# Dating and Identifying Early Coca-Cola Bottles: Focusing (Mainly) on Georgia and Florida Bottles

By Bill Porter with contributions from Bill Lockhart

In attempting to identify the makers and dates of manufacture of early "straight-side" Coke bottles, every possible variable must be considered. The most obvious and important variable is the location of the script ("cursive") Coca-Cola trademark (or "logo") on the bottle. Coke bottle collectors divide straight-sided Coca-Cola bottles into categories according to the location of the Coca-Cola logo. Thus, a "shoulder-script" bottle has the logo embossed at the shoulder; "middle-script" bottles have the logo in the center area of the bottle, and "heel-script" bottles have the mark at the heel (sometimes confusingly called the "base").

Some later bottles have an additional trademark on the base (sometimes called the "bottom"). The logo also appears on paper labels and on caps, but few of these have survived. Many earlier

bottles apparently were designed for use without paper labels, although of course it is possible that they had them. Finally, collectors use a shortcut to describe multiple locations. For example, a shoulder / shoulder / shoulder / base (or "S//S//B") bottle has the logo (Coca-Cola trademark) on front and back shoulders as well as the base of the bottle.

Many Coke bottles have no manufacturer's mark. In those cases, one must carefully observe such details as the style of the Coca-Cola trademark, other inscriptions that may appear, such as "warnings" (e.g., "THIS BOTTLE LOANED, SOLD") NOT and "contents" which

may appear in several versions and abbreviation styles, including the amounts in ounces. Other details such as the style of the letters, the shape and color of the bottle, and the type of mold used to manufacture the bottle all need to be considered. Many bottles have a manufacturer's mark on the base or on the heel – but rarely both. But even if the bottle has such a mark, it may be difficult see or to attribute. Bottles may have numbers which also must be interpreted. Many later bottles are dated, and this is especially true of bottles manufactured by the Root Glass



Figure 1 – 3-digit heelcode (315) used by Root Glass Co.

Company of Terre Haute, Ind.

Coke bottles can be very confusing, but some are easier than others to identify. I prefer to begin with the "easiest" and try to work backward and forward from those. Remember, this is an introductory study. It is not "the last word." In fact, very little has been written at all on these bottles. I only hope this will be a jumping off point for better research.

As far as I know, there are no company records, no memories of "old timers," and almost no contemporary histories to help put this story together. We have only a small sample of old Coke bottles, and those must speak for themselves. To a large extent, they will tell us their story, if we listen closely.

#### The "Easiest" Coke bottles

The easiest Coke bottles to attribute and date are those made by the Root

Glass Company. Root began operations in November, 1901 – but its earliest Coke bottles come along much later, in 1905. There are several lines of evidence that support this date. The first line comes from the bottles themselves.

Almost all Root have bottles small 3- or 4-digit numbers embossed on the heel (Figure 1). These numbers appear to represent the bottle design type or model. Unlike most glass houses. Root appears to have assigned a new number for each bottle type it produced. The heel numbers probably begin with "1" (but not on Coke bottles!) and increase to several



Figure 2 – "1845 ROOT 15" heelmark (composite photo)

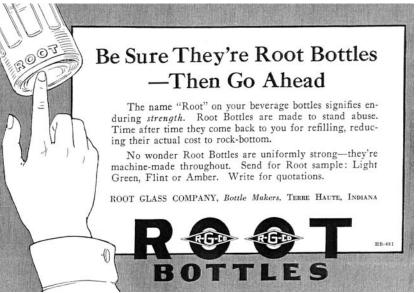


Figure 3 – Root ad (Glass Packer 1926:34)

thousand by 1932 when Root went out of business. On Coke bottles, the heel numbers only begin in the low 300s. This is important, as we shall soon see!

Bottles made in 1909 are dated on the heel with "9" – separate from the model or type number. From then on, all Root bottles are marked a two-digit date code – as well as a four-digit numerical code – on the heel (Figure 2). On the first (still undated) Root Coke bottles, the company mark was "R.G.CO." Root . continued to use the R.G.CO. initials in advertisements at least as late as 1926 (Glass Packer 1926:34 – Figure 3).

After that, "ROOT" was embossed on the base or heel, sometimes both



Figure 4 – ROOT basemark

(Figure 4).All of these early Root (or R.G.CO.) bottles bear the "TRADE MARK REGISTERED" wording. Because of that, and because the model numbers (when present on the heel) are all over 300, they can be dated to 1905 (or later) as I will show.

When the R.G.CO. mark was used on those first Root Coke bottles, a large size number was placed below the mark, on the base of the bottles (Figure 5). A different large number was used on the bottle base (below "R.G.CO.") for each city that ordered a Root Coke bottle. At first, there was only one bottle type for each city. Soon the mark was changed to ROOT, but the bottles still carried a large (now two-digit) number on the base. These bottles almost always lack the Root model numbers that appear on the heels of almost all other Root bottles. This applies to later Coca-Cola bottles as well as all non-



Figure 5 – R.G.Co. with large number underneath

Coca-Cola bottles made by Root. These first R.G.CO. and ROOT Coke bottles – with the large base numbers – have a distinctive Coca-Cola trademark, with a very thick, "flat-footed" tail of the



Figure 6 – Flat-footed tail of "C" in "Coca"

"C" in "Coca" (Figure 6).

