

CHARLES E. HIRES COMPANY 1870 - PRESENT PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

by Don Yates



Charles E. Hires was born in Elsinboro, Pennsylvania on August 19, 1851. Charles grew up on his father's farm in Roadstown, Pa., but was an adventurer and did not want to become a farmer like his father.

Charles E. Hires originally developed his root beer as a medicinal syrup or tonic, while still living on his father's farm in Stow Creek Township. In 1867, Charles was hired as an apprentice to a Roadstown pharmacist, in his home town. He was paid \$12 per week.

In 1870, Charles worked as a Pharmacist's Apprentice in Philadelphia, and experimented in mixing many natural ingredients to achieve a pleasing syrup or extract. Charles took night classes at the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and Science. At that time, shortly after the Civil War, there was a tremendous demand for any product with medicinal virtues. Some of the medicinal cure claims include tuberculosis, bronchitis, asthma, catarrh, pleurisy, Quincy, whopping cough, and diphtheria.

Charles saved \$400 and invested in a drugstore at Sixth Street and Spruce Street in Philadelphia. Charles was a natural born pharmacist and thoroughly enjoyed all aspects of the business.

Charles developed a side-line potters' clay business making Fuller's Earth and his bank account quickly reached \$5000. This gave

him the capital to develop his new beverage, root beer.

In 1875, Charles Hires was married in Roadstown, and spent his honeymoon on a New Jersey farm. It was there where he was served root tea made up of sixteen wild roots and berries, including, pipsissewa, spikenard, juniper wintergreen, sarsaparilla, and hops. Charles persuaded his hostess to part with her recipe for root tea. A similar beverage had been made by Native Americans for many years.

Charles again mixed the ingredients and blended his own formulation, trying to get a perfect blend. Hires Root Beer Extract was then bottled in quantities for the first time, and sold in his Philadelphia pharmacy. The extract would be mixed by the buyer with water, sugar, and yeast on his premises. In a few months time, other soda fountains were purchasing Mr. Hires syrup and extract.

Charles E. Hires' obituary, which ran in the *Brigeton Evening News* on August 2, 1937, stated that the Rev. Dr. Russell Conwell, the founder of the Temple University, asked Charles Hires to help him develop a beverage that might be sold among hard drinking Pennsylvania miners, in the interest of the Temperance Movement.

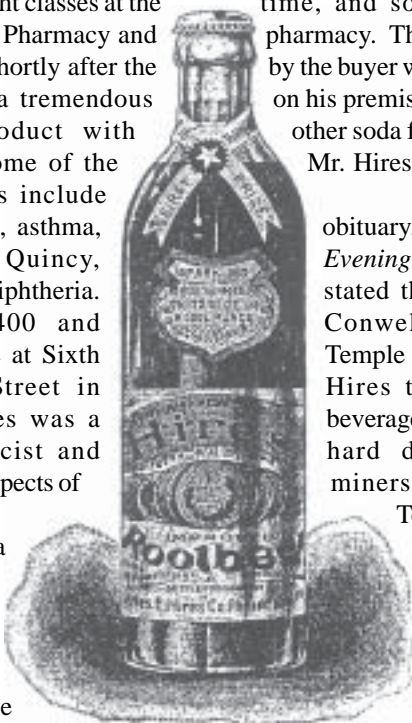
Charles, studying medicine at Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia at the time, was happy to comply and was assisted by two

medical professors. Russell Conwell was given a sample of Mr. Hires beverage, and was highly enthusiastic. He convinced Charles to call it "Root Beer" instead of a "Tea," thinking it would be more readily acceptable to the workers.

Hires eventually became the world's largest manufacturer of root beer. There were some slow periods in the beginning - like growing pains. Charles sold his drug business and became a wholesale dealer in vanilla beans. He traveled to Mexico to study the native vanilla plant and wrote a book on vanilla. Do you think that vanilla was one of his secret ingredients?

