

The Bottles, Marks, and History
of the
Southwestern Coca-Cola Bottling Co.,
New Mexico and Arizona, 1917-1947



by

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with Contributions by

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Foreword

One of the things that makes this book both useful and interesting is that it is a collaboration between an archaeologist and a bottle collector (with contributions from others in both groups). Although not germane to this publication, there has been a long-standing quarrel escalating to actual enmity between archaeologists and collectors, each of which often sees the other as impinging upon its requisites. Mike and I (and the bottle research group) are evidence that cooperation between members of the two groups is not only possible but can be distinctly beneficial.

Mike and I discovered our common interest at the annual Albuquerque bottle show about September 2000. Since then, we have both been collecting information, passing it to each other and discussing the results. Mike is one of the many collector/researchers who is devoted to examining local bottles (in his case, Arizona) to increase our knowledge of dating, identification, and general information about each individual container.

About five years ago, Bill Lindsey and I found each other via the internet and began corresponding by e-mail. Bill was just beginning work on his magnificent bottle identification site for the Bureau of Land Management (now available through the Society for Historical Archaeology website). Carol Serr, an archaeologist working for Jones & Stokes in San Diego, joined us several months later, and was followed by David Whitten, a long-time bottle collector in Illinois. Although David has since left the group to pursue other interests, he contributed significantly to Part III of the book and is included as an author. We remain in close touch. The final member of the group is Pete Schulz, archaeologist for the California Department of Parks & Recreation. Although the group is interested in virtually all aspects of bottle history, technology, and identification, we have mostly settled into a study of manufacturer's marks that will culminate in a major work that will update *Bottle Makers and Their Marks* by Julian Harrison Toulouse, considered by many to be the "bible" of such studies.

And process it is! For example, Mike first drew all the bottle variations that we originally knew about and assigned dates based on what appeared to be date codes, similarities in style to other bottles with known dates, apparently-obvious evolution of specific styles, and, occasionally, just intuition. Then I would come up with a new bottle from El Paso that had, for example, the OS 1218 mark, which we originally thought included a date code for 1918. The El Paso bottle, however, could not have been

made later than about 1915 – ergo, the numbers were not a date code.

Other times, just as we thought we had a sequence pegged, Mike would find a previously unknown variation (or two or more) that forced us to reshuffle the order again. Sometimes, one of us would just look through the drawings and realize that something looked wrong. So we would pass that back and forth for a while. Then the research group unlocked what OS and OP actually meant, and that opened up some new ideas. And so it went.

Mike and I have started to look for a publisher about five times in five years, but each time, Mike found a new bottle variation, or I found a new source, or the group re-evaluated the dating of a manufacturer's mark. We have rearranged the chronology of Southwestern's bottles so many times that I have lost count. Most people only see the end result of chronological or historical studies and never have a glimpse of the process.

We finally settled on an online vanity press (Lulu.com) because it gave us more control. It has proved to be a wise decision. I originally loaded the book onto the Lulu webpage in late 2007. I ordered five copies for Mike, the BRG members, and I. We did no advanced advertising. Mike found some flaws, so we decided to add an addendum (easy to do on Lulu).

Then, Bill Porter entered the picture. Bill is one of the foremost Coca-Cola bottle researchers and collectors, and he wanted to pass some new ideas on to the BRG. One of those was his hypothesis that single letters (P-S) on bottle manufactured by the Graham Glass Co. indicated the years 1916 to 1919 (because P is the 16th letter of the alphabet). Mike and I tested the hypothesis with every bottle we could find, and the letters as date codes fit every time.

Every solution creates new problems, and this one was no exception. While Bill's date code idea solved most of the remaining mysteries connected with Southwestern, it required some extensive rewriting. That threw all the formatting of the book off. Essentially, I had to begin again in formatting. The advantage, of course, is a better book with the latest, most up-to-date information. The disadvantages are a great deal more work and more delay. Since Lulu.com publishes "on demand," we can actually incorporate these changes with only the first five books published incorrectly.

Currently, we have taken the research as far as we can. Most of the chronology is pretty solidly based now and is unlikely to change. A very few bottles cannot be precisely ordered with current techniques, but they are so few that they fit almost perfectly into the remaining time gaps. Of course, all bottle research only reflects the latest knowledge we have about a given container, company, mark, technique, or glass type. This fascinating field is always dynamic, never static – and never boring. We hope you enjoy the story of the Southwestern Coca-Cola Bottling Co. and its bottles.

Nothing on Earth occurs in a vacuum, and this work is no exception. Mike and I have talked with dozens of collectors (Mike much more so than I) to gather data on Southwestern Coca-Cola Co. bottles. In addition, I have photographed numerous marks from private collections, archaeological collections, and from eBay auctions. We owe a great deal of gratitude to all these people, although we would never be able to list all the names. Thanks also to Wanda Wakkinen and Karen Miller, our ever-helpful wives. A final debt of gratitude goes to my fellow members of the Bottle Research Group. It has been an exciting adventure.

Bill Lockhart

Preface

We have tried to set this book up in such a way that it will be useful to both archaeologists and collectors. Archaeologists need as much detail as possible, especially about bottle bases. Often, only fragments are found in excavations, and details help identify fragments. However, details also help the discerning collector. While some collectors only look for outstanding differences in bottles, others seek more minute variations. Mike Miller's drawings and the various photographs are intended to help both groups by showing as much detail as possible.

Although collectors are concerned about prices of bottles, price guides are basically useless. Prices fluctuate due to the typical market forces of supply and demand. Generally, the more common bottles demand a lower price. However, scarce or even rare bottles may still be low priced – if there is no demand. Until recently, for example, virtually no one collected milk bottles from El Paso, Texas. Totally unique bottles sold on eBay for \$4.95 each because there was almost no demand. Prices are set according to what the highest bidder is willing to pay. Thus, the market changes with the addition of each new collector. Those same milk bottles a year later are selling for over \$200! The difference is the addition of two collectors, both with “deep pockets.” A final consideration is supply. If someone discovers a new source, and previously scarce bottles suddenly become common, the price drops dramatically. In other words, if we were to set prices, they would be obsolete as soon as the book was published.

Although archaeologists tend to dismiss the scarcity category often included in collectors' literature, it can be useful to both groups. Obviously, knowing if a bottle is common or very hard to find is useful to a collector, but that knowledge also can help in archaeological interpretation. In the case of Southwestern Coca-Cola bottles, we find that all but one bottle type used prior to the collapse of the New Mexico plants are rated by Mike Miller somewhere between very rare and scarce. This scarcity indicates that either Southwestern did not order many bottles (*very unlikely*) or that the company used the bottles until they completely wore out. More affluent companies discard bottles *before* they become unsightly. Southwestern apparently operated on a tight profit margin (as did its predecessor, the Empire Bottling Works – based on similar evidence of scarcity). The last bottle type used before the New Mexico collapse, however, broke the pattern. This probably indicates a termination of the house-brand flavors. With that discontinuation, many bottles would have been dumped rather than refilled until the bottle was broken or otherwise unuseable. Thus, we have included scarcity information

in the text.