This style of the Coca-Cola trade mark is almost a trade mark in itself – for the Root Glass Co. The few of these first Root bottles that do carry heel "model" numbers (in addition to base numbers from 1 to about 20) have numbers in the low 300s. Later, perhaps as early as 1906, when the Root "404" Birmingham crown-top and the Root 405 Birmingham Hutchinson style Coke bottles appear, the trade mark stye is modified to a less exaggerated form (Figures 7-9).

From these low 400 numbers and onward, every Root Coke bottle finally gets a heel number, and the large 2-digit base numbers are discontinued. The heel numbers increase rapidly



Figure 7 – Birmingham bottle



Figure 8 – Logo on Birmingham bottle



Figure 9 – ROOT 405 heelmark

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until 1909, when the numbers are in the 1100s, and the first bottles with a numerical date code (also on the heel) appear. This number is placed to the right of "ROOT" with the model number on the left. So the heel will read something like: "1145 ROOT 9." Sometimes, since these were "model" numbers and not mold numbers, a lower heel numbers appears on dated bottles of earlier types. These are bottle types that were re-issued by Root after date codes were used – in 1909 and later.

The first line of evidence for the 1905 date comes from those model numbers. The lowest model number I have seen so far on a Root Coke bottle from Georgia or Florida is 315 (see Figure 1). This is a fairly high number. It is obvious that "a lot of water has gone under the bridge" by the time the number 315 was used. Root had been very busy making bottles for three vears. An Atlanta Celery Cola crowntop is known with "R.G.CO. 262" on the heel, and Ron Fowler reports a great many Hutchinson style bottles, mostly with "R.G.CO." (a few with "ROOT") and numbers lower than 300 (Personal communication, Ron Fowler).

Clearly then, from late 1901 until at least late 1904, Root probably made just over 300 types of bottles, all of which were duly numbered on the heels. Once in a while, a number below 300 appears on a later ROOT Coke bottle, perhaps in error, or perhaps a low number had remained unused for some reason. Nevertheless, there is strong evidence that the Root Glass Co. did not produce Coca-Cola bottles until about 1905.

The second line of evidence for this date comes from the use of "TRADE MARK REGISTERED" on all Root (and R.G.CO.) Coke bottles. The first U.S. Trademark law was passed in 1881. But the term "Trade Mark" apparently did not appear on early Coke bottles. Many early non-Coca-Coal bottles used the terms "TRADE MARK" or "REGISTERED," but the term "TRADE MARK REGISTERED" did not appear on early Coke bottles. Then, in 1905, another trade mark law was passed, which required trade marks

to be registered.

Another possible line of evidence may come from Harold Hirsch himself. We know that early in that year, Hirsch became the patent and trade mark lawyer for Coca-Cola. And Hirsch must have had something to do with the change, because from then on, every Georgia (and Florida) Coke bottle was embossed with "TRADE MARK REGISTERED," usually directly under the trade mark. Interestingly, however, this did not apply to many other states: Alabama, for example. It may be that Hirsch had a closer connection with the "parent bottler," Joseph Whitehead (1864-1906), who supervised Georgia and Florida Coca-Cola bottlers, than he had with the other parent bottler, the "Thomas group" (under Benjamin Franklin Thomas, 1860-1914), who led Alabama bottlers, as well as those of many other states.

A third line of evidence comes from the special numbering system Root Glass Co. used for all of these early style Coke bottles. Apparently they were kept in a separate file by Root. Why else would these large-size base numbers be used? Was someone tracking them to see how well they circulated or how many survived? These numbers have all the ear-marks of an experiment. The fact that they were later dropped, and Root began producing large numbers of bottles for the ever-increasing population of bottling plants, further supports that idea.

The "R.G.CO." logo appears on Coke bottle bases from the cities with the following base numbers: Columbia, South Carolina "1"; Augusta, Georgia "2"; Macon, Georgia "4"; Savannah, Georgia "6"; Greenville, South Carolina "7"; Athens, Georgia "8", and Raleigh, North Carolina "11." A Sumter, South Carolina Coke has "ROOT" and a large "14" on the base, and a St. Louis, Missouri, Coke has "ROOT" over a large "16X" on the base. All of these are middle script types with the characteristic "flat-foot" trademark style of early (ca. 1905) Root Glass Co. Coke bottles. Finally, with heel numbers in the low 400s, Root dropped the large experimental base numbers and

began mass production for cities like Birmingham (404 and 405), Nashville (406), and others, occasionally making so many bottles they use small base mold numbers.

#### Coke Bottles with "Warnings"

During the period of "middle-script" bottles, various warnings begin to appear on many Coke bottles. Those warnings occur earlier, on many bottle types, and at Kansas City on Coke bottles in 1902-1903, but in the Whitehead parent bottler territory, the warnings apparently begin only in 1905, possibly at the instigation of Hirsch.

When "ROOT" replaced "R.G.CO. / 2" on Augusta bottles, probably later in 1905, the firm did not place the large number below the name on the base. But the bottle did have the earliest side (heel) model number yet seen on a Coke bottle: "315." On this bottle, too, the first "warning" (literally the "bottle" speaking for itself!) appeared: "NOT TO BE SOLD" (see Figure 1).

South Carolina Cokes seem to have a special warning. The Columbia "R.G.CO. / 1" and the Sumter "Root / 14" bottles have "THIS BOTTLE NOT" (on front), with "SOLD AND MUST BE RETURNED" (on back). On later (non-Root) Augusta bottles, this warning was clarified in various ways: "THIS BOTTLE TO BE RETURNED" and "THIS BOTTLE LOANED AND MUST BE RETURNED" both appeared on middle script Coke bottles. These were attempts to explain that the bottle was not free; it was the property of the bottler, and it had better be returned. And soon the voice was not that of the bottle only, but of a "higher authority!"

