

NuGrape

A FLAVOR YOU CAN'T FORGET

A youngster attending his first professional baseball game discovered a soft drink guaranteed to make the driest throat happy on a hot day.

Do you remember your first baseball game? How about your first bottle of NuGrape? I do, because they happened the same day. When I was seven or eight years old, my dad took me to my first Atlanta Crackers ballgame, where I enjoyed my first NuGrape.

I was born in 1951, so I grew up with Babe Ruth, Mickey Mantle, Sandy Koufax, Roger Maris...well, you know the names, if you're from that era. Every red-blooded American kid that I knew, including me, loved baseball. We collected baseball cards. We played Little League. We played the game every chance we got, including afternoons after school and on Saturdays. We carried our baseball gloves with us everywhere. We even slept with them under our pillows. We played catch with our dads and our friends. Life revolved around baseball.

My dad ran an old-fashioned Texaco gas station in west Atlanta. He worked there every Monday through Saturday, so the only day he had off was Sunday. One Sunday, when he wasn't too tired, he took me to see my first "AA League" Atlanta Crackers baseball game at Ponce de Leon Park. I can't remember the exact date or the name of the opposing team, but I remember the smells that only a baseball park had back then.

It was a combination of hotdogs and roasted peanuts, freshly mowed grass, red Georgia clay, Neatsfoot oil, and probably a hundred other things. There was row after row of hard wooden seats, huge concrete columns holding up a massive roof, and thousands of people. I had never seen anything like it, and I took it all in. It was one of the happiest days of my childhood, my first "real" baseball game with my dad.

I remember men walking up and down the aisles, selling all kinds of food and drinks. Dad called out to one of them, "Two bags of peanuts and a couple

MIKE H. BROWN

of NuGrapes!" Dad passed the man the money. The man passed Dad the peanuts and NuGrapes. And that was it...my first ball game and my first bottle of NuGrape on one of the best days of my life. What more could a kid ask for? It was a slice of kid heaven.

That was about the same time Dad decided I was old enough to help out around the station, so over the next several years I spent a lot of time there. I worked mostly on Saturdays, when it was too cold to play baseball, and sometimes

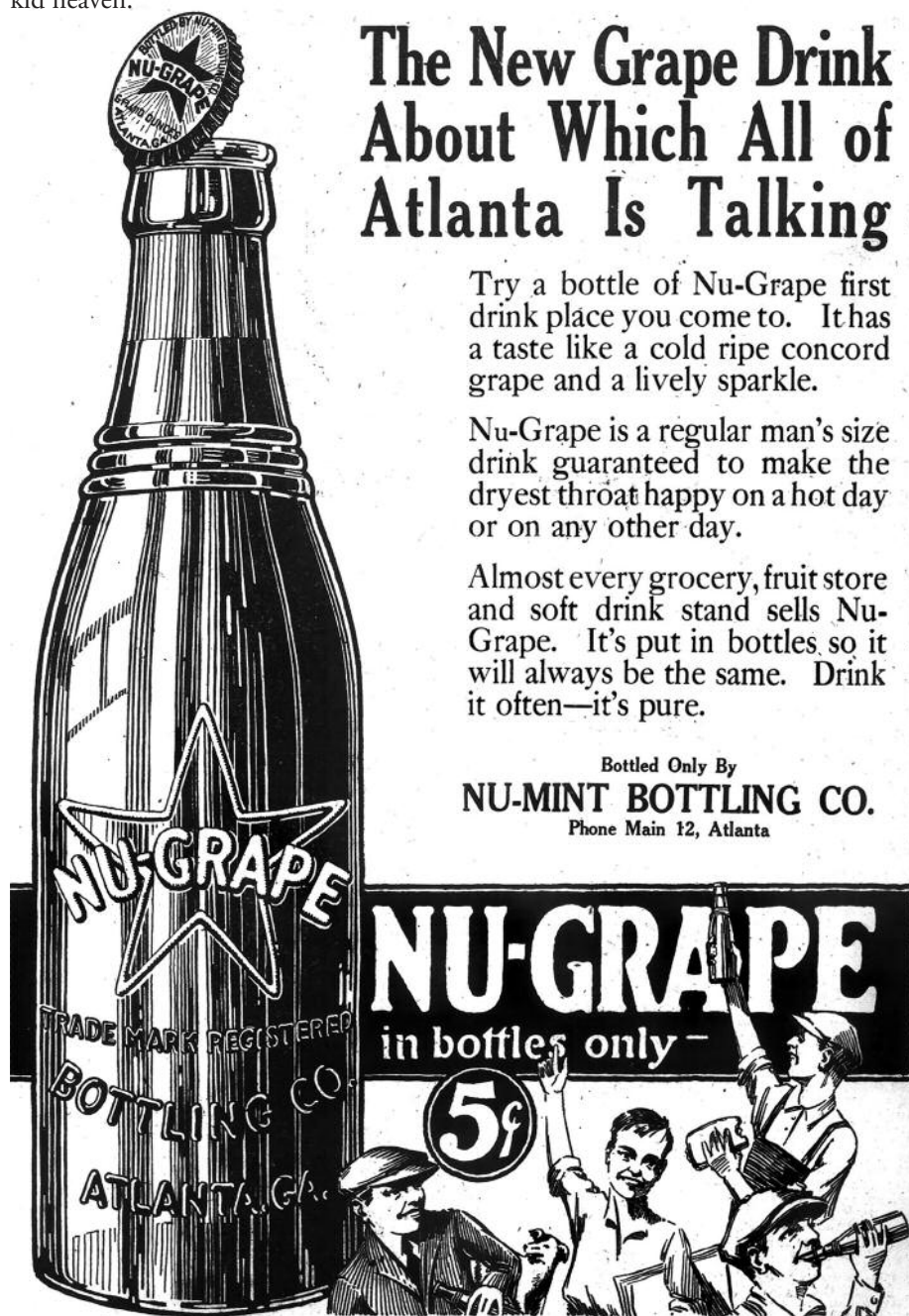
The New Grape Drink About Which All of Atlanta Is Talking

