archaeologist, greatly interested in bottles, joined us, and we became the Bottle Research Group. When David Whitten, bottle collector, joined us, he shifted my personal interest and the focus of the group to manufacturer’s marks. Although David dropped back out, he remains a friend and associate, maintaining an excellent bottle website of his own. Pete Schulz, Beau Schiever, Nate Briggs, and Bob Brown all eventually joined, although Pete was forced to leave

because of health issues and Nate went on to other things, and the Bottle Research Group continues to seek out the backgrounds of bottles and their makers.

From the beginning of my research as a UTEP student, I have been involved with both bottle collectors and archaeologists – despite a major rift between the two. Archaeologists complain that collectors destroy sites, and collectors gripe about archaeologists closing places that they had dug for years. Many in both camps do not realize the mass of information – often very *different* information – held by each group. My experience is that most collectors obey all laws and only dig on private property – completely in line with U.S. laws – and most archaeologists were *not* trying to ruin anyone’s fun – just attempting to protect our heritage. Once I became accepted by both camps, the information and ideas began to flow at an incredible rate.

The key to this study was Bob Brown. From the time Bob joined the BRG, we had intended to investigate Seven-Up. Of the three major brands of sodas in the U.S., Seven-Up has received the least serious attention – so it was ripe for an intensive study. Bob is a tireless researcher; if it is on the internet, he can find it. My job is to put together the pieces, and we make a good team, often discovering information that past researchers have missed. Enjoy.

Author’s Preface – Bob Brown

When I was 23 (1975), I began collecting soda bottles, but my interest in collecting goes back to my childhood. A lifelong sportsman, my father preferred hunting or fishing to work on the family chicken ranch in southern California. Dad introduced my brothers and I to hunting for arrowheads and other artifacts. I don’t know if I was just lucky or had a keen eye, but I always seemed to find more arrowheads than anyone else in the family. My technique was to crawl around on my hands and knees so I could see the ground closeup. My brothers used to tease me about it, but I was finding stuff, and that was all that mattered to me.

That same technique found my first soda bottle when I went on my first bottle hunt with a friend of my oldest brother who apparently had been collecting soda bottles for years. He searched for old sodas in the brush along old highways where motorists used to toss them from their cars. He told me to look closely because the bottles were often hard to see. By crawling

around on my hands and knees I found more soda bottles that day than anyone else in our group. The guy who headed the group was impressed with my technique and said he would probably use it more in the future. However, he pointed out that it was a bit risky because rattlesnakes also like to crawl around under the brush. He was certainly right about that. During the course of 30+ years of hunting for soda bottles in the brush, I encountered at least a dozen rattlesnakes, almost putting my hand on one. Finally, I wised up and no longer hunt for soda bottles in that manner – nor do I recommend it to others. Stick with eBay – no rattlesnakes there.

Eventually, I managed to amass a collection of 1,000+ bottles - the majority of which I sold years ago. The pride of my collection now consists of about 50 Big Chief ACL bottles. Possibly, my interest in Big Chiefs is a throwback to my early experience collecting Native American arrowheads. However, my primary interest now is researching soda bottles rather than collecting them.

I got my first computer about twenty years ago and have been researching soda bottles ever since. As a member of several bottle collecting forums, I am most often known as SodaBob, and I have participated in more soda bottle related discussions than I can count. Bill Lockhart is a friend I never met in person, someone I used to contact whenever I had a bottle question and couldn't find the answer. If Bill didn't know the answer, then it was likely that no one did. Over a period of time we developed a rapport that still exists. Through Bill, I was invited to join the Bottle Research Group (BRG), where I and other members devote our combined interest in the pursuit of all things related to bottles.

In his Preface, Bill said “Bob is a tireless researcher; if it is on the internet, he can find it.” Even though I appreciate the comment, I would like to expound on it a bit by saying there is nothing particularly unique about my research skills. The same information is there for anyone to find. If I have a unique skill it is “time.” For example; if you only spend an hour looking for something, the results will be somewhat limited. However, if you devote hours or even days, the end results will expand proportionally.

With some tasks that Bill assigned to me for this and other studies, I might spend an entire day looking for a single item or single bit of information. I'm tenacious in that respect and won't give up until I have used every key word or words I can think of to find what I'm

looking for. Hence, it's not only about time, it also involves key wording. Of course it doesn't hurt to access every known website such as newspaper archives and other databases, but that is another story for another time. Meanwhile, we hope you enjoy our 7up story – which we feel is the most comprehensive study about the brand that has ever been compiled.

Introduction

As noted in our brief personal sections above, both Bob and Bill have had abiding interests in soda bottles for decades. Two things spurred our interest in the history and bottles of Seven-Up – the lack of a major study and the name Bib-Label Lithiated Lemon Soda. Both Coca-Cola and Pepsi-Cola have had several serious researchers delve into both the history and bottles of the companies. While there are plenty of Seven-Up collectors (both bottles and memorabilia), it seems odd that histories of the firm have been spotty, and there has been no comprehensive looks at the bottles. We felt it was time.

The name Bib-Label Lithiated Lemon Soda never made sense to us – or to many others. Often, we have read or heard people say that they could not understand how someone who made a success with the name Howdy could use such a complex moniker for his lemon-lime soda. So, we discovered where the name came from and how it developed. Then answer, of course, is in Chapter 1.

This has been a labor of love, over five years in the making. Every time we were approaching the end, Bob would discover something else, and, once again, we were off to the races, digging and rewriting – eventually creating four chapters and five appendices. Although we had many discussions about where and how to publish these results, we finally chose Bill Lindsey's webpage on the Society for Historical Archaeology website. Even though that choice will never net us a penny for the thousands of hours of labor that went into the study, it makes the information much more available to the people who will really make use of it. We hope you will find it helpful.