# The Chattanooga Glass Co., the first Coke Bottle Manufacturer

There were many other similar warnings, but only later, (and not at Augusta) did that ultimate warning appear, explaining in no uncertain terms, and in huge letters in the middle of the bottle, that this bottle was "THE PROPERTY OF..." and, with this remarkable type, we are introduced to the glass house that claimed to be the

first manufacturer of Coke bottles - the Chattanooga Glass Co. (Figure 10).



Figure 10 - Large PROPERTY OF on center body

This giant warning occurs the Coke bottles of five Georgia cities from about 1906 to at least 1909. We know this because some of the bottlers who ordered these bottles only started bottling during that period. These "PROPERTY OF" bottles are all products of the Chattanooga Glass Co. All five of these cities have the tall-thin



Figure 11 – Tall-thin Coca-Cola trademark

Coca-Cola trademark style (Figure 11) of the earlier blue-aqua bottles (see below) and now, on their bases, they show the Chattanooga Glass Co. mark: "C in a diamond."

According to Coca-Cola records, Cartersville and Gainesville, Georgia, began bottling in 1906, Griffin in 1907, and Convers in 1909 (Ricketts 1973).All of these cities, as well as Atlanta, issued bottles with this huge

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"PROPERTY OF" notice, and these are the earliest known Coke bottles from these cities (except Atlanta of course). All other types known so far from these other cities are the much later (after 1912) shoulder / shoulder / base types). Soon after 1909, the warning is made a little less loudly, with "PROPERTY OF" still in large letters, but no longer "huge," and the Chattanooga Glass



Figure 12 - Smaller PROPERTY OF on center body

marking disappears (Figure 12).

Bottles of this second "PROPERTY OF" type were issued for a few Florida and Georgia cities during the period of about 1909 to 1912 - including Vidalia, Georgia, which, according to Coca-Cola records, began bottling in 1909 (Ricketts 1973). Finally, the warning was again moved to the back of the (still middle script) bottles and was reduced to fairly small letters above a second trademark on the back heel. This appears on 1912-1913 issues from many cities – for example, Fort Valley, which, according to Coca-Cola records, began bottling in 1912 (Ricketts 1973).

None of these later "PROPERTY OF" types (after 1909) have maker's marks, but they have most of the earmarks of other late Chattanooga Glass Co. bottles. The last of these types has a third (and surprisingly crude) "Coca-Cola" trade mark on the base. These probably date to 1913. I have seen only three of these. Two are from cities that, according to Coca-Cola records, began bottling in 1912; the other is from Dawson, Georgia, where Coke bottling began in 1913 (Ricketts 1973). All of these, including the first, are clear ("flint") glass. None are any shade of aqua, blue or green.

Apparently, all these warnings had some effect. The "PROPERTY OF," now a gentle reminder (Figure



Figure 13 – PROPERTY OF – "gentle reminder"

13), continued in small letters even after 1913, until the hobble-skirt was introduced in or after 1917 (depending on the city). But, by 1913, a major change was ordered, a pre-hobble-skirt attempt at establishing a unique "Coca-Cola" identity.

# An Attempt to Establish a Coca-Cola "Identity" in Glass

Middle script bottles continue to be made for Georgia and Florida plants into 1913. But during that year, the new "shoulder / shoulder / base" trademark type was instituted (Figures 14 & 15).



Figure 14 – Coca-Cola trademark on both shoulders



Figure 15 – Trademark on base of same bottle

This type was ordered by Hirsch, the Coca-Cola attorney (a well documented historical fact, for a welcome change!). The new type sported no less than five Coca-Cola trade marks (with the fourth and fifth trade marks on a paper label and the crown cap). The idea was that all those trade marks would make it unmistakably a Coca-Cola bottle. Of course, it didn't work!.Imitators simply created bottles with multiple examples of their own trademarks. The first of these new types did not show the contents. These may be dated to between 1913 and 1914.

Another change occurred soon after the new bottle type appeared. In 1913, the Gould Amendment to the 1906 Food and Drug act was passed, and it went into effect in late 1914. It required all containers to be marked with their volume, measured in fluid ounces (Figure 16). Apparently, the use of paper labels was not considered sufficient, since different bottles had different capacities, so the contents were embossed in the glass. Thus, bottles of the "shoulder / shoulder / base" trade mark type with embossed

"contents" may be dated from late in 1913 to 1917 (and rarely, later -- again, depending on the city). It should be noted that earlier bottle types often have contents. In many cases, these are later re-issues of early types, but some bottles may have been marked with contents earlier than 1913.

This style of Coke bottle became the standard at most plants after 1912, but there were still many holdouts. This was especially the case in New England, where most bottling began as late as 1916, and straight-side Cokes – usually of clear glass and many with heel-script trademarks – were ordered well into the 1920s. New England followed NONE of the rules I have "set forth" here. That should explain why I am avoiding dealing with those bottles – for the time being!

## A Word about Manufacturing Methods

A major distinguishing characteristic of all Coke bottles is the type of mold used. All Coke bottles have mold lines down the sides, where the front and the back mold fit together. On some, the side molds extend all the way to the base, which in this case is a circular plate inside the bottom. These are



Figure 17 – Post-bottom base





Figure 16 – Volume example (composite photo)

known as "post-bottom" molds (Figure 17), and the side mold lines end under the bottle. This is a characteristic of all Root bottles, even hobble-skirt types. I call this mold type "Base A."

