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OLD BERRIEN

Newsletter of the
Berrien Historical
Foundation

Volume 5 Number 2

Summer Quarter 2023

THE NASHVILLE BOTTLING WORKS



One of the simple pleasures enjoyed by those living in the early 1900s was to sit down at the soda fountain in the local drug store and have the “jerk” behind the counter mix up a concoction of various medicinal and flavorful ingredients, topped off by adding liquid carbonic soda. The “soft drink” was a refreshing and uplifting delight.

It was not long before customers wanted their thirst quenched while at work or play, and not be limited to sitting at the counter of the drug store. Bottling plants were springing up all around the south, offering various flavors of mixers—the most common being the lime cola. When the bottled drink was opened, the sudden escape of pressurized gas caused a popping sound, thus the term “soda pop”.

The Coca Cola Bottling Plant on Jefferson Street, next to Ronald Griner’s barbershop in Nashville, Ga. J.R. “Dick” Bennett, who started his career at the Coca Cola Bottling Plant in Valdosta, moved to Nashville and established this bottling plant for Coca Cola in 1923. Viewing west out onto Jefferson Street.



The first bottling works in Berrien County actually got its start in February, 1905 by two Sparks gentlemen, Homer J. Hall and Jackson Whitehurst.

Though they started their business in Sparks, they found a thirsty customer base in Nashville.

In the April 7, 1905 issue of the *Nashville Herald* it reports, "Homer Hall, the gentlemanly little soda pop man of Sparks, was circulating among his Nashville customers Tuesday."

Not only were the proprietors of the bottleworks good salesmen, but were innovative in marketing different flavors of their drink as well. The November 17, 1905 *Nashville Herald* reported,

"Homer J. Hall, the soda pop man of Sparks, was in town Thursday looking after his soda trade. He says he will have a new drink ready in a few days for the people.

Over the next six months of 1906, the Nashville folks could not get their thirst quenched. Then on August 3, 1906, the *Nashville Herald* announced, "Bottling Works Comes at Last—Joel I. Norwood went over to Sparks Tuesday morning and closed a trade for a half interest in the Sparks Bottling Works. The plant will be moved to Nashville.



Mr. Norwood states that the plant will be boxed up and shipped next Monday. The fourth store room of the Carter-Taylor block has been leased and will be used for the works. The *Herald* has been trying to work up a trade for several to get the enterprise to Nashville. Just such manufacturing enterprises as this is what makes towns."

The most popular drink produced by the Nashville Works was "High Life"

Pictured left is Joel I. Norwood, early owner of the Nashville Bottling Works. Pictured above is the Nashville Bottling Works most likely taken about 1917 when the enterprise was called the Lime Cola Bottling Company.

Ginger Ale. In a 1907 newspaper ad it states, "Our 'High Life Ginger Ale' is taking the lead over all other ales in this territory. It is good and wholesome. When you have that dry feeling there is nothing that will refresh you like a nickle bottle of this ale."

Norwood's half-interest in the bottle works, increased to full ownership in the plant in December, 1908. But this turn over of ownership became a revolving door when Norwood sold his full ownership to R.L. Ferguson in April, 1910. Then Ferguson sold it to Benjamin A. Deal, Jr. in August, 1912.

The purchase of the Nashville Bottling Works by Deal, began a decade long ownership by the civic minded gentleman. He immediately constructed a new building near his ice plant on the east side of the Georgia Florida Railway tracks north of McPherson Avenue.



This Lime Cola bottle with the Nashville, Georgia embossed on the bottom rim, is most likely dated to the early 1920s. Though rare due to the name, numerous communities around Georgia and Florida had Lime Cola bottling works. Bottle from the collection of Brad McCall.

Deal was an aggressive marketer, and expanded his customers from Nashville to Valdosta. The August, 1913 *Nashville Herald* proclaimed, "The Nashville Ice & Manufacturing Company is one of the hustlingest manufacturing enterprises in our town. This concern broke the record last week by shipping a solid car load of

soda water to points between Nashville and Valdosta. Large shipments are being made all the time, but this is the first solid car load of goods ever shipped out of Nashville. Mr. Deal and his manager, Mr. Humphries are giving their personal attention to the manufacture of their bottled goods.

The flavored drink of Lime Cola was fast becoming one of the most popular sodas in the south. In 1915, the Lime Cola Company was incorporated in Montgomery, Alabama, and soon began offering franchises.

The company started franchising the brand in January of 1916, and in one year boasted having fifty seven franchises located in Alabama, Georgia, and Florida. As of January, 1917 there were twelve new franchises under construction, including the Nashville Bottle Works. That year, the operation became known as the Lime Cola Bottling Company of Nashville. A newspaper ad in the *Nashville Herald* boasted "Manufacturers of Dope, Upper-Ten Ginger Ale, Ideal Ginger Ale, and all kinds of Soda Water."

The franchise seemed to be doing well, however on the night of July 17, 1920, a fire broke out at the Nashville Ice and Manufacturing plant. Both the ice plant and the bottling works were destroyed by the fire of unknown origin, entailing a loss of \$25,000 of which only \$17,000 was covered by insurance.

