

The Root Family Museum

Story and Photos by Bill Baab

Visitors flock to this east coast Florida city in search of one thing: The thrills, chills and spills of professional stock car racing. And they find all of that at world-famous Daytona International Raceway.

Looking for a change of pace? A s-l-o-w change?

It can be found just down the road from the speedway at the Museum of Arts and Sciences at 1040 Museum Boulevard.

You don't have to be a collector of Coca-Cola memorabilia to enjoy the change, but it can help when you visit the museum within the museum, in this case the Root Family Museum occupying a wing of MOAS.

Let's hit the rewind button on this story and travel back in time for more than 100 years. As most collectors know, Coca-Cola entered the world in 1886. Joseph A. Biedenharn of Vicksburg, Miss., is credited with bottling Coca-Cola for the first time in 1894, using a Hutchinson bottle.

But the Hutchinson, which used an iron stopper and rubber washer to seal in the contents, was neither a sanitary nor a satisfactory container. It soon gave way (during the early 1900s) to the straight-sided Coca-Cola bottle with its cork-lined "crown" stopper.

The Root Glass Company of Terre Haute, Ind., was among the companies manufacturing the early Coca-Cola bottles. It embossed the base of its bottles with its own distinctive name — ROOT.

From 1900 to 1916, bottlers of Coca-Cola pretty much had their own way in

designing bottles to contain the drink. While Coca-Cola was always embossed on the bottle, bottlers sometimes added their own names such as was the case of W.L. Williams of Sandersville, Ga., whose straight-sided bottles bore his name in large block letters on their shoulders.

The Coca-Cola hierarchy decided if the drink was to reach national prominence, steps should be taken to standardize the shape of the bottle "so a person can recognize it as a Coca-Cola bottle when he feels it in the dark," explained one official.

So the company contacted each parent bottler and asked them to come up with such a design. A committee was formed to judge the design and at the bottlers' convention in Atlanta in 1916, the Root Glass Company's design, which was to become world famous, was chosen.

Bottles were blown in the shape of the modified final design, which was patented on Nov. 16, 1915. It was nearly four years later that the new contour-shaped bottle was being used universally. Main reason was, of course, there were millions of straight-sided Cokes in circulation and each bottler wanted to use them as long as possible.

The Coca-Cola contour bottle went unchanged until 1923 and then Chapman J. Root patented the bottle in his name. The only noticeable change was in the date — Dec. 25, 1923 — and the bottles were popularly called "Christmas Cokes."

The Roots sold the glass company in 1932 to concentrate on bottling Coca-Cola



This 1925 black Ford Model T truck hauled barrels of syrup to Coca-Cola bottlers.

At right is a 1922 Model T delivery. (Porcelain sign - upper left - late 1930s, \$850; Diamond sign, 1948-1952, \$500)

and in 1939 created Associated Coca-Cola Bottling Plants Inc., to consolidate its bottling facilities, according to a feature article in Central Florida Business in 1996.

During the next 30 years, the Roots' Associated Coca-Cola became the nation's largest independent Coke bottler with plants scattered from St. Louis and the Virgin Islands to New York to Florida. In 1982, the Roots decided to sell the bottling company back to Coca-Cola and did so for \$417.5 million, which netted the Roots \$238 million for their 57 percent share of the company, according to the article.

The Coca-Cola Company had acquired the contour bottle patent from Root in 1937.

So, when you walk into the Root Family Museum, it's like stepping into a time capsule — a veritable Coca-Cola collectors' Heaven.

The family not only collected Coca-Cola memorabilia, but was able to acquire most of it in pristine condition. The Roots didn't stop at bottles, coolers and signs, but included Ford trucks driven by Coke route men during the 1920s and 1930s.

The artifacts had been housed in the



Here is another view, with 1930s American Flyer kite on the wall. (1930s American Flyer kite, \$325; Crossing guard sign, \$1800)



The Root Glass Company of the 1920s in Terre Haute, Indiana. Unidentified machine at the left came from the factory.



A 1930 Ford Deluxe Sedan delivery truck sits below signs. From left: 1940s rectangular (\$700), 1934 round sign (\$650), 1934 bottle sign (\$650) and a 1914 straight-sided Coca-Cola sign (\$2000).

private Root museum in Daytona Beach until MOAS acquired the collection in early 2000, opening it to the public in the fall of 2001, according to museum officials.

Unfortunately, the family did not produce a color catalogue in which its fantastic collection could be pictured, but photography is allowed in the Root Museum. So the author shot up two 24-exposure rolls of Fuji 400 and a few of the best of the lot is featured with this article.

It's not like seeing the real thing "up close and personal" as someone said, so the next time you're in Florida, make it a point to see it for yourself.

Check out the museum's gift shop where, for a nominal price, you can purchase reproductions of the Hutchinson, straight-sided and contour bottles.

If you own a personal computer, check out the Museum of Arts and Sciences web site at www.moas.org. Or, you can write to MOAS, 1040 Museum Blvd., Daytona Beach, FL 32114. Enjoy!

References:

The Illustrated Guide to the Collectibles of Coca-Cola, by Cecil Munsey, 1972, Hawthorne Books, New York.

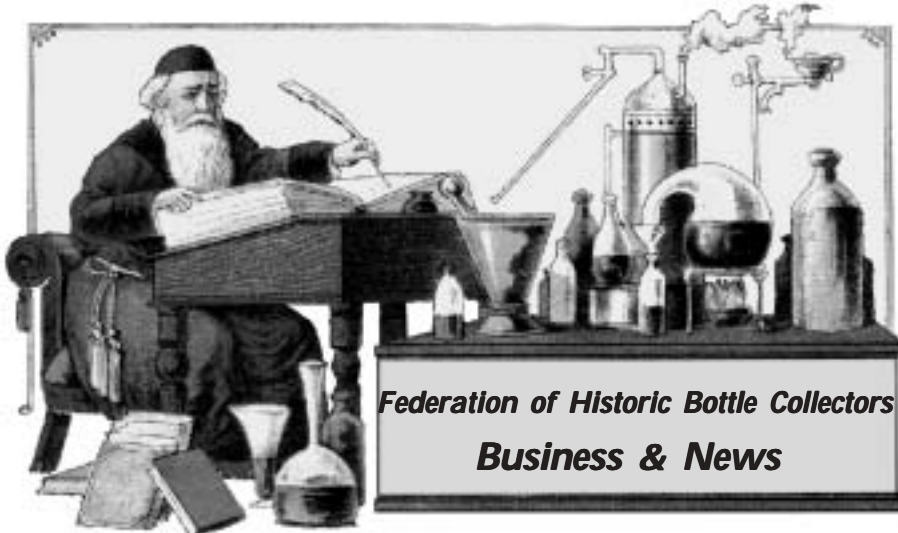
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Petretti's Coca-Cola Collectibles Price Guide, 11th Edition, Allan Petretti, 2001, Antique Traders Books, Krause Publications.

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Cigar store Indians pose in front of an early drug store adjacent to the Root Family Museum.



Federation of Historic Bottle Collectors Business & News

The Federation of Historical Bottle Collectors is a non-profit organization for collectors of historical bottles and related collectible items. Our primary goal is educational as it relates to the history and manufacture of historical bottles and related artifacts.

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