Dr. Russell Conwell convinced Charles to present his root beer at the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition. Hires root beer was served at their soda fountains and was a huge success. Hires also sold their root beer extract and their cough syrup. In 1893, Hires offered bottled root beer for the first time. Once the public tasted Hires root beer, the demand exploded.

Charles Hires sold 115,000 glasses of root beer during their first year. That







quickly expanded to 700 million glasses. The Hires Root Beer Company lost the patent for the name "Root Beer" in 1879. Charles remained in charge of his company until 1925, when his two sons took over.

Charles died at the age of 85, in Haverford, Pa., on August 1, 1937. Charles was active in the Temperance and Quaker Movements throughout his life.

Although Charles Hires claimed to be the inventor of root beer, and applied for a patent, there were many earlier brewers of such a beverage. Root beer was being made even before Charles was born. Charles originally wanted to use the term "Root Tea" but changed it to "Root Beer." It is highly unlikely that he did not hear about root beer being available in many regions. His medicinal claims were also stretched a bit. Root beer could "cure" cancer over a hundred years ago, as well as tuberculosis and twenty other serious diseases. This was typical of medical advertising at that time, prior to the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906.

Hires Root Beer Extract, after several years of development, got its major introduction at the Philadelphia Exposition in 1876. It received wide acceptance by



HOME GUARD.
Though you laugh at and deride me,
All your pomp and sneers can't hide me
From the families who must have me,
And must have me every day.
I'm the Home Guard they appeal to;
And their woes I quickly heal, too;
For I kill the Coughs that rock them,
Or I drive them far away.

HIRES' COUGH CURE

Will be found to be the best, surest and safest remedy for Coughs, Colds, Croup and Whooping Cough ever discovered. Don't fail to try it when you have taken Cold.

the general public. In 1878, his first year, Charles sold 864 bottles of extract; and almost two million by 1891. The Charles E. Hires Company was located at 117 to 119 Arch Street in Philadelphia; a modest but ornate facility.

Much of Hires early advertising was done with Victorian Trade Cards. These were artistic masterpieces, created by some of the most talented lithographers and artists of the time. The main period for Hires trade cards was from 1883 to 1910. After that period, they used magazine ads. Much of Hires early history was depicted on the back of their trade cards.

If you look at the Hires trade cards, you will notice that the majority of them show young and healthy children. This was explained on the back of the trade cards; all of the healthful benefits including strength, rosy complexions and beauty; "It supplies nerves and the brain, as well as blood food. It vitalizes the energies, increased the mental as well as the physical strength."

A package of Hires extract sold for 25 cents, and it made five gallons of root beer, a delicious, sparkling, and wholesome temperance drink. From an 1896 trade card: "It cleanses the blood from impurities, gives vitality and energy, strengthens and invigorates the whole nervous & physical system. Sarsaparilla root, herbs & phosphates that go to make-up this pleasant & delicious drink, furnish muscle & increase the vigor of the brain & nerve forces."

Hires second major product of the 1800s was "HIRES COUGH CURE." This product was also advertised on Hires trade cards. It contained white pine balsam, gum Arabic, roots, barks, and herbs; including sarsaparilla root, birch bark, and wintergreen. "It was the cheapest and the best."

Stoneware Mugs - Many of the early Hires mugs were made by the premier potteries of England and Germany. Again these mugs depicted exquisite pictures of a very young boy, to promote root beer for children. The utilitarian Hires stoneware mugs were made by the Sherwood Pottery of New Brighton, Pennsylvania. (Sherwood Pottery historical information from Jeff and Sandy Heasley of Beaver, Pa.). These mugs were mass produced for use at soda fountains all over the country. These large mugs were 7 inches tall and held 20 ounces of root beer, quite a large drink for the early



1900s.

Some American stoneware Hires Root Beer Mugs were made by Whites Utica Pottery in Utica, New York. These were made around the turn of the century and were an ornate cobalt blue and white Bristol glaze design.

Stoneware Bottles - Around 1914, Hires again commissioned the Sherwood Pottery to make stoneware root beer bottles. These bottles were to be used for making home-made root beer by the general public. (Jeff and Sandy Heasley own the original transfer stamp used by the Sherwood Pottery on this enigmatic bottle).