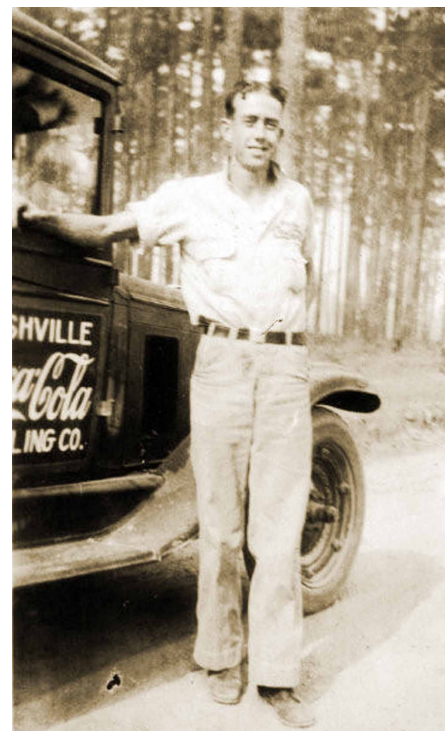
Although the intention of Mr. Deal was to rebuild the plant, young upstart J.R. "Dick" Bennett took over the franchise and set up shop on South Jefferson Street adjacent to Ronald Griner's barbershop. He continued to bottle the Lime Cola drinks until 1922 when he sold the franchise and equipment back to an Adel firm who went out of business shortly thereafter.

"Dick" Bennett then installed new equipment and bottles, becoming a bottler for the Coca Cola Company.

Joel I Norwood had bottled Coca Cola just before he sold his interest in the Nashville Bottling Works, but he could sell more strawberry soda than



J.R. "Dick" Bennett, Manager of the Nashville Coca Cola Bottling Co.



Longtime driver and employee of the Nashville Coca Cola Company, Fred Taylor, standing beside an early 1930s delivery truck.

Coca Cola, and he dropped the product from his offering.

But by 1923 Coca Cola was becoming a "must have" thirst quencher, and with his license with the Valdosta Coca Cola Company, he received a new 1923 model "T" Ford delivery truck. Bennett



In 1949 Valdosta Bottling Company delivery driver, Lacy Polk and his son Bobby could still take time for a snap shot on one of his deliveries through Nashville.

went about filling orders from old customers and adding new ones. His route took him from Lakeland to Cottle, and Masee to Mud Creek.

In 1932, new store fronts were added to the two buildings on South Jefferson that had been used to bottle and ship the Coca Cola products.

But in 1933, when the aftermath of the depression caused a tightening of operations across the country, Valdosta Coca Cola Bottling Company ceased the bottling operations in Nashville, and the Nashville Bottling Works became just a distribution facility.

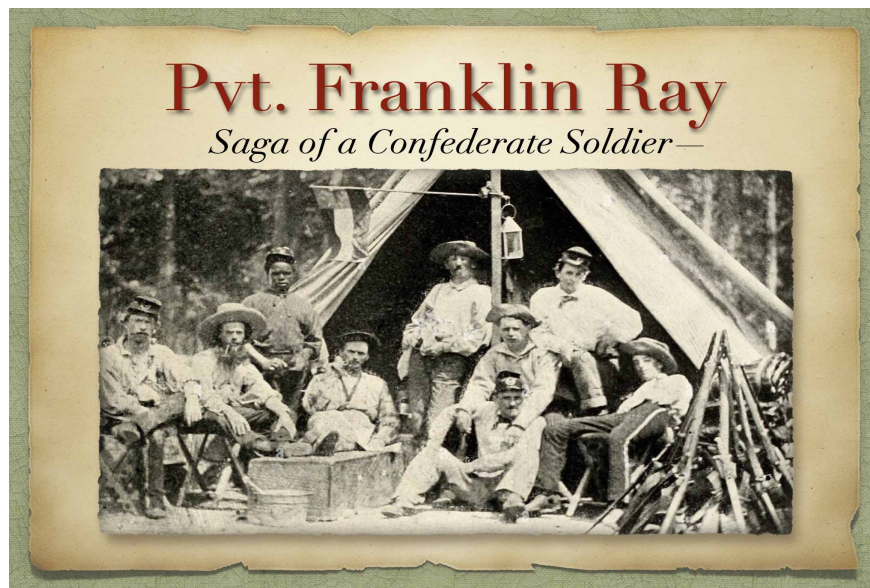
Advertisements in the *Nashville Herald* still promoted Coca Cola products supplied by the Nashville Coca Cola Bottling Company, with J.R. Bennett, Manager as late as April 1940. By 1941 he became the sales manager of the Valdosta Coca Cola Bottling Co.

In November, 1941, the former location of the Nashville Coca Cola Bottling Company became the Modern Market and Nashville Sea Food Market.

That next month WWII broke out, and the sodas that once quenched the thirst of thousands of Berrienites for almost two decades, were consumed five billion times by soldiers during the war.

But if you wanted to take a seat at the soda fountain at the Berrien Drug Store or the Union Pharmacy, they could whip up a concoction that would still satisfy your tastebuds.

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