On other Coke bottles, the side molds end above the base, which is a wide plate on the bottom, visible from the side of the bottle. These are

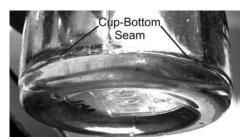


Figure 18 – Cup-bottom base

"cup-bottom" molds (Figure 18). I call this type "Base B." This mold type is characteristic of all mouth-blown Chattanooga Glass Co. and Laurens (S.C.) Glass Works bottles. Machinemade bottles were produced with cup-bottom molds and have a seam that is at or just above the heel. However, in the case of bottles made with the Owens machine, there is a machine scar, almost always off center that is usually completely on the base of the bottle. I call these "Base AB" because they look like a combination of the two



Figure 19 – Post-cup-bottom base

(Figure 19)

#### **The Earliest Coke Bottles**

Gradually, the early Coke bottle "story" is yielding to research, especially in the later bottles. But the earlier bottles are more difficult to research, mainly because very few are marked, other than Root bottles, and those, as we have seen, only begin in

1905. Now we need to look back even farther, to the very earliest Coke bottles.

In Augusta, and at many other plants, the earliest bottles were not designed for a paper label. Embossing on the side is in four lines that extend downward from shoulder to heel. The embossed label begins with "THE" followed on the next line by the script Coca-Cola trademark, then "BOTTLING CO.," and finally the city and abbreviated state names near the heel. There is no mention of "TRADE MARK REGISTERED" (Figure 20). These bottles might have been made by at least two different manufacturers. They occur with base A, at Tampa, and

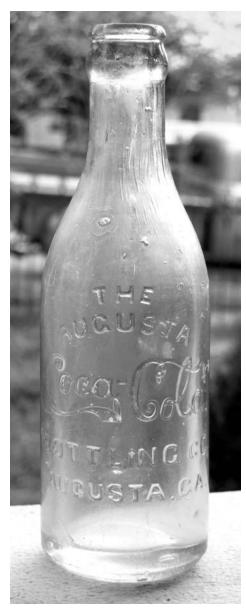


Figure 20 – Bottle without TRADE MARK REGISTERED, from Augusta, Georgia

with base B, at Augusta. The "style" of the side writing and the trademark "signature" appear to be the same. No "slug plates" are used on either. Presumably, these bottles date no later than 1902-1903. The Augusta bottle is very rare. Both are made of clear (flint) glass. I do not know the manufacturer of these bottles.

The next type from Augusta is anything but rare. It is a bit crude, clearly early, made of light blue-aqua glass, and designed to take a paper label. The Coca-Cola trade mark is on the front heel – at the bottom part of the



Figure 21 – Trademark only on front heel

side – and only on one side (Figure 21). The bottle has no other wording except the name of the city and "GA." on the back. There is no "TRADE MARK REGISTERED" on this type of bottle from Augusta. These Augusta "heelscript" types use slug plates for the city and state, and they occur with several different (and surprisingly high) base numbers, which may be order numbers, since the bottles are basically identical. At Augusta, the numbers include 1285, 1318, and 1463. Importantly, all of these Cokes have the "tall-thin" Coca-Cola trademarks, like the later "huge PROPERTY OF" types. Also, like the later containers, the Augusta bottles are "base B" mold types.

If the early (heel-script) numbered-base bottles are products of Chattanooga, the plant certainly made hundreds of bottles other than Coke. At the end of 1905, only about 320 Coke bottling plants were in operation. The Coca-Cola trade marks of these very

early Coke bottles are a very distinctive style, with "tall, thin" letters, and very long, narrow tail of the first "C" in Coca, very unlike the tail of the "C" of "Coca" seen in early Root & RGCO trade marks. This very distinctive Coca-Cola trade mark is another "trade mark" style, this time of the Chattanooga



Figure 22 – Tall, thin trademark

Glass Co. (Figure 22).

Later heel-script bottles with very similar-style Coca-Cola trade marks have the "TRADE MARK REGISTERED" wording, and have the "Diamond-C" mark of Chattanooga Glass Co. on the base. The similarity of these unique trademark styles is evidence that the earlier bottles are from the same source, even though the earlier bottles are a light-blue aqua color, while the later types, including the "huge PROPERTY OF" series, which I date from 1906 to 1909, are composed of clear "flint" glass, as are later Chattanooga Glass Co. Coke bottles, until about 1914.

The later bottles have more developed trade mark styles, but they are still recognizably those of the Chattanooga Glass Co. The last have "empty Ls" in the trade mark (Figure 23), "peg-leg Gs" in "GA." (Figure 24), and "REGISTERED" – characteristics of all or most later Chattanooga Glass Co. Cokes even into the hobble-skirt period, after 1917. On all of these (both early and later) the lower end (or bottom tail) of the second "C" is neatly squared off, not pointed (Figure 25). Clear or "flint" Glass

In the days before 1914, better bottles were made from clear ("flint") glass, which had to be treated ("decolored") with manganese dioxide,



Figure 23 – Empty "L" in "Cola"



Figure 24 – Peg-leg "G" in "GA"



Figure 25 – Squared-off "C" in "Cola"



Figure 26 – DIXIE logo (eBay)



Figure 27 – Pointed end of "C" in "Cola"

using a method invented in Venice around 1450 AD. By 1907, Chattanooga Glass started producing clear bottles. These included the first "PROPERTY OF" bottles.