The Hires stoneware bottles were made by pressing each half into a mold, forming mating halves of a rabbit joint; the two halves were joined together after curing, by using slip clay, and a fixture for holding both halves together. A similar procedure to that used for making stoneware ginger beer bottles. After stamping the greenware bottle with the transfer, the lower half of the bottle was dipped in Bristol Glaze, which allowed the transfer to be seen. The top half of the bottle was carefully dipped in Albany Slip clay and the interior was thoroughly coated with Albany Slip clay by filling the bottle and dumping out the remainder. Don't forget that the firing time was seven days in the kiln.

The top of the Hires Stoneware Bottles had a dark chocolate Albany Slip coating, and the label transfer read "OLD HOME MADE ROOT BEER - FROM HIRES

EXTRACT.” These bottles had a crown top, designed for a bottle cap, but Hires developed a special closure for the home market. These closures were made of die-cast brass, and consisted of an expanding rubber plug, which fit inside the bottle neck, and a screw and wing-nut, which tightened the closure. These special closures allowed the public to make their own Hires root beer, without purchasing a bottle capper. These stoneware bottles were only used for a short period of time, since glass bottles were being mass-produced by automatic bottle machines.

Hires was the most successful early root beer producer, but they were not the first company to make root beer in the U.S.A. Root beer was first developed in the U.S.A. and was brewed by many prominent soft drink and mineral water bottling plants as early as 1830. Ginger beer was the principal predecessor of root beer, and was made in England a hundred years earlier. There may be 8,000 different English stoneware ginger beer bottles, but no root beer bottles. Ginger beer was their favorite national beverage up until around 1930, when Coca-Cola became available world wide.

According to David Graci's Book: "AMERICAN STONEWARE BOTTLES", there were at least 45 known brewers of root beer prior to 1870. The term root beer may have originated around 1780. Doctor Chase used the term root beer in his 1864 book: "DR. CHASE'S RECEIPT BOOK AND PRACTICAL PHYSICIAN."

The following article was written by Charles E. Hires, telling how he got started.

AMERICAN DRUGGIST AND PHARMACEUTICAL RECORD
OCTOBER, 1913

SEEING OPPORTUNITIES

How Charles E. Hires Laid the Foundation for His Commercial Success - Opportunities Come to All - The Philosophy of a Successful Merchant

HIRES ROOT BEER is known all over the world. It has been the prototype of a whole series of imitations and substitutes, but still retains its precedence. The maker, Charles E. Hires, began life as a drug store boy in a country town at the age of twelve, went to Philadelphia at the age of sixteen, by industry and economy accumulated a capital of \$400, with which he engaged in business on his own account, and now

carries on a business which is the envy and admiration of half the drug world. At the solicitation of the editor of the *AMERICAN DRUGGIST*, Mr. Hires describes below the typical old fashioned Philadelphia drug store, in which he laid the foundation of his fortune and describes his first opportunity and how he took advantage of it. He still believes that business life is full of opportunities for those who are shrewd enough to see them and energetic enough to grasp them. Many thousands of men had passed the workmen excavating the cellar. Thousands of those who passed lingered to watch the busy scene. But only one - Mr. Hires really saw what the thousands looked at. They only saw men carting dirt. He saw the dollars in the dirt.

I was not a registered college of pharmacy student, but after serving my apprenticeship of four years in a country store, from the time I was twelve until I was sixteen, I came to Philadelphia and after obtaining a situation as clerk here, I attended lecture occasionally at the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy in the winters of 1867, 1868 and 1869.

HIRES Rootbeer
Carbonated

Delicious
Sparkling
Appetizing

Is sold everywhere
by the bottle and
case. Served at
hotels, clubs and
restaurants.

With Hires Rootbeer Extract you can
make your own
Rootbeer at home.
One package
makes five
gallons.
We would
like to send
you, free, a
beautiful pic-
ture book and
prize list up-
on receipt of
your name
and address.