Try a bottle of Nu-Grape first drink place you come to. It has a taste like a cold ripe concord grape and a lively sparkle.

Nu-Grape is a regular man's size drink guaranteed to make the driest throat happy on a hot day or on any other day.

Almost every grocery, fruit store and soft drink stand sells Nu-Grape. It's put in bottles so it will always be the same. Drink it often—it's pure.

Bottled Only By
NU-MINT BOTTLING CO.
Phone Main 12, Atlanta



in the summer, when school was out. I swept up, put air in tires and set out stock, like candy bars and bubblegum, chips and crackers, and filled the cooler with soft drinks. It was the coolest place I ever saw.

I tried every chip, cracker, pie and candy bar in the store; every drink too: Coke, Pepsi, R.C. Cola (with a Moon Pie), Dr. Pepper, Nehi and Bierley's, Red Rock Ginger Ale, Frostie Root Beer, 7-Up, Orange Crush... if Dad sold it, I tried it. I had lots of favorites, which changed many times over the years. But I always loved NuGrape. And today, it's the only soft-drink you can always find in my refrigerator.

Now, if all of that wasn't reason enough to be a huge NuGrape fan, there are all the incredible signs, really cool bottles, and tons of advertising doodads. On top of that, NuGrape has an interesting and colorful history.

I wish I could start at the very beginning, but I still don't know exactly when

and where NuGrape originated, or who came up with the formula, or why the earliest ads show bottles that none of my collector friends have ever seen. There is a Wikipedia article claiming that "In 1906, John James Mangham and a fellow pharmacist concocted the formula for NuGrape in Bremen, Georgia." But when a Bremen historian asked Mangham's grandchildren about it at my request, they had no knowledge of it. I do know that NuGrape was first sold in Atlanta by the NuMint Bottling Co. located at 168/170 Peters Street.

Kelley Brothers, a wholesale grocer in Atlanta since 1887, started the bottling company called NuMint. The earliest ad I could find for NuMint appeared in the *Atlanta Constitution* on April 20, 1919 (Dad's fourth birthday) and just in that one issue. Depicting a drinking glass but no bottle, it encouraged readers: "Don't Wait until July the 1st—get a glass today." It's possible that NuMint was only a fountain drink prior to that July 1st,

when it then became available in bottles.

Details about NuMint's origins are just as elusive as NuGrape's, but there is no doubt that the Kelley Brothers first introduced both to the public. It seems logical that a drink called NuMint would be mint flavored, but there was no mention of its flavor in any of the ads I've seen.

NuMint was a rising star in the Atlanta soft drink market, but its fame was short-lived. The last mention of NuMint (the beverage) that I could find was in the *Atlanta Constitution* on September 28, 1919. The NuMint company was still around, but the drink had ended just as mysteriously as it began.

The first ad for NuGrape appeared on May 1, 1921. The ad said: "Bottled by The NuMint Bottling Company" and featured an illustration of what might have been the first NuGrape bottle. It looked exactly like a NuMint bottle except for the name. For just five cents, a bottle of NuGrape was guaranteed "to make the driest throat happy on a hot

These bottles appeared in NuGrape ads but no physical examples are known to exist.



Bottle design in 1923 patent application.



Actual NuGrape bottle.



day or any other day.”

I’ve never seen a bottle like the one depicted in the ad, so whether it ever existed is a mystery. A.E. Kelley, president of NuGrape at that time, submitted his own bottle design to the U. S. Patent Office on February 2, 1922, and received the patent on January 23, 1923. Numerous bottles based on Kelley’s design are collected today, all bearing the slogan: “A Flavor You Can’t Forget.”

NuGrape advertised regularly and employed all sorts of gimmicks and public relations promotions to entice the public. NuGrape’s newspaper ads were some of the most creative and artistic in the industry. Gimmicks included sponsoring baseball and softball teams and giving away samples of NuGrape at grocery stores, movie theatres, and grand opening events. Two of their many promotions were unique to NuGrape: the Human Fly and the NuGrape Twins.