The advent of flint glass bottles may correspond to the addition of a second "continuous tank" at the Chattanooga plant "by 1907," which Toulouse says resulted in a "gain. . . in [the] flexibility of colors." Some very late Chattanooga Glass straight sides, (mostly with "contents") and all hobble-skirts, are blue or bluish. This color choice may have been in response to the blue bottles made by the Laurens Glass Works, which appear in 1913.

Lockhart (2006) recorded that "crown top soda bottles were generally not decolorized with manganese [dioxode] after 1914, giving a good ending date for such 'colorless' bottles with an amethyst (manganese dioxide decolorized) cast to the glass as the beginning of World War I. Most of these amethyst crown soda bottles would be mouth-blown." In addition to all that, Toulouse notes that a third tank was added at Chattanooga Glass, "by 1913." That change, along with the disappearance of manganese dioxide from the mix, must have precipitated the end of "clear" Coke bottles and the re-introduction of the light aqua colors familiar on later straight-sides and so common on early Chattanooga hobble-skirts.

Thus, the earliest and the latest Chattanooga Glass Co. straight-side Coke bottles are aqua, while the "middle-period" bottles are clear! And all of these, including the clear Cokes of the "middle period," have in common the "vertical" trade mark, and the blunt (or squared-bottom) "C" in Cola, both characteristics I attribute to Chattanooga Glass Cokes see (Figure 25).

#### Dixie Glass Works

Another manufacturer, "DIXIE" (1898-ca. 1906), made clear bottles, including the early Key West oval slug plate type, and the early Tampa, Fla. bottle (although neither has "TRADE MARK REGISTERED" on the bottle).

It should be noted that Dixie, based in the west Georgia town of Tallapoosa, manufactured the early block-letter Hutchinson-patent bottles for the Chattanooga, Tennessee, plant. If these held Coke, they may well be the very first Coke bottles (Figure 26).

The Dixie Glass Works made soda, beer, patent medicine, and other bottles, along with liquor ware – especially for the South Carolina Dispensary – from 1898 to ca. 1907. The plant embossed "DIXIE" on the bases of most of its bottles throughout the entire time it was in business.

There is a series of very attractive, oval-slug plate (clear) Coke bottles that do not quite fit the "Chattanooga style trade mark" I have discussed above. They occur at several plants in Florida and Georgia. These attractive bottles are unlikely to be products of Chattanooga Glass (wrong mold type), Dixie (too late; Dixie ended in 1907), or Wormser (but see below!) because they are clearly made from "post-bottom" molds (base A, not B). They are all from Florida and Georgia cities, and they are distinguished by sharp or pointed "Cs" in the Coca-Cola trade mark in addition to their characteristic oval slug plates. These include Brooksville, Ft. Meade, and Plant City, Florida, along with Jackson (Jewell Bottling), Thomasville, founded in 1910 (Ricketts 1973), and Villa Rica, also founded in 1910 (Ricketts 1973), Georgia.

They must date to 1910 or 11, and they all have the type "A" baseplate. All have an exaggerated "C" in Cola, with a sharp bottom end (Figure 27). However, on these bottles, the "C" in Cola ends in a point, exactly like those on later bottles I attribute to the Wormser Glass Co.Later Wormser bottles are further distinguished by lines drooping down to the left from each "o" in the Coca-Cola trade mark (see below), but the earlier slug plate types do not share that detail (Figure 28).

Possibly these southern slug plate types were made by a Chattanooga sub-plant, using a different type of mold. Or they could be early Wormser Glass products, again using a different mold set. Some later bottles with the "WGCO" mark share letter forms with Chattanooga Glass Co.Coke bottles (although the implications of this are still unclear). None of these has a visible maker's mark or any base number. The manufacturer, so far, remains uncertain.

#### **Numbered Base Coke Bottles**

I have alluded to the early "vertical trade mark" Coke bottles, (without "Trade Mark Registered"), which I attribute to the Chattanooga Glass Co. These bottles are a nice blue-aqua color. I call them "nice" now, but these were the cheapest possible bottles in their day. Those blue-aqua Augusta heel scripts are numbered: 1285, 1318, and 1463 on their bases. These cannot be "model" number since the bottles are identical, except for slight variation caused by hand-cut molds.

There are several handsome, clear. center oval slug Cokes, in addition to those mentioned above. Those I have seen all have 3-digit mold numbers on the bases. The (clear) St. Petersburg, Florida, and the clear Bainbridge, Georgia, slug plate bottles share the same base mold number, 247. Since St. Petersburg began in 1909 (Ricketts 1973), these bottles can both be dated to about that year. These smaller numbers may belong to a different manufacturer, perhaps the successor to Dixie, but share the Chattanooga Glass Co. mold type, base B or cup-bottom molds. Their maker remains a mystery.

Another group of clear bottles with a trade mark of nearly identical style, a type I have previously attributed to Wormser Glass Co., appears about 1912, with the "B" or "cup-bottom" molds characteristic of the Chattanooga Glass Co., and (later) the Laurens Glass Works. These have the "hooked" first "C" with pointed bottom end, an open "a" in "Cola," lines dangling down from the left side of each "o," and an unusually fat "C" extending through the "l" in "Cola" (Figure 29).

Many of these clear, mouth-blown, shoulder-script varieties also feature the diagnostic "peg-leg G" of Chattanooga

Glass. This presents us with a minor mystery. Did Wormser copy Chattanooga, or perhaps hire a mold cutter from there? Later, machine-made bottles with all of these characteristics, (but no "peg-leg G") occur with the W.G.CO. base marking. Because of this, I have previously attributed all bottles with these characteristics to W.G.CO. The machine-made Coke bottles with the W.G.CO. mark are bluish aqua, no longer cleared with manganese, so likely from 1914 or later.)

