

The Remarkable T.L. Reber
Soda Bottles and Bottling in the Black Range
and Silver City, New Mexico



Edited by Bill Lockhart and Zang Wood

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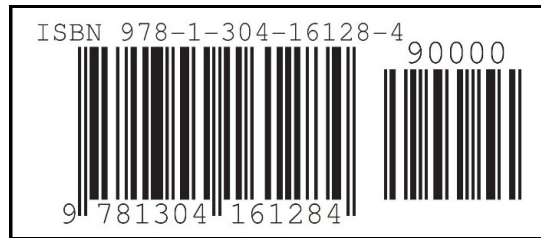


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Preface

My students often ask me how researchers select their subjects. In my case, they seem to choose me – although I *am* a willing participant in the process. Only rarely do we hear the stories about *why* certain subjects for articles or books were chosen. The topics just seem to have fallen into place. Most, however, *have* a story – as does this one.

Part 1

This book is composed of three sections, and every one became part of this study in a different way. Part 1 discusses the life and the bottling works begun by Theodore L. Reber and his wife, Rebecca. Virginia Bergey, a distant relative of Reber, visited New Mexico in 2010 in search of information about him. Bergey knew that Reber had been a soda bottler during the late 19th century, with plants at several locations in New Mexico Territory. Her search brought her to Pat Brown's Trading Post & Mining Museum in Cerrillos.

Brown was intrigued. She sent e-mail messages to collectors and others whom she thought might be interested, including Bill Lockhart, a professor at the Alamogordo campus of New Mexico State University. Lockhart, a sociologist and historical archaeologist, was just as captivated as Brown. As part of Lockhart's ongoing investigation into the bottle-related industries of Southern New Mexico, El Paso, Texas, and Juárez, Mexico, Reber's experience in the Black Hills fit perfectly. Several others also expressed interest, including Zang Wood, author and collector of Hutchinson soda bottles. The group began sharing information.

Soon, the Reber file grew to be too large for an article yet too small for a book all its own. Reber's scope was too broad for most venues. Lockhart published part of the story in his books on the soda bottling industries of El Paso, Texas, and of Alamogordo, New Mexico, and presented a paper on Reber at the 2011 Jornada Mogollon archaeology conference at El Paso. Lockhart and Wood discussed the issue, and the idea of a three-part book arose.

Of special note, we have repeated small sections of Part 1 – virtually verbatim – in Parts 2 and 3. In both cases, segments about Reber are essential to the flow of the story line, and short paraphrases simply would not provide justice to Reber – or to the histories of the bottling

industries in the Black Range and Silver City. Each of these three parts needed to be whole and complete.

Part 2

Part 2 is almost entirely the fault of my co-author, Zang Wood. Zang wrote a book about New Mexico Hutchinson soda bottles and included an ad for a totally unknown bottler named T.L. Reber. The ad came from the town of Robinson, New Mexico – in the middle of the Black Range. Zang became obsessed with the Black Range and the possibility of other soda bottlers in the area during the late 19th century. The next step occurred when *New Mexico Magazine* published an article about Kingston in the Black Range. The article included a photograph of a mysterious soda bottle embossed with the name of the Black Range Soda Works. Wood discovered references to bottlers in old issues of the New Mexico Business Directory and Gazetteer, a few ads in the Black Range newspapers, and an intriguing set of promissory notes and mortgage records.

Zang and I have been friends for quite some time, and we have fed each other a great deal of information over the years. I guess it was only natural that Zang kept slipping me little tidbits about the Black Range and asking my opinion. I managed to stay pretty peripheral – until he sent me the summary of several deeds and loans that Ron Fowler had compiled from records that Zang had sent him. The summary was most interesting and really piqued my curiosity.

Since my background is in historical archaeology, I wanted to see the originals. So Zang sent me a packet of the documents, and I began to unravel what was certainly a delicious mystery. We speculated, dug around in New Mexico newspapers and every document we could find – including Sanborn maps of the area. By this time, I was hooked.

