

# "TIP Baby's" father shares Gary Beverage Co. history

By Bill Baab

Linda Carolyn "Tippy" Gary may have been the only baby born in September 1939 to be nicknamed after a family soft drink.

She is the daughter of soft drink bottler Fred Gary and Kathryn Flynn, who wed in May 1938 in Washington, D.C. It was during the first month of her birth year, according to a news story in the *Raleigh Times*, that the Gary Beverage Company of Raleigh, North Carolina introduced a grape-flavored drink called TIP.

"When I was born at Rex Hospital in Raleigh, I was told that the nurses referred to me as 'the Tip Baby.' The first people to visit my mother in the hospital brought a silver (loving) cup engraved 'Tippy' and there you have it," said Tippy (Mrs. Richard) Gary Thibodeau of Coronado, California. Husband, family and friends still call her by her nickname.

Her father, Fred Branan Gary, a retired U.S. Navy commander, 96 years old and living in Coronado, recalled his life and times with the Gary Beverage Company:

"In 1914, my father (Joseph Nicholas Gary, Sr.) operated a farm and cotton gin outside of Swainsboro, Georgia where I was

born. He and his family moved to Covington, Georgia where he had obtained a franchise agreement with the Chero-Cola Company of Columbus, Georgia for Covington (Newton County) and adjoining counties."

The Chero-Cola Company had been organized by Claud Hatcher in Columbus. Hatcher's first beverage line in 1905 was Royal Crown and the Chero-Cola Company was chartered in 1912. The NEHI line of fruit flavors as introduced in 1924, becoming so successful that the company changed its name to NEHI Corporation in 1928, according to a company history.

"The Covington franchise turned out to be very successful. It became a direct competitor of the Coca-Cola Company. My father had an opportunity to get a Coca-Cola franchise, but he was of the firm belief that Coca-Cola was a habit-forming drink (associating the name with cocaine) and thought Chero-Cola wasn't.

"Father's operation was very successful until World War I. Coca-Cola stopped bottling its drink because they couldn't get the necessary sugar, but Chero-Cola kept

making their drink using some sort of syrup. But that spoiled the drink and that was the end of that."

However, from that start, "my father, myself and brothers Elwyn Gary Jr., and Joseph N. "Nick" Gary Jr., ended up in the drink business.

"A new drink named NuGrape was developed in Atlanta. It had a very pleasing flavor and its bottle (shape) was very unusual, being 'squeezed' in the center. My father took that on and it became so successful, he was able to get the franchise for Charlotte, N.C., about 1920. After success there, he decided to take the franchise for Washington, D.C. He moved to that city in 1922 and the family joined him in 1924."

His father's advertising skills were bold and different. For example, his fleet of trucks included a car shaped like a NuGrape bottle. On the rear of the car was the distinctive NuGrape logo and its motto, "A Taste You Can't Forget." You wouldn't forget that car, either, once you saw it.

During the late 1930s, another strange-looking vehicle caught Fred Gary's eye – he thought it was just the thing to catch the public eye as well..

The Gary Beverage Company was advertised on the aluminum "fuselage" of a bus-car called the Dymaxion, one of just three invented by Buckminster Fuller. It had only three wheels – two in the front and one in the back – "and it was very tricky to drive," Fred Gary remembered. "You steered it with the rear wheel. If you wanted to go to the right, the rear of the car would go slightly to the left; if you were going quickly to the right, it would force the car over (to the left)



Joseph Gary Sr.'s plant in Covington, Ga., celebrated National Chero-Col Day on April 18, 1918. Fred Gary is the boy on the left and his father (with cap) is on the right. Note that everybody is holding a labeled Chero-Cola bottle.



Chero-Cola advertising serving tray from the teens.



The NuGrape Bottling Co., in its 1925 heyday on 210 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, S.W., in Washington, D.C. J.N. Gary Sr., is behind the wheel of the sporty NuGrape car on the right. It was built on a Chevrolet chassis with solid rubber tires. The man wearing the straw hat next to the car is Joseph N. Gary Jr. The delivery trucks are all Model T Fords.



and probably hit an oncoming car.” But Fred survived in the vehicle “I think I paid \$200 for. A friend drove it from D.C. to Raleigh and I drove it from there to Charlotte. I wanted it for advertising purposes.”

Richard Buckminster “Bucky” Fuller (1895-1983) was an American visionary, designer, architect, poet, author and inventor.

Fred Gary bought the vehicle from an employee at the U.S. Bureau of Standards

where he had been employed before joining his father in the beverage business. He said that one day, after it was gassed up, the gas cap was accidentally left off, the thing caught fire and “melted right where it was.”

The Gary Beverage Company’s future looked bright, but there were storm clouds on the horizon. Welch’s Grape Juice Company sued NuGrape to make it put real grape juice in the soft drink. “My father, the local bottler, was a witness during the trial

and Welch’s won. But the stuff (real grape juice) fermented in the bottle and that killed it,” Fred Gary recalled.