This creates a strange sequence of events. The various characteristics seem to show a progression from the Dixie Glass Works to the Chattanooga Bottle & Glass Co. to the Wormser Glass Co. It is possible that the same mold maker worked for Dixie until 1907, then shifted to Chattanooga, when the Dixie plant closed. Tallapoosa is only about 100 miles almost due south of Chattanooga, and the Chattanooga Bottle & Glass Co. bought the Tallapoosa Glass Co. in late 1916 or early 1917. Establishing a connection with Wormser - at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania - however, is more of a stretch. Of course, a good mold maker might have been lured to Pennsylvania, if the pay and conditions were right.

#### Two Chattanooga Glass Co. Marks:

"CBGCO." and "C" - Which Came First?

Coke bottles with the CBGCO. base marking (Figure 30) tend to have higher two-digit numbers, including 13, 15, 16, and 17, (and a very few 14s recently seen). The 16 and 17 are often followed by a large "J" (Figure 31) These numbers could well be dates. Interestingly, "J" is the first letter of "Jahr," German for "Year." Were the mold cutters in Chattanooga German immigrants? Other lower numbers may occur on these Chattanooga-made Coke bottles, but I have only seen one, a "1" on an Atlanta bottle, marked "6 1/2 FL. OZ." This anomaly may be a base mold number that was not continued. The other bottles, with the following numbers:13, (14), 15, 16J, 17 and 17J are all embossed with "7 OZ" on both sides (like Laurens Glass



Figure 28 – Drooping line on Coca-Cola "o"



Figure 29 - Open-A in "Cola"



Figure 30 - CBGCo logo



Figure 31 – CBGCo logo with 16J code



Figure 32 – CBGCo bottle with "14" date code on back lower body



Figure 33 – Contents or volume designation



Figure 34 – "C" above Coca-Cola with "2" below



Figure 35 – Bent peg-leg "G"



Figure 36 -Half-empty "L"

Co. Coke bottles of 1914 to 1917). All "CBGCO." Cokes are mouth-blown.

But the problem with calling these CBGCO bottles "dated" is that in 1914, Chattanooga Glass produced machinemade Coke bottles. These are "dated" with a "14" on the back (Figure 32), and all are marked on the base with a large "C" along with a single-digit number (5, 7 & 8 have been noted). Many of these have the contents marked as "6 1/2 FLUID OZS.," although some are embossed "7 OZ." The "contents" marking appears in fairly large letters high on the side (Figure 33). The number "14" on the back side is not large but is usually quite sharp.

There are other late Chattanooga Glass bottles which are clearly machine-made but do not have the "C" or base number, the side number "14", or any other number. A good example is a Claxton, Georgia bottle, clearly made by Chattanooga Glass.Coca-Cola Co. records indicate that Claxton began bottling only in 1916 (Ricketts 1973). Claxton Cokes are scarce, and all are a light aqua color, as would be expected.

Not all bottles with the large "C" over the trademark and a single digit number beneath it are machine-made – only those beginning with the base number 5. Earlier bottles with the "C" on the base are mouth blown. Examples of these include the Cartersville "tiny-arrow" type and Rome, Georgia (both with "C" only on base, no number), Bainbridge (with "C /2" – Figure 34) and Marietta (with "C / 3").

These have no mention of contents and do not exactly fit the Chattanooga markers. All the way into the hobble-skirt period, after 1917, Chattanooga Glass Co. bottles generally feature a distinct "peg-leg G," and an empty "L" in Cola, without a trace of the tail of the "C" passing through it (see Figure 23). On the three earliest "C-base" bottles, each "G" features a bent-pegleg, (long, but curved outward – Figure 35), and the "L" in "Cola" is only half-empty, in that only a part of the tail of the "C" in "Cola" passes through it (Figure 36). These four clearly resemble earlier bottles.

Since the later "C" base bottles

(with base numbers of 5 and higher) are machine-made, all of those with the "C" mark "should" follow those with the "CBGCO." mark - all of which are mouth-blown, whatever their number and letter. In that case, these two-digit numbers would simply be base mold numbers, and this CBGCO type would precede the 1914 dated C-on-base issues and other machine made C-onbase examples. But each "CBGCO" type has the empty "L" and peg-leg "G" similar to the later Chattanooga Glass bottles (including hobble-skirts). In addition, they carry base numbers which are hard to interpret as anything but dates.

If the "14" is indeed a date code, Chattanooga first produced machinemade Coke bottles in 1914. Later, Chattanooga again made undated bottles by machine for many cities and, perhaps in 1917, for Claxton. Hobbleskirts followed soon after that, but the company also (mostly?) produced mouth-blown Coca-Cola bottles from 1915 to 1917. Not all are marked with base numbers. A machine-made bottle from Senoia, Georgia, is embossed "61/2 FL. OZ" on the side but has no letter or number on the base. It is identifiable only by its "bent-peg-leg G" and "half-empty L!" What about that big J? Interestingly, a similar large "J" in a diamond is the mark on some early looking Chattanooga amber Cokes, and also, reportedly, on an early(?) Birmingham, Alabama, aqua Coke. Could these be related? And what about that "14" on the C-base types? Why only a "14?" Where are the higher numbers?