The Charles E. Hires Company

Ad from the Ladies Home Journal, July, 1889.

It was at the time customary to extend an invitation to drug clerks, whose preceptors were interested in the College of Pharmacy to attend lectures during their nights off, and this was about the extent of my attending the College of Pharmacy. About the year 1872, a state law was passed that all druggists should undergo an examination and be registered. I took this examination and was given a certificate of efficiency to carry on the drug business.

When embarking in business at Sixth and Spruce, I had less than \$400 and did a great deal of work in assisting the carpenter in fitting the place up, and it was through the good offices of my wholesale drug friends that I got started. Mr. Crenshaw, of Bullock & Crenshaw, Valentine H. Smith, Clayton French and Robert Shoemaker - these good friends gave me that credit I asked, and to them I owe a great deal of my success.

Perhaps an incident of my first conspicuous success would be interesting. This occurred about a year after embarking in business at Sixth and Spruce. It came about in this way:

I had always been active and energetic, and the time spent behind a prescription counter, especially in the dull part of the day, often became irksome and I longed for greater things to do. One day when walking out on Spruce Street, I noticed a cellar being dug and from this excavation I noticed a lead colored clay like substance, which attracted my attention, as it seemed almost of the consistency of putty. I picked up some of it and took it back to the store and after drying it and examining it, I found it was Fullers' Earth or potters' clay. I returned to the place the next day and saw the contractor and asked him if I could have some of this clay. I only wanted the clay from this certain strata. As they had some distance to cart the dirt from this excavation, he very gladly, when he learned where to deliver it, assented to my having all I wanted of it, and was glad to give it to me. I had him bring it to my place, and after boarding up a passage along the side of my cellar, I filled the entire balance of the cellar, up to the ceiling with this clay.

It occurred to me that I might put up potters' clay in convenient sized cakes that would be handy to retail and more

convenient for people to use, as at that time potters' clay was sold in a loose way in broken clumps and powder, which caused a great deal of dirt and dust in handling.

At this time, I was boarding next door, or taking my meals there, as I slept over my store, and I recalled having seen the women folks using an iron ring on which to stand their irons on ironing day. It occurred to me that this would be the proper instrument to cut out or mold these cakes of clay. I borrowed from my landlady a couple of these rings, after being charged very particularly to take care of them and return them in good order.

I then wet the clay, working it into a paste, from which I molded a dozen or two round cakes about one inch thick and about three inches in diameter, and put them on a board out in the yard in the sun to dry. These after a day or two became thoroughly dried, and I found them to be a very fine texture of Fullers' Earth of potters' clay, and was very much elated over my project and the possibility of selling quantities of it.

I then went down on Third Street to a stencil and letter place and bought some lead letters, and after cutting out a round block, I glued these letters on to the block, spelling out the words "Hires Refined Potters' Clay" in a circle. My thought was that these cakes could be sold for five cents.

While the cakes were soft, I pressed these letters ink which made a very distinct impression. After doing a few, however, I found that the moisture soon melted the glue and the letters would fall off. Then I had to have a cast iron one made, with which I could work much more rapidly and which made a very neat impression.

Together with a boy and my assistant in the store at leisure times, we worked up several gross of these cakes. In fact I first made up enough to fill a barrel and I found that a barrel would hold about ten gross. Having everything ready and with two or three nice samples done up in tissue paper, I started out to visit the wholesale drug trade. I remember I called on Mr. Crenshaw first and told him of my project and showed him my sample. He thought it was a most excellent idea and would take because it saved a great deal of weighing out and dirty work that the

old method of dispensing Fullers' Earth necessitated. At that time Fullers' Earth was used quite extensively for taking out grease spots and cleaning woolens and flannels and had quite a large sale. I continued to put the price of \$3.50 a gross on the cakes to the wholesale trade and they could sell them for 35 or 40 cents a dozen. Mr. Crenshaw took hold of it at once and said: "You may send me ten barrels." I then visited Valentine H. Smith, who also took ten barrels. Robert Shoemaker, John C. Hurst & Co., McKeon, Bowen & Ellis, Mahon K. Smith & Co., afterwards Smith, Kline & Company, and I believe every wholesale druggist took three to five barrels. Clayton French took twenty-five barrels.

