

Here's a huge Coke collection located in a small Georgia city (Near Augusta!)

By Bill Baab

A pleasant 80-mile drive down U.S. Highway 1 from Augusta through the middle Georgia communities of Wrens, Louisville, Wadley and on into Swainsboro will result in an unexpected view of a super collection of Coca-Cola memorabilia.



The collection was gathered over the years by Michael Bright, a former employee of the Summerville (S.C.) Coca-Cola Bottling Co.

Back in the early 1980s, he was asked if he'd like to make extra money by working one weekend and cleaning out the bottling plant attic.

He responded in the affirmative and was amazed to see the old signs and other Coke-related artifacts that had been up there gathering dust for many years. Once he learned the plan was to throw out everything, he asked if he could have the signs and other items and was told he could.



The result of that job is a vivid and astonishing display at the Swainsboro Coca-Cola Museum taking up a lot of the 12,000 square feet of the Main Street Market Antique Mall at 215 West Main Street in downtown Swainsboro. There is no admission charge to check out the huge collection of everything Coca-Cola. There is a large public parking area in the rear.

Mr. Bright, who turned 55 in October, also has a booth in the mall from which he sells Coke-related stuff, including reproduction signs that look good, but cost well under the going prices for The Real Thing.



Among other items is a Coke Fountain Dispenser, the first to have a continuing flow valve, he said, dating to 1949-58. It still works.

There are many bot-

tles covering Coca-Cola's era from the late 19th century to the present. There is a 1904 Coca-Cola tray among many others and calendars and other Coke memorabilia signed by the late Denmark, S.C., artist Jim Harrison, known for his country Coca-Cola sign-themed artwork.

Bright said it took him 3-1/2 years to build the collection and he later moved to Swainsboro where his wife had grown up. He found the mall the very best place to set up his collection, which is not for sale.

The mall itself has 60 different dealers represented and is one of the best laid-out and cleanest of its kind anywhere. Each dealer is encouraged to rearrange his (or her) stock from time to time, we were told.



The mall is open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m., to 5 p.m.

Should you

make the 1-1/2-hour trip in the morning during the week, there are a number of fine restaurants close by. Just ask Bright or any mall employee and they'll give you recommendations and information on how to get there.

For more information, visit www.swainsborococacolamuseum.com or [facebook.com/mainstreetmarket/swainsboro](https://www.facebook.com/mainstreetmarket/swainsboro).