Were there problems with the machine? Problems were not unusual. Machines were tricky and required training and practice to operate well. Whatever the case may be, the evidence is strong for this unlikely seeming theory. I happen to have four "C" machine-made bottles with the 14; I have three "CBGCO" with 16, and three more with 17. Most of these 16s and 17s have a large "J" after the number. This sample should be fairly random. I have not sought out either type or any number

to exclude any other type or number. The Return of the "Blues"

After 1913, the blue-aqua color returned at most manufacturing plants. and remained until Root Glass turned

its bottles green just before 1917. Coca-Cola later endorsed the green

color, (calling it "Georgia Green"). This action prodded the "blues" to add copper or other metals to make their bottles green. This change occurs gradually and sporadically. Some "CBGCO 17" bottles are still clearpink (notably Dublin, Ga.). Most late straight sides and early hobble-skirts are a very light agua color (often nearly, but not quite, clear), but, in 1925 and 1928, many Coke bottles made by the Laurens Glass Works are truly clear (although they often turn pink due to manganese in the glass formula), and, in 1929, some Chattanooga bottles still look more blue. Even as late as 1929. Graham is still using the very light aqua color.

# The Laurens Glass Works: A Much Simpler Study

The Laurens Glass Works, South Laurens. Carolina. seems to be a much simpler study. Assuming it is correct that Laurens began producing bottles in 1913, and knowing

early hobble-skirts are still mouth blown, a long series of single and double digit base numbers on attractive but somewhat crude shoulder / shoulder / base bottles may be attributed to the Laurens Glass Works. These have only a number on the base. These are clearly mold numbers, not dates, and not series or model numbers. Later Laurens Cokes (from about 1914) have the contents embossed in the glass, but here the contents are sometimes added to the base. Some, with base molds that may have been hastily modified, were intended to read "7 OZ" but were cut with a backward Z, and actually read "7 OS."

Laurens bottles are usually a very attractive light blue color, and many have "BOTTLING Co." and the city and state names in a single line in a heel slug plate. Note that on many of these, the "o" in Co." is lower case (Figure 37)! There are other varieties with a normal sized "o,"



Figure 37 – Lower-case "o" in "Co"



Figure 38 – Rectangular plate at heel

but all of them have a single- or doubledigit base number with no other letter, and, of course, all are mouth-blown. The machine did not arrive at Laurens until sometime in 1919.

## Slug plates: A Solution, and a Problem...

A word now on "slug plates," properly called "plates." I have mentioned Laurens, but Chattanooga Glass Co. bottles (and those of many other manufacturers) often have the city name and state abbreviation in a sharp-cornered rectangular plate (Figure 38). The early, unmarked "tall thin" trade mark bottles also have that style of plate for city and state. "Coca-Cola" is in a plate on some bottles, too, but rarely, and, as far as I can tell, only on those of smaller manufacturers.

Rectangular, round and oval plates

were used extensively from the mid 19th century as a way of saving money on molds. Root used an attractive round slug plate from about 1906 onward. This type of bottle had the Coca-Cola trade mark on one shoulder and the city name and state abbreviation along with "BOTTLING CO." or something similar in the plate. This mold type is numbered 505, and was used well into the teens on at least 15 different city-named bottles. Slug-plate bottles are especially difficult to date. If it were not for the fact that Root put numbered dates on its bottles after 1908, their slug plate types might be thought to be earlier than they are.

The dates were often changed, using one of three ways: 1) drilling out the old date and using a steel rod to refill the hole (then stamping the new date); 2) creating an "over-date" by stamping a new number on top of the old one; or 3) peening out the old number with a hammer

and engraving a new one. In the case of Root, it must be remembered that the three- or four-digit heel numbers are not mold numbers, but "model" or "type" numbers. These model numbers can be "reused" at a much later date. For example, many Root 505 types occur undated, and others are dated 9, 10, 12, and even 17 (1909, 1910, 1912, 1917 – possibly others). Model numbers often have a letter suffix, indicating a slight variation, or in the case of hobbleskirts, most of which are Model #1, two or more letters may be added as "mold letters."



Figure 39 – C 491 basemark



Figure 40 – C 1761 basemark



Figure 41 – C 1825 basemark



Figure 42 - 1187 / 2 base code



Figure 43 – American Bottle Co. Coca-Cola trademark

# Those Early Type "Hutchinson Patent" Bottles: How Early?

In my discussion of the "PROPERTY OF" types, I have so far omitted the famous Hutchinson style Coke bottles that resemble that type. I believe the "PROPERTY OF" Hutchinson dates to the same year as the Bessemer and Jasper (Ala.) Hutchinson types, 1906-1907. Indeed, it might have inspired the similar crown-top bottles (or visa-versa).

Recently, an "earlier" oval-plate style "PROPERTY OF" Hutchinson bottle has turned up. The dating of this bottle is even less certain, as is the date of the Birmingham "D.O.C. 13" (D.O. Cunningham) script Hutch, which may well be earlier than its companion "ROOT 405" version, although the trade mark style is late. It might be worth noting here that the Bessemer Hutch Coke bottle has the Chattanooga "C in diamond" mark on the base, exactly the same as those Georgia Coke bottles with the huge "PROPERTY OF" mentioned above.

## **Many Important Questions Remain**

If the early bottles are more difficult than later bottles to understand, the middle period bottles are nearly impossible! Did Chattanooga Glass make bottles between 1905 and 1907? There are many blue-aqua bottles with three and four digit numbers on the bases that would fit. Some even have "C" before the number. But the trade mark style varies, and I am not yet comfortable attributing these to Chattanooga or any other plant.

