

# Louisburg, North Carolina Bottling Works

By Bill Baab



**George Herman recalls his father's work at the Louisburg Bottling Works as his wife, Ann, listens (photo by Bea Baab)**

Freddie Lee David Herman decided to get into the soda water bottling business when he bought an interest in the Louisburg (N.C.) Bottling Works owned by Blumey Miller in 1906.

Two years later, Herman owned the whole plant, said his son, George, 83 when interviewed at his home near Creedmoor, N.C., in May of 2008.

The business bottled Koca Nola, Rye-Ola and Nut Cola early, later adding Dr. Pepper and NuGrape. Also bottled was a concoction called "Satan-Et, The Drink with a Wink," produced by the Garrett Corporation of Norfolk, Va., that cost 5 cents a drink. Wording on a tin sign called the drink "as smooth as satin," yet spelled the beverage's name like the devil's.

Researcher Dennis Smith of Buffalo, N.Y., checked the name on the internet and found a label-under-glass "Satan-Et" bottle that sported a metal top probably used as a drinking cup. He also located the tin sign and a pocket mirror produced by the company.

The Louisburg bottling plant delivered its products in a 1914 Ford Model T "car-truck."

"On Saturday evening, four bolts were loosened and the truck body would be replaced on the chassis by a car body," said George Herman, who was born in Louisburg in 1925. The company later added a 1918 Ford T-model truck.

"My wife, Ann, rode in both those trucks, but she doesn't remember doing so," said George. The Hermans have been married 54

years.

The 1918 truck is owned by James "Junior" Woodard of Johnson City, Tenn. He said his grandfather, F.L., picked up the truck chassis in Raleigh and drove it to Louisburg. "It didn't have a cab or seats and he rode atop the gas tank all the way," Woodard said. "It was an awful trip because it snowed. Plans showing how to build the cab were later mailed to him."

George Herman recalled seeing a bottle washing machine and a bottle capping machine which could cap only one bottle at a time.

"The washing machine had revolving brushes and whoever was doing the cleaning would take a bottle out of the water and push it onto one of those brushes. Then the bottles would be filled and capped. I remember Dad always tried to figure out how to cap more than one bottle at a time, but later said someone else had beaten him

to it."

He said the company used lots of sugar in 100-pound bags "and one time the price of sugar jumped to 27 cents a pound. Dad bought several hundred pounds at that price, only to see the price plummet overnight to 7 cents a pound!"



**Satan-et came in this unusual bottle whose top may have been used as a drinking cup (courtesy of Dennis Smith)**



**Check out the graphics on this pocket mirror (courtesy of Dennis Smith)**

George also recalled his sister, Dorothy, who was paralyzed from the waist down by a fall from a tree when she was 6, guarding a truck full of beverages at the Louisburg fairgrounds when she was a bit older.

"She was sitting in the truck. She told me some boys had come up to steal some of the drinks, but she warned them off."

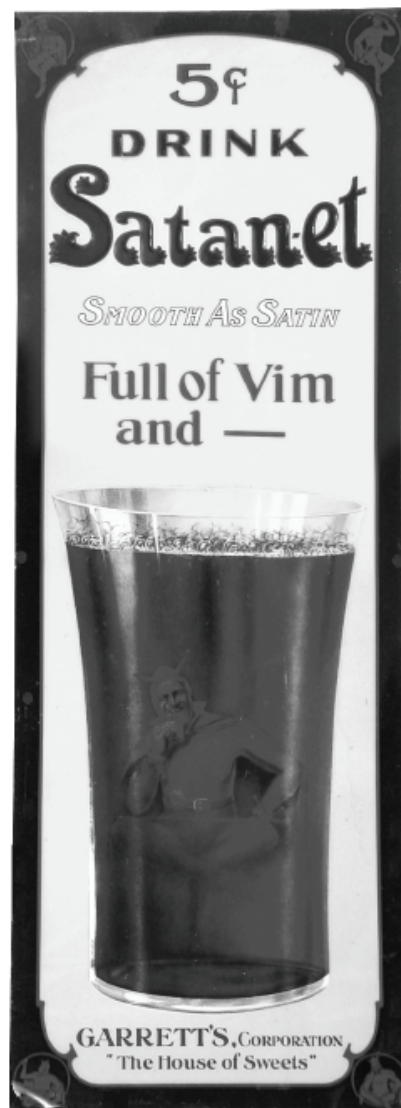
Woodard said his "Aunt Dot" was

the family historian and wrote down records of the bottling business in a notebook. "She said the newer truck dated to 1916, but I checked with folks who are authorities on Fords and they told me the 1-1/2-ton truck wasn't manufactured until 1917." He is still looking for that notebook.

The business suffered losses when bottles simply weren't returned because there was no deposit system to act as an incentive. It was forced to close after the stock market crash in 1929.

"Dad later was able to recoup only 15 cents on the dollar, but that was better than nothing," said George, whose Uncle Ezra Herman also was in the bottling business, owning the Coca-Cola plant in Mt. Airy, N.C.

"Dad sold most of the bottling equipment to the Lane NEHI Bottling Co., in Henderson, N.C. Folks also broke into the plant and stole some things. I remember even later breaking up the bottle crates to use as firewood," he added.



**Satan-et's tin signs were in eye-catching colors (courtesy of Dennis Smith)**



**A syrup salesman holds a Satan-et sign, while Louisburg Bottling Works owner, Freddie Lee David Herman is seated in the truck and employee, Calvin Caviness, is at right (courtesy of Willis Herman, grandson of the owner)**

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** Thanks to Dennis Smith of Buffalo, N.Y., for sharing the Satan-Et images and to Willis Herman for e-mailing the photo showing his grandfather with a delivery truck. The photo is owned by George and Ann Herman.

Bill Baab  
2352 Devere St  
Augusta, GA 30904  
(706) 736-8097  
riverswamper@comcast.net