

Bottles on the Border:

The History and Bottles of the Soft Drink Industry

in El Paso, Texas, 1881-2000



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Chapter 11a

Chapter 11a
Trone Bottling Co. and Dr Pepper Bottling Co.

Trone Bottling Co./Dr Pepper Bottling Co. (1950-1957)

History

Empire Products Corp. bottled Dr. Pepper from at least 1931 until about 1949 when James Howard Trone (known as Howard) moved to El Paso and acquired the franchise. Lawrence Gardner, president and primary stockholder of Empire had expanded his company until about 1940. Apparently, he gradually sickened until he retired from Empire in 1944. Upon his retirement, his wife, Nell, now president of Empire began to reduce the company's involvements. One of those reductions consisted of selling the Dr Pepper franchise to Howard Trone.

Trone was born in Bentonville, Arkansas, in 1901. Little is currently remembered about his early years, although he was married, and his wife, Erma, bore two children: their daughter, Sue, and a son named James Harold (born November 20, 1925), who, like his father, went by his middle name. By at least the early to mid-1930s, the family had opened the Trone Candy Factory in Waxahache, Texas. Although many businesses suffered and/or collapsed because of the Great Depression, Trone discovered that most of the raw materials (especially sugar cane) he needed to continue manufacturing candy were available in the immediate area. Unsatisfied with the typical fare, Trone experimented until he produced the Peanut Patty, a candy so successful that he patented it (Trone Interviews).¹

Trone moved his candy company to Corsicana, Texas, in the early 1940s and soon received an offer from Tom's Toasted Peanuts that would change his life. The Peanut Patty suited their needs, so the company offered Trone a price that he could not resist for his candy factory and his patent. He sold out for enough money to comfortably retire, and Tom's expanded from its home base at Columbus, Georgia, to Corsicana.² Although he could have retired,

¹ I have been unable to find the patent with an online search. The online search engine is far from perfect. The patent may yet be found.

² Tom's Foods still operates a plant at Corsicana.

Howard Trone was a worker, so he acquired the Farmer's Wholesale Coffee franchise for Central Texas. Family memories suggest that he may have begun the business as a place to employ his son, Harold, when Harold and his new bride, Vickie, joined the family – shortly after Harold returned from his hitch in the Navy at the end of World War II.

By the late 1940s, the senior Trone had developed asthma, a condition which grew increasingly worse. Medical science had few answers for the illness in the mid-20th century, and the doctors advised a move to a dryer climate. In casting around for business opportunities in a more arid environment, he discovered the availability of the Dr Pepper franchise in El Paso (Trone interviews).

According to the Directory of El Paso Manufacturers (1955), the Dr Pepper Bottling Co. began business in El Paso in 1950, the same year Trone was first listed in the city directories, although the company was not listed in the directories until 1952 when the business incorporated with James H. Trone as president. Family memories agree that Trone moved to El Paso “in the late 1940's” where the family lived at 5024 Timberwolf. The Dr Pepper Bottling Co. offered a drink called, Texan, in five flavors. Although the name never appeared in the city directories, all known Texan bottles are marked TRONE BOTTLING CO. / EL PASO, TEXAS (Trone Interviews; EPCD 1950-51-1954; EPT 4/5/1953 B13:4; 4/25/1954 E11:2).

Even though this sounds like Trone Bottling Co. was a separate company, the real answer is probably a bit more complex. Many bottlers in El Paso operated under more than one company name. Magnolia Bottling Co., for example, was also listed as Magnolia Coca-Cola Bottling Co. and just Coca-Cola Bottling Co. Trone probably followed this precedent and conducted business under both headings.

Like some other El Paso bottlers, Trone experienced labor problems. Dick Trone remembers visiting Howard when he “came in and said another driver had left his empty truck and absconded with his days collections, never to be heard from again. Because this was a common practice, no bonding company would bond them, he said” (Trone interviews). This is reminiscent of a story told by “Dub” Yowell where a driver not only absconded with the day's receipts but even sold the truck tires (see the section on the Barq's Dr Pepper Bottling Co.).