Consider the following: One bottle, a Norfolk, Virginia, heel-script type, seems to have the "right" tall-thin Coca-Cola trade mark. It is certainly early, and it has "C491" on the base (Figure 39). Other slug plate types with the pointed "C" trademark style, and "1741" on the bases are found from Mulberry, Florida, and Lake City, South Carolina. A New Bern, North Carolina bottle (with a different, very "crude" trade mark) has "C1761" on its base (Figure 40). Another North Carolina type with a much "later"

looking trade mark style that includes a thick tail and open "o" has the base number "C1825" (Figure 41).

Why would the "C" be used on a smaller number, dropped later, then re-used again on bottles with larger numbers and entirely different trade mark styles? This is still a mystery! But a possible explanation is that these North Carolina and Virgina bottles (with the "C") are from Thomas Territory cities. I have not delved into this territory, but I have noticed that no Whitehead territory bottles have base numbers preceded by a "C." This is a major reason I am concentrating on Whitehead territory (Georgia and Florida) Coke bottles!

There are many other important manufacturers that need study. Among them are the Ohio Glass Co., of Newark, Ohio, whose heel mark was "O.B.CO." On the base (bottom) of these is a fourdigit number with a single-digit number below it (I have seen numbers between 1173 and 1294 – Figure 42). The Ohio Bottle Co. was in business from 1904-1905 only. Its successor, the American Bottle Co., used a mark "A.B.CO." on the heel and sometimes on the base, with a four-digit number and a singledigit number or letter below it (I have seen numbers from 1197 through 1586). These are probably four-digit series or model numbers with a smaller mold number or letter.

The American Bottle Co. operated factories at five locations from 1905-1916.Both firms used a unique "signature" Coca-Cola trademark, with a large "C" in "Coca" and a smaller, slanted "C" in "Cola" (Figure 43). In 1916, the Owens Bottle Co. purchased American Glass, and Coke bottle manufacturing continued at their Newark (Ohio) and Streator (Illinois) plants using marks of "N" and "S" on the heel, followed by a two digit date code. By this time, the Coca-Cola trade mark styles are pretty well standardized, although bottle molds are still hand-cut for many years.

Some earlier machine-made Coke bottles are dated "14" and "15" on the heel, followed by a "1," "2," or "3."

Who made these? Other Coke bottles are undated and have only a rather large one-digit number on the heel. These bear the tell-tale "Owens scar" on the base and must be other (later?) Owens bottles.

A very important company that I have discussed elsewhere was the Wormser Glass Co., located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The firm operated under the Wormser Glass Co. name from about 1884 to about 1918 or later, although there may have been a break in production from 1888 to 1897. The plant specialized in beer bottles during the early years of the 20th century, but it apparently made Coca-Cola bottles, too. Many later shoulder / shoulder / base type Coke bottles, some of them machine made, can be attributed to Wormser. Some machinemade bottles are marked with a tiny "W.G.CO." on the base. I have noted that Wormser may have had some type of relationship with the Chattanooga Glass Co. – possibly through the migration of a single mold maker. This desperately needs further research.

Many middle-script, machine-made Coke bottles, and a few shoulder / shoulder types can be attributed to Southern Indiana Glass Works, the immediate predecessor of the Graham Glass Co. The Graham family purchased the Lythgoe Bottle Co. at Loogootee, Indiana, in 1904 and renamed it the Southern Indiana Glass Works. The Grahams brought in "Johnny Bull" (Ashley) machines in 1905 and began developing their own. The Graham machines were in service by at least 1906, and the firm became the Graham Glass Co. in 1912.

Southern Indiana Glass Works bottles usually have a faint four digit number on the heel, or a pellet, a number, or sometimes nothing on the base. These are the only middle-script, machine-made Coke bottles, and they date from 1906 to 1912. Many machine-made bottles of the shoulder / shoulder / base type (after 1912) were made by Southern Indiana Glass Works' successor, the Graham Glass Co. at the

Okmulgee, Loogootee, and Evansville plants. Most of these, thankfully, are marked, and some are even dated. Production at Okmulgee begins in 1910; Loogootee begins in 1912, and Evansville comes along in 1913.

Graham Glass Co. marks include a model number and the initial "L," "E," or "O" – followed by a letter "S" (secondary?) or "P" (primary?) and sometimes followed by a third letter date code. The date codes began with the 16th letter of the alphabet and continued until the 19th letter:

P = 1916

Q = 1917

R = 1918

S = 1919

Beginning in 1920. Graham eliminated the letter date codes and began using two-digit number codes in their places. Until about 1925, those were frequently stamped to the right of older codes, so that some hobble-skirt Coke bottles were actually embossed with two date codes. For example, a Hobart, Oklahoma, hobble-skirt bottle is embossed "576 ESR G23" on the back heel. The "576" is the Evansville code for a Coke bottle; "E" equals Evansville; the meaning of "S" is uncertain; "R" is the older date code for 1918; "G" indicates Graham; and "23" is a date code for 1923.

Other makers exist, of course – including the North Baltimore Bottle and Glass Co., originally opened at North Baltimore, Ohio, later moving to North Albany, then to Terre Haute, both in Indiana. This was an early company that produced many bottles for southern cities, but only an occasional Coke bottle. Most later bottles are marked and present few problems with attribution. Others are not, and some are still complete mysteries! Hopefully, these companies will be explored and discussed in future articles.

The Message of This Essay

These early Coke bottles present us with many questions, but they are trying to tell us about themselves! Hopefully, most of the questions we pose to them are not beyond their ability to answer. If we continue to listen carefully, we may be able to hear more of their stories. So far, though, we have barely made a start

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