“My father had plants in Charlotte and High Point, North Carolina, and added ginger ale and flavored drinks. That (in 1928) is when he founded the Gary Beverage Company. Here’s a point of interest: On Oct. 29, 1929 (Black Thursday), the day the stock market crashed, the Charlotte plant burned to the ground. It was relocated in the city and production continued.”

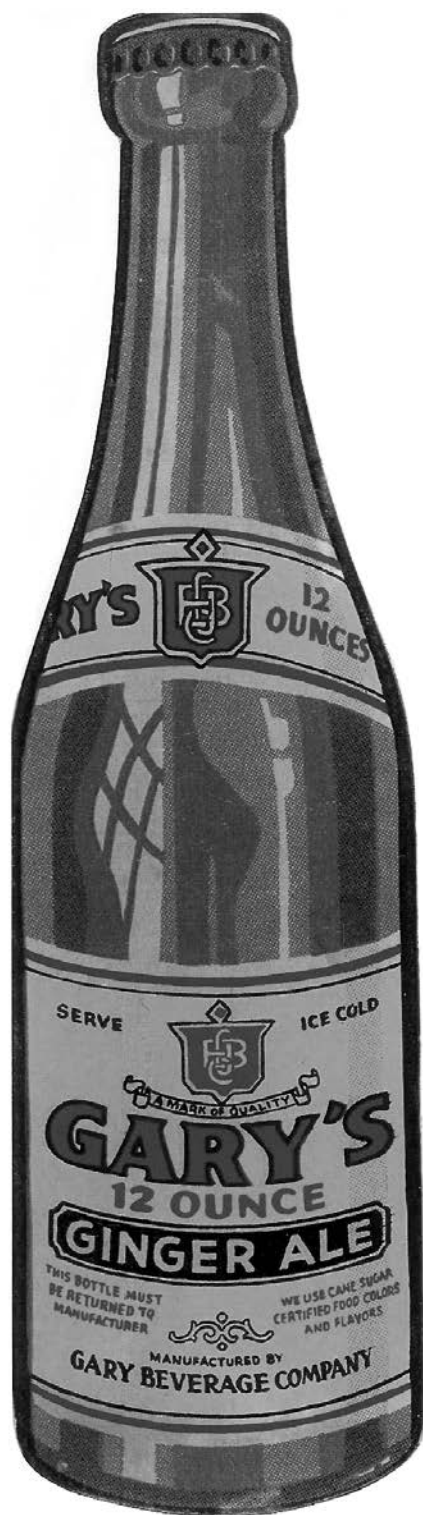
A decade later, Nick Gary met a glass company salesman in Charlotte. The salesman showed a small, thin bottle about half the size of a Coca-Cola bottle and its price was right – about half the cost of a Coke bottle. So the palate-pleasing drink called Tip was born, thanks to research by Joseph N. Gary Jr. It was made with dextrose with a slight bit of carbonation.

“I’d always heard it was father’s sister, Ruth, a school teacher, who came up with the name,” Tippy Thibodeau said. “She came up with the slogan Take a Tip: Drink a Tip.” Her father confirmed it.

“The Gary Beverage Company owned the Tip Company and started two franchises – one in Oklahoma and the other in Columbus, Georgia,” Fred Gary said. After he married Kathryn Flynn in 1938, they moved to Raleigh to be with the rest of the family in the bottling business. At the time, there were plants in Raleigh, High Point, Greenville and Charlotte. In August 1941, Fred was sent to Birmingham, Alabama



Gary Beverage Company staff in front of the Raleigh Auditorium about 1935. Fred Gary is on the front row’s extreme left. Elwyn Gary Sr. is on front row’s extreme right. Elwyn Gary Jr., is on back row’s extreme left. Others unidentified.



Above: Door sticker illustrating a green paper-labeled Gary's Ginger Ale bottle. Sticker was manufactured by Mystik Division, Chicago Show Printing Co.

Right: Tip Company stationery showing Birmingham, Ala., address, circa 1940s.



Unidentified staff of the Gary Beverage Co., in High Point about 1935.