The following story about the business was related by Richard C. Trone (Trone Interviews):

HOW DELL CITY TEXAS GOT DR PEPPERS

Shortly after Howard Trone bought the Dr Pepper bottling plant in El Paso, Texas, a man dropped by his office one day and asked if he could or would make a delivery about 80 miles from El Paso?

The man usually stopped at the plant once or twice a month and purchased all the Dr Peppers he had room left in his pickup to haul. He explained that a new farming community had been founded at the southern end of Crow Flat, New Mexico, Just inside the Texas line. It seems that a great source of fresh water had been discovered and many irrigation wells had been dug, opening up vast areas of rich farm land. The area was so isolated that the need for a town became apparent, and he and a few other enterprises had built the town of Dell City, Texas. It was located about half-way between El Paso Texas and Carlsbad, New Mexico and some 20 miles of rough road, north of the main highway.

This information perked Trone's ears, and he said he was interested but would have to be assured of selling the whole truckload to defray the hauling expenses. The gentleman from Dell City assured him there would be no problem; he would buy and pay cash for the whole load.

Trone was having trouble with his drivers and hired his son to oversee the hiring and firing of qualified men and establishing a good work force. In the mean time he completely forgot about his Dell City promise until one day when they seemed to have everything under control. Jim Trone, Howard's son asked if he had anything that needed doing, and Howard thought about the Dell City delivery. He told Jim to load a truck and the general direction to Dell City and explained that he was to sell the whole load.

Jim said he thought he would never find the turn off to Dell City and was about to give up and return to El Paso when he spotted a small arrow on a sign pointing up a dusty unpaved road, that said Dell City. Again he was about to give up and

return to El Paso after bumping up the road for what seemed like an eternity, when he reached the small community. The main street had a few business on each side of a one block area. He knew he was to deliver to a grocery store, but which one? There were two, across the street from each other, so he stopped in the middle of the street. Before he could step down from the truck, both store owners were beside him shouting, "I'll buy the whole truck load." Jim said it immediately got rather loud and hostile between the two men, to a point where he thought they were about to start a fist fight. Jim was a good sized man and he stepped between the two and made a bargain that he would sell each a half of the load and would be back the next week with another load. In time it became a one month route.

Trone continued to have medical problems, and his doctors diagnosed him with leukemia about 1953 or 1954. Although Erma insisted that he visit a specialist in Europe, he soon died. By 1953, the firm employed fifteen to twenty people and delivered its products to Hudspeth County as well as El Paso. Erma became president of the corporation when Howard's illness advanced to the point where he could no longer fill the position, and Harold became vice president in 1954 (Trone interview; EPCD 1952-1954; EPT 4/5/1953:B13:4).

The company continued to distribute the five flavors of Texan along with Dr Pepper until at least 1955 when Harold, the family fortune now reduced to only the El Paso business, sold the Dr Pepper Bottling Co. to William J. Diebels. Harold remained with the firm as a route supervisor for a year then moved to Dallas, where he began using his first name (Jim) and worked wholesaling light bulbs. James Harold Trone, at that time a resident of Miller, Arkansas, died on August 17, 1997. Although the reasons are unknown, the El Paso business deteriorated, and eventually Dr Pepper left the El Paso market (Trone interview; EPCD 1955-1956; Social Security Death Index).

William J. Diebels was an interesting character. A long-time resident of El Paso, he began his time in the workforce in 1939 as a salesman for the Purity Baking Co. He rose in Purity to the position of distribution head before entering employment with Woodlawn Bottling Co. as general manager in 1944. Diebels stayed with Woodlawn until 1950, when he became a salesman for D&R Truck Equipment. But bottling was in his blood. He was general manager for Nehi-Royal Crown in 1952, and worked for Duffy's Distributing the following year. The

year, 1954, saw him as general manager of Barq's Bottling Co. before he took over Dr Pepper in 1955 (EPCD 1939-1955). Although no explanation has been found for the deterioration of Dr Pepper ca. 1957, it was certainly not caused by Diebels's inexperience.

Bottles and Artifacts

Texan

The only known beverage claiming the Trone Bottling Co. was a drink called Texan. Texan came in two sizes: 8- and 10-ounces, with the larger size made later (see cover page for this section). The firm apparently purchased bottles each year, at least during the first few years of its tenure (Figure 11a-1).

