

COLLECTORS TO MOUNT DRIVE FOR JOHN RYAN MEMORIAL

By Paul Chance
Savannah, Georgia





Here are three super rare colored John Ryan Sodas

One of the most famous 19th century Georgia soda water bottlers was John Ryan. Born in Ireland, Ryan came to the United States as a youth and eventually joined the Irish community in Savannah, Georgia, in 1852.

He marked his Southern arrival by establishing his Excelsior Bottling Works that same year. Excelsior in Latin means “Ever Upward” and is the motto of New York State. Ryan was ever moving his business upward and it eventually became the port city’s largest manufacturer of soda waters, mineral waters and other beverages.

But it wasn’t until well after his death March 25, 1885, that the glass containers in which his beverages were packaged became sought after by 20th century collectors of antique bottles not for their shapes, but their colors.

While most of his sodas and mineral water bottles were in sparkling cobalt blue, there also are examples in a wide



Two more examples of John Ryan bottles, cobalt blue bottle is dated 1859 and a yellow green example dated 1852

Left: Longtime bottle collector Paul Chance has joined the campaign to erect a monument on the now unmarked grave of Savannah soda bottler John Ryan.



Here is a grouping of John Ryans with a multitude of color and shapes. John Ryan bottle photos courtesy of Mike Newman

variety of other colors including red, pink, emerald green and yellow. Most of the bottles were blown in northern glass works such as the Union Glass Works in Philadelphia, Pa., so during the Civil War Ryan's business struggled to stay open. The Federal blockade of Southern ports made it difficult for him to obtain replacement bottles and cork stoppers.

After the war, Ryan resumed operations and established branch

soda operations in Augusta (1866), Atlanta (1867) and Columbus (1883).

While the famous bottler's final resting place is in the old Catholic Cathedral Cemetery on Savannah's Wheaton Street, his grave site is unmarked for unknown reasons. Cemetery records indicate the plot contains multiple graves, most likely family members.



Many bottle collectors, including this writer, have become offended by the lack of a monument or memorial on the grave of one of America's best known pioneers in the soda water manufacturing business.

I am urging the establishment of a memorial fund to pay for a suitable marker and, once it is in place, to hold a graveside service in commemoration of his life and achievements.

An address to which contributions can be mailed has been set up.

Checks should be made out to the John Ryan Memorial Fund and sent to P.O. Box 9491, Savannah, GA 31412-9491.

The goal is to raise \$5,000. Once the marker has been chosen, everybody will be notified of a day and time when a memorial service will be conducted at the grave site.