About the time I became committed to Black Range research, Ginny Bergey arrived on the scene as described in the tale about Part 1. Things meshed. The story of Reber melded into the history of the Black Range, just like it did with the soda bottling histories of Socorro, Alamogordo, Roswell, and other New Mexico towns, as well as El Paso, Texas, and several locations in Arizona. The two histories – Reber and the Black Range blended far too well to be ignored, so they became bonded in this study.

Part 3

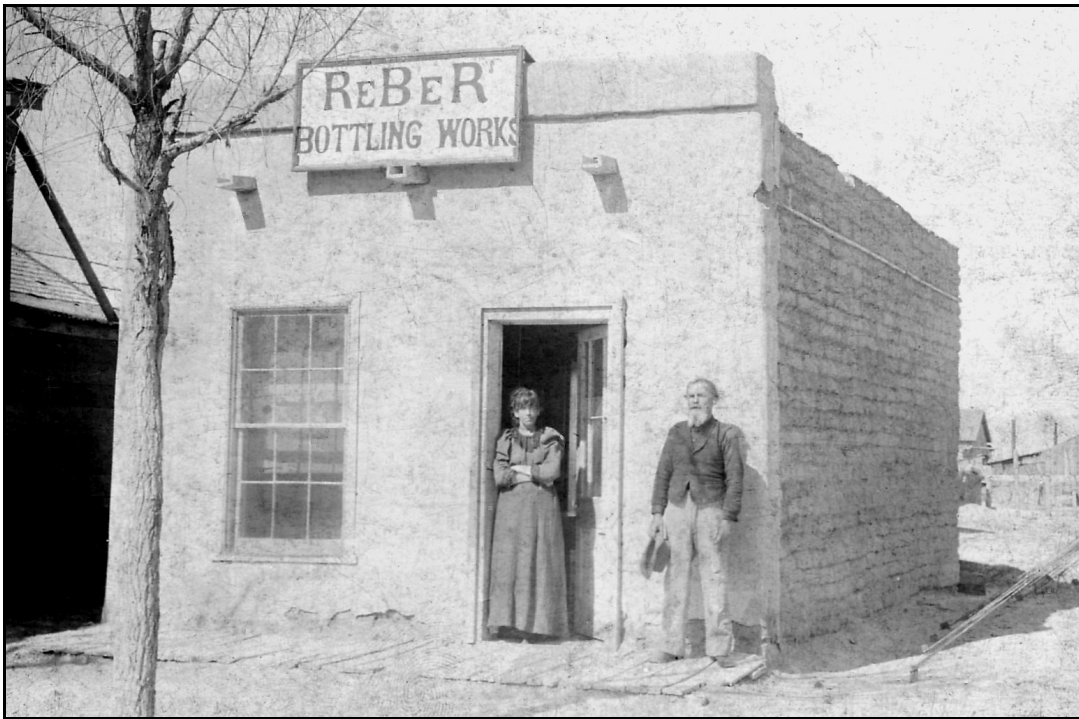
The story of Part 3 is much simpler. I had already picked up some material about Silver City, New Mexico, because of two books I had written – the story of the Southwestern Coca-Cola Bottling Co. (with Mike Miller) and the story of the Deming, New Mexico, soda bottling industry. Zang kept pestering me about that issue, too, so Silver City became Part 3.

We have attempted to separate evidence from our speculation and to let you know when we do the latter. A good history always includes speculation. As my history seminar professor, Dr. Cheryl Martin of the University of Texas at El Paso used to say, “History is like putting together a jigsaw puzzle with most of the pieces missing.” Even though we do our best to find the pieces, there are always gaps. Sometimes, the only way to fill the gaps is with speculation.

We hope you enjoy both the evidence and the speculation. The process has continued for a few years at this point, but we have thoroughly enjoyed the process. Our journey begins with Theodore L. Reber . . .

Bill Lockhart
May 15, 2013

Theodore L. Reber
the Johnny Appleseed of Soda Bottlers



Bill Lockhart, Virginia Bergey, and Zang Wood