Method of Manufacture: Machine

Color: Colorless

Size (in cm.): 23.3 (h); 5.5 (d)

Primary Labeling Style: White ACL

Finish: Crown

Capacity: 8 oz.

Overall Bottle Design: Cylindrical with vertical embossed rounded ribs on shoulder and near the heel

Front Description

Shoulder: Vertical embossed rounded ribs

Body: A white ACL square surrounding a lone star superimposed with the word TEXAN

Heel: Embossed, 8 FL. OZ. [The ACL was not centered on the mold, so the two sets of heel embossing may appear on below any part of the label.]

Back Description

Shoulder: Same as front

Body: "Good" (including quotation marks) / AND / GOOD FOR YOU / TRONE BOTTLING CO. / EL PASO, TEXAS (all in white ACL)

Heel: Embossed - L-G 314 1



Figure 11a-1 – Texan – 8-oz. bottle

Base: Embossed - 50 (or 51)

Manufacturer: Liberty Glass Co. (1936-1954)

Dating: [1950-ca.1954] Because documentation about Trone Bottling Co. is lacking, dating is difficult. Trone, himself, was unlisted in the city directories prior to 1950, so it is unlikely that the firm was founded prior to that year. Trone Bottling Co. may have preceded the Dr Pepper Bottling Co. which was known to have produced a drink called Texan in five flavors in 1953 and 1954. Because the Dr Pepper Bottling Co. was operated by Trone's widow during those years, the bottles used may still have borne the label of Trone Bottling Co. The probable date for these bottles, therefore, is between 1950 and ca. 1954, although I have never found a date code higher than 52 (EPT 4/5/1953 B13:4; 4/25/1954 E1:2).

Collection(s): Mike Morrison Collection, Las Cruces; Robert Sproull collection; author's collection.

Variations:

1. Eight-ounce size – described above
2. The ten-ounce size measured 24.0 cm. in height and 5.7 cm. in diameter. The front heel was embossed 10 FL. OZ., with L-G 14 2 on the back heel. The base was embossed L-G / 555-1 / 52.

A Yellow and Red Texan

An unrelated bottle was made in yellow and red ACL, although the brand name was Texan (Figure 11a-2). It was a grapefruit drink, with half a grapefruit depicted on the front, along with a cowboy head and a rattlesnake. The back body was labeled Drink (script) TEXAN (stylized T) / "IT'S TRULY A TREAT" / {dot} / THE PERFECT GRAPEFRUIT DRINK / CONTENTS 7 FL. OZ. / BOTTLED UNDER AUTHORITY OF / THE TEXAN CO. / {three small dots} (all in yellow ACL).

I have seen two of these bottles offered on eBay, both made by the Owens-Illinois Glass Co. One showed a photo of the base, embossed G-94 / Duraglas (script) / 3 {Owens-Illinois logo} 48 / 51.; the other was reported as made in 1963. Thus, these bottles appear to have originally been contemporary with the El Paso brand.



Figure 11a-2 –
Texan – yellow &
red ACL

According to Chris Weide (personal communication 12/22/2010), the drink was sold in green containers by the Cassandra Bottling Works, Cassandra, Pennsylvania; bottlers at Chicago, Marshall, and Mount Carmel, Illinois; Anderson, Indiana; Auburn, New York; and three Seven-Up plants at Abilene, Stamford, and Sweetwater – all in Texas. The bottle Chris has was embossed {G-in-a-square} 63 / 11-700 – made by the Glenshaw Glass Co. in 1963. Chris also has documentary evidence that the Cassandra plant offered the brand in 1961, so it was almost certainly sold between 1948 and 1963. Unfortunately, none of the bottles seem to have locations. Chris suggests the Cassandra plant as the originator of the drink.

Dr Pepper – Embossed

The oldest style of debossed (and embossed) bottles of Dr Pepper used in El Paso were sold by Empire Products Corp., and a description of them appears in that section. Although most companies adopted the ACL labeling format for their bottles in the late 1930s, a few firms, most notably, Dr Pepper and Coca-Cola, continued to use the embossed (in the case of Dr Pepper, debossed) forms.