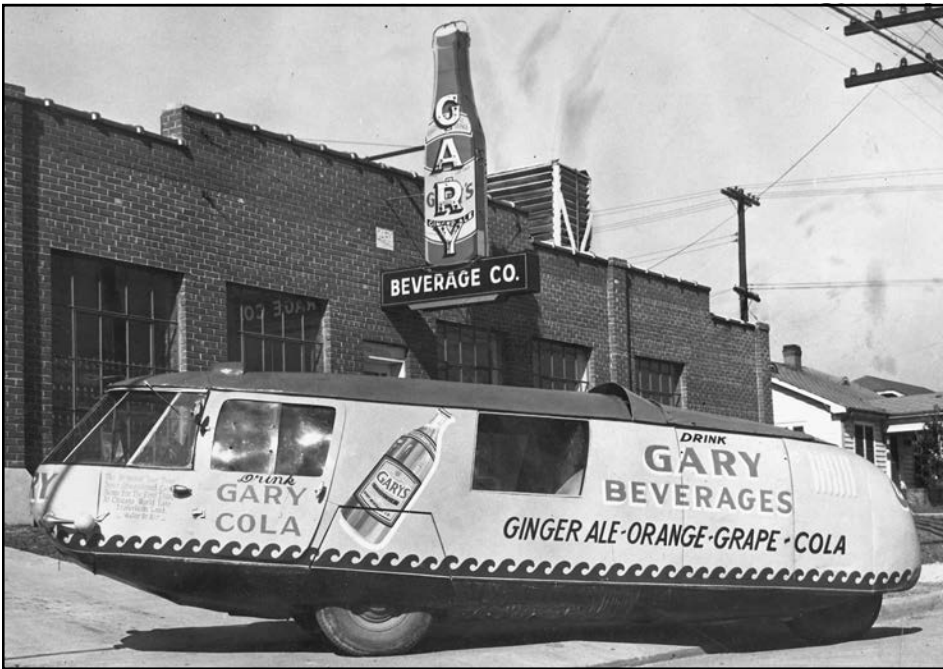


Gary Beverage Company delivery truck, driver in front of North Carolina's state capitol in Raleigh, circa 1935.

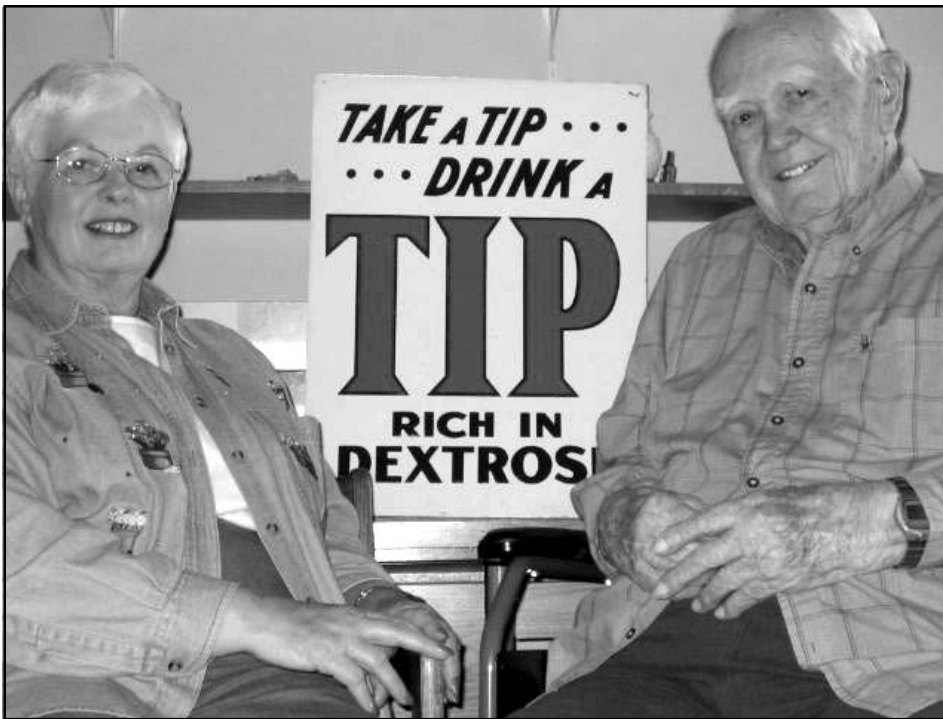


THE TIP COMPANY

104 - 14th STREET NORTH  
BIRMINGHAM, ALA.



Gary Beverage Company's Dymaxion car caught the attention of passers-by. It's sitting in front of the company plant on North Tryon Street in Charlotte about 1939.



The "stars" of the story: Tippy Gary Thibodeaux and Fred N. Gary in Coronado, California. (Photo by Dick Thibodeaux.)

where he had a contract with the Barq root beer company for it to bottle Tip.

Then the Japanese surprise attack at Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941 changed everything and the production of Tip in Birmingham ceased.

World War II created a hardship for many firms, limiting the available amount of sugar, gasoline and (truck) tires. During the

war years, the Tip Company was sold to the Dr. Pepper Bottling Company in Marion, Virginia, but went out of business about four years later. The Gary Beverage Company, with Elwyn Gary Sr., stayed in business in Charlotte, High Point and Durham, but it, too, eventually ceased operations during those tough times.

Nick Gary was drafted into the U.S. Army,



Illustration of a TIP bottle from an ad in the *American Carbonator & Bottler*. The 6-ounce bottles were lettered in white Applied Color Labeling with orange crown caps.

Elwyn Gary Jr., joined the U.S. Army Air Corps (stationed in England as a pilot, he flew 25 bombing missions over Germany in a B-17 Flying Fortress) and Fred Gary joined the Navy. The latter visited California during the war, liked the weather and retired there in 1963 where he has lived in the San Diego area ever since.