

Chapter 1

Overview of the Alamogordo Soda Bottling Industry

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Alamogordo was founded by the Eddy brothers (Charles Bishop and John Arthur), along with William Ashton Hawkins, in 1898 as a watering stop for the new railroad stretching from El Paso to service the gold mines at White Oaks, New Mexico. Otero County was carved out of Doña Ana County the following year, and Alamogordo became the County Seat. In the beginning, Alamogordo was a small but growing community with a population of only 1,298 in July 1899.

Shortly after the town was laid out, Theodore L. Reber arrived at the new settlement. Reber was a restless wanderer, a Johnny Appleseed of soda bottlers, who established fifty different soda bottling works (according to his own count) between 1879 and his death in 1912 – mostly within the boundaries of New Mexico. Reber frequently followed new mineral strikes and the founding of new towns, so his presence in Alamogordo was no surprise. Reber usually established a business, sold out, and left to found another one. He opened the first soda bottling plant in Alamogordo, but there is no record that he found a buyer for it. By June 1899, Reber was gone.

Because of the railroad link, soft drinks from El Paso were readily available to Alamogordo residents, although they had to be ordered from the larger city. Two El Paso bottlers, Houck & Dieter and Henry Pfaff, advertised in the Alamogordo newspapers, and the easy proximity to El Paso sodas may have been responsible for Reber's failure to sell out. Both El Paso firms also dealt in liquor and beer.

By 1903, Pfaff had obtained the only bar licence for Alamogordo (see Chapter 4), and his sodas became more readily available through his saloon on Block 50. However, in 1905, the railroad closed many of its Alamogordo facilities, and the population declined. Probably as a reflection of the population ebb, Pfaff sold his interest in the saloon and withdrew his business to El Paso. The outsiders were gone, although rail order for sodas was still available.

The population grew very gradually, and Alamogordo experienced a slump between 1905

and 1912. Despite this local recession, George A. Weigele, an Alamogordo baker since at least 1903, began offering the town's 1,948 people Weigele's Pop at his downtown bakery and confectionery in 1910. Although he probably began bottling in the back of his wife's boarding house (where he also did most of his baking), he had opened up a bottling facility on Delaware Ave. by the following year. The bottling operation became popular and was run by his son, George, Jr.

Weigele ushered in the era of the small, family owned bottler in Alamogordo. His Alamogordo Bottling Works likely grew with the population, and many citizens surely drank his "pop" as part of the celebration of New Mexico statehood on January 6, 1912. A series of other owners followed, and the bottling works was usually only open during the hot, summer months. Eventually the last owner changed the name to Crystal Bottling Co. and the next one again renamed the plant the Crystal Beverage Co. Crystal closed its doors about 1947, and the national brands came into prominence.

National brands first arrived in Alamogordo in the form of Coca-Cola in 1921. Although the Alamogordo Bottling Works was now a franchise unit, serious marketing of the product did not begin until the Crystal Beverage Co. lost (or sold) the franchise in the early 1930s. The Magnolia Coca-Cola Bottling Co. of El Paso began trucking Coca-Cola into Alamogordo and initiated a series of ads in 1937. Soon, the company established a warehouse and later a bottling plant that was eventually divorced from its parent firm and obtained its own franchise. By the mid-1940s, the population had grown to 10,522, and outside companies were shipping Pepsi-Cola and Royal Crown products. Competition had arrived.

When the Pecos Valley Coca-Cola Co. of Roswell, New Mexico, bought the Alamogordo plant in 1975, the firm discontinued bottling in Otero County and shipped filled containers to the city (and their entire territory) from their Carlsbad plant. Bottling in Alamogordo had come to an end. The national trend by this time was toward fewer bottlers with larger territories, and Alamogordo has been caught in that trend since the 1980s. Local bottlers are gone, and local bottling is finished. Both The Coca-Cola Bottling Group, Southwest, Inc. and Pepsi Cola West, the only two carbonated beverage distributors left in Alamogordo are small branch warehouses for large corporations headquartered far away.