By the time Trone opened Dr Pepper in 1952, the new slanted block lettering was in use on aqua bottles. The new lettering, adopted in 1950, used a slanted line and a dot for the letter “r.” The use of a period made the “Dr.” look like a “D” followed by a slash and a colon (*D/:*), so the period was dropped from both the logo and the company name (Ellis 1979:193, 259). The debossed bottles appear to have been the last style used by Dr Pepper that included the name of the city and state (Figure 11a-3). See Table 11a-1 for a chronology of Dr Pepper bottles used in El Paso.

Because Dr Pepper bottles are scattered among various bottlers through El Paso history, it is helpful to organize them in a single table by bottle style, dates of use, and local franchiser.



Figure 11a-3 – Debossed Dr Pepper slant block letters

Method of Manufacture: Machine

Color: Aqua

Size (in cm.): 20.5 (h); 5.6 (d)

Primary Labeling Style: Debossed

Finish: Crown

Capacity: 6 oz.

Overall Bottle Design: Cylindrical

Front Description

Body: Debossed - upwardly-slanted Dr Pepper in slant block letters

Heel: Debossed - MIN. CONT. 6 FL. OZS.

Back description

Body: Debossed - stippled clock face with 10, 2, 4 (4 is centered at bottom of clock); Dr Pepper in slant block letters horizontally across center of clock face

Heel: Bare

Base: Embossed - EL PASO (downward arch) / 7 / 15 I-in-an-oval-superimposed-on-a-diamond 52 (all horizontal) / TEXAS (upward arch) (Figure 11a-4)

Manufacturer: Owens Illinois Glass Co. (1929-1954)

Dating: [1950-1957] This style bottle was in general use between 1950 and 1955 (Mildred G. Walker, personal communication).

Bottles with the slanted block logo were also produced in twelve-ounce configurations, although I have found none of these in El Paso contexts. An unusual variation has a clock face embossed on the neck (Bates et al 1996a:D22-24).

The baseplate on the mold that made this bottle was obviously altered. The “5” in “15” was stamped over some other number, and the “52” was also an overstamp. I cannot tell what the original numbers were.

Collection(s): Willie F. Terrazas collection; author’s collection.



Figure 11a-4 – Base of the 1952 bottle

Variations

1. See description above.
2. This bottle was embossed L-G 7-3 on the heel and EL PASO (arch) / 53 (horizontal) / TEX.

(inverted arch) on the base. The “53” was very faint but showed up in the photo. The font on the basemark is unusual.

3. EL PASO (arch) / 7 / 19 I-in-an-oval-superimposed-on-a-diamond 57 / TEXAS (inverted arch)
 Another bottle was identical except for the plant and date code. Plant No. 15 was opened in 1944 at Waco, Texas, and is still operating in 2010. The date code indicates that the bottle was made in 1957, probably one of the last of this style.

This date code poses an interesting complication. According to the evidence, Dr Pepper had faded from the market prior to the purchase of the franchise by Yowell in 1957. Thus, a 1957 date code either suggests that Yowell used the debossed, Georgia Green bottle, although he probably only ordered the style once or that Diebels’s business continued into that year and then deteriorated. The ACL Dr Pepper bottles will be discussed in Chapter 11c, the Barq’s Dr Pepper Bottling Co.

Table 11a-1 - Dating El Paso Dr Pepper Bottles

Bottle Style	Dates in Use	Bottling Co.
Colorless, <u>embossed</u> , “Good for Life,” 3-handed clock	1928-ca. 1930	Empire Products Corp.
Colorless, <u>debossed</u> , “Good for Life,” 3-handed clock	ca. 1930-ca. 1949	Empire Products Corp.
Aqua, debossed, slant block lettering, no period after Dr, no hands on clock	1952-ca. 1957	Dr Pepper Bottling Co.
ACL, clock design, no bottle cap, slant block lettering	ca. 1957-1960	Barq’s Dr. Pepper Bottling Co.
ACL, bounce lettering (3rd “p” “bounced” up)	1960-1971	Barq’s Dr. Pepper Bottling Co.
ACL, broad block lettering in oval, no clock	1971-1976	Barq’s Dr. Pepper Bottling Co.