I sold this mostly with the understanding that the amount was to be taken out in drugs or sundries as I should want. In this way I suppose it was much easier to sell the quantity I did. From these sales I was able to better stock my store, and after selling this supply of clay, I renewed it several times from cellar excavations, because I found that nearly all Philadelphia is under laid with a strata of three to four feet of Potters' Clay.

After supplying Philadelphia, I went to New York and sold quite a lot in exchange for goods. In this way I had quite a revenue from my drug business, having to pay but little out for merchandise. But in the course of a year or two, I soon had competitors; others finding out about it commenced to put it up in a large way and it was very soon at prices that hardly made enough profit for the labor.

I have often thought when I have heard of the difficulties of a young man in getting along, that surely the reason for their not getting along is because of their lack of initiative or the lack of making or seizing opportunities when they come, because I think a business life is continually full of opportunities if one can grasp and utilize them.

Charles E. Hires had three sons who joined him in the extract business. Charles E. Hires was the president. Charles E. Hires Jr., was the vice president from 1900 through 1918. In 1900, William N. Hires was the secretary and lived in Camden, New Jersey. In 1919, J. Edgar Hires was the vice president and Charles E. Hires Jr. was

the secretary.

In 1900, the Charles E. Hires Company was located at 1 Fairmount Avenue in Philadelphia. Charles was the president and lived in Merion, Pa. In 1905, the Charles E. Hires Company was located at 210 North Broad Street. They also added Hires condensed milk to their product line at this time. Charles had a brother George A. Hires, who was also in the extract business during this period.

The following article is from an article in the *Philadelphia Daily News*, February 14th, 1891. This was written by a newspaper columnist, who was given a tour of the Hires Root Beer Depot. It was titled: "AS OTHERS SEE US"

The history of the growth, the method of manufacturer, and the present dimensions of the Hires Root Beer Extract business reads like a brilliant romance, yet the truth is beyond question.

It was during the year 1878 that Charles E. Hires, then in the wholesale drug business, conceived the idea of making and combining roots, barks, and berries with flowers in such a form that from it could be readily produced a home-made root beer, such as our forefathers used in "ye olden time."

The idea was at once put into execution, and after months of labor was rewarded with success beyond the most sanguine anticipation, for, beside making a most delightful drink, there is combined with it elements not only of a great health beverage, but one of the most valuable diuretics and blood purifiers in the world.

MERIT WILL WIN

It is one thing to design and conceive a good article and another to successfully introduce it to humanity. The growth of the Hires business illustrates the saying, "merit will win." In conversation, Mr. Hires always attributes the success primarily to the merit of the article. The extent of the sales of the Extract are best shown by the number of bottles used to contain the Extract. The first year the trial order given to the box maker was for 1000 boxes, and 800 packages were sold, while the cost incurred in advertising and selling exceeded the amount of money received. Mr. Hires was not discouraged. Letters of praise and

commendation of the merits of the new Health Drink were received, and the insurance of greater sales was positive.

The second year brought a sale of three thousand packages, and this proportionate increase in sales, and likewise increase in the cost of selling the Extract, was continued for several years. Persistency in advertising, strict integrity in all business relations, and careful, conservative and truthful statements about the Extract, have established the business on the basis of the confidence of the public, a rock worthy to stand upon.

THE GRAND FULFILLMENT

I have been told by the readers of this paper the beginning of this wonderful business, and now for the fulfillment. The supply is hardly to be kept equal to the demand for the Extract at present. The past year it reached a consumption of over a million and a quarter of bottles, and the demand is rapidly and constantly increasing.

The million two hundred and ninety-six packages used this last year represent 6,480,000 gallons when made up into root beer. This, if bottled in quart champagne bottles, would represent 32,400,000 bottles, sufficient to quench the thirst of every man, woman and child in America and Great Britain. This vast amount gives effective proof of the high appreciation and favor in which it is held, and fully demonstrates that the demand has been created by its superior excellence.

AT COMPANY HEADQUARTERS

Our readers will be interested in a perusal of a description of the house of the Company that has accomplished so astonishing results in the sale of such a boon to humanity. We present several views of the establishment. The new building is four stories high, the front of pressed brick with brown stone trimming, and has a frontage on Arch Street of 28 feet, running back 115 feet. In addition to the four floors, there is a light and airy basement under the entire building and extending 15 feet under the pavement. It will readily be seen that the area of floor space occupied is very extensive. The arrangement of the interior is especially made with a view to perfect facilities to the business.

In the view first presented the interior



Mr. Hires' Private Office.

of Mr. Hires' private office is shown. This office is handsomely furnished, but not excessively so. The second view is a pictorial simile of the main office, with the corps of clerks at work attending to the large mail business. These offices and the shipping rooms are located on the first floor. The basement serves admirably as a packing and storage room.

Passing to the second floor the well stocked printing office of the Company occupies a lion's share of the floor space, and is a marvel of completeness. Steam power turns job presses whereon thousands of trade cards and circulars are printed.

WHERE IT IS MADE

The entire third floor is given up to

the bottling and packing of the Extract. Scores of comely maidens, neat as the typical pin, bright, and perhaps, chattering as girls will do when two or more are gathered together - are occupied bottling, corking, and packing in cartons or boxes the root beer Extract, the daily capacity being from 125 to 150 gross each working day.

The fourth floor is fitted up for and devoted to the purpose of a laboratory, where Hires Root Beer and Cough Cure are compounded and stored in reservoirs, from which the liquid is conveyed through pipes to the floor below for bottling. First the roots, barks, herbs and berries are carefully selected and ground, then placed in an immense caldron of one hundred gallons capacity, where they are steeped



Second Floor - Printing Office.

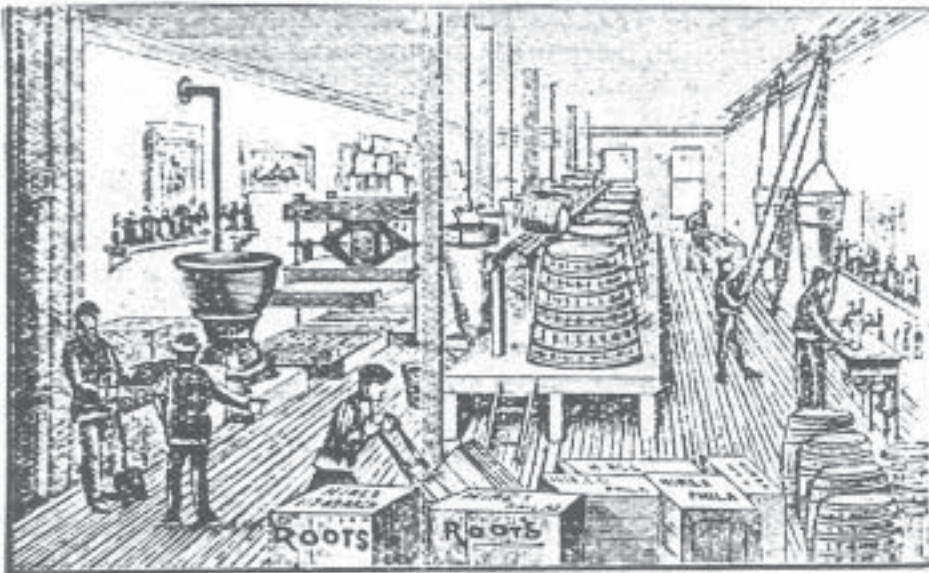
several hours in water, then transferred to a large press of eighty tons pressure and pressed.

From our Book *Ginger Beer & Root Beer Heritage*

DONALD YATES



Third Floor - Bottling and Packing Room.



Fourth Floor - Laboratory.