I was about 15 when I heard about the daredevil Evel Knievel. He did all kinds of crazy stunts on motorcycles during the late 1960s and ‘70s and “broke every bone in his body,” or so it was said. But long before Evel was born, in 1938, there was the even more death-defying, and some say gravity-defying, Human Fly.

His name was Harry H. Gardiner. An illusionist and acrobat, Gardiner was born in 1871 and is thought to have died in 1933. He started climbing the sides of buildings in 1905 and made more than 700 ascents during his career. He wore ordinary clothes and shoes and had no special equipment. He attracted lots of imitators but is still the undisputed king of the climbers. An unofficial count of 120 men who took up this hazardous profession would fall to their deaths.

Dubbed the Human Fly after climbing the 159-foot flagstaff atop Grant’s Tomb in New York City, Gardiner was sponsored by NuGrape as early as March 1, 1923. The company covered his expenses so that the proceeds of his events could be donated to charity. The March 1, 1923, event took place in Orlando, Florida. For more than an hour, some 10,000 spectators watched

spellbound as he scaled the 11-story high-rise, Angebilt. The proceeds were donated to the Elk’s Club to build a home for “the friendless girls of the city.”

During his ascents, Gardiner would frequently yell to the crowd, “Don’t Forget;” to which the crowd yelled back, “NuGrape!” Gardiner always refreshed himself after a climb with a bottle of NuGrape.

The last Human Fly climb I’ve been able to document was of the Cumberland Hotel in New Jersey in 1929. Soon thereafter, Gardiner was forced to abandon his profession in the United States. So many climbers had fallen that it became virtually impossible to acquire a climbing permit. He went to Europe and plied his trade there, never returning to America. In 1933 a severely beaten body was found near the Eiffel Tower in Paris. It appeared to be a case of foul play. Though some believed the body to be that of Harry Gardiner, it was never proven. His fate remains a mystery to this day.

The NuGrape Twins often accompanied the Human Fly. The Twins, Mark and Matthew Little, were born in Tennille, Georgia, in 1888. They worked for NuGrape for many years, though I haven’t been able to ascertain exactly how many.

The NuGrape Twins were gifted singers who sometimes performed while the Human Fly was scaling a building. In one case, they performed atop the metal awning above the main entrance while Gardiner worked his way up the building’s face. The Twins, known for their unusual style of harmony, recorded several old-time gospel numbers and two NuGrape songs. Look on YouTube for “NuGrape: A Flavor You Can’t Forget” and “I Got Your Ice Cold NuGrape.”

When NuGrape introduced its Nu Icy line of beverages at the open house for the new Atlanta plant on April 15, 1928, the Twins were there. That may have been when they were first called the Nu Icy Twins. The only photo I’ve been able to find of the Nu Icy Twins accompanied a short article in the *Jackson (Miss.) Ledger* on May 18, 1929.

Even as the Twins were singing and

Unless In This
Distinctive Bottle
---It’s a Substitute



NuGrape Bottling Co.,
423 Seventh Avenue, South,
Main 5267. Nashville, Tenn.

NuGrape
A FLAVOR YOU CANT FORGET

the Human Fly climbing, NuGrape was beset with copy-cats. NuGrape was so successful that knockoffs seemed to slink out of every alley in Atlanta... and elsewhere. Three that I know of were Grape-Dew, Mi-Grape and Tru-Grape.

Hard-to-distinguish bottles were another challenge. NuGrape’s answer was to come up with a clever bottle design that would stand out from all the rest. The new design would be expensive and difficult to copy, and to do so would violate the trademark. NuGrape turned to



Here is a cork opener and a trio of promotional Pens to the right

Chapman J. Root, of the famed Root Glass Company, who came up with a unique design. A patent was applied for on July 30, 1925, but wasn't granted until April 12, 1932. Meanwhile, Root used the patent date from one of his earlier, similar designs on new bottles.

The new bottle design was unique in its day and truly set NuGrape apart from its competitors. It sported the famous "three rings" raised around the bottle neck that had been a feature of every earlier version of the NuGrape bottle. The company spread the word through advertising that the "3 rings" distinguished its products from those of copycat competitors: "3 rings around the bottle is a genuine NuGrape," one ad campaign emphasized. Anything else was an inferior imitation.

With a new and distinctive bottle to eliminate brand confusion, the advertising campaign went into overdrive. NuGrape appeared at more events than ever before. This bottle, often called the "Mae West" or the "Double-Bubble" because of its "pinched waist" design, was featured on all manner of doo-dads that were given away at all manner of goings-on. You know, like: "What's goin' on downtown today?" "Why there's a grand opening goin' on at the new drug-store" or grocery store, hardware store, appliance store, furniture store, drive-in, gas station, bowling alley, roller rink, and pretty much anything that could draw a crowd.

I don't know whether it's possible to compile a complete list of all the merchandise NuGrape gave away, but here are some of the items I'm aware of: rulers, pencils (the kind you sharpen, and mechanical ones too), ink pens, ice picks, wooden match holders made of copper, soda jerk hats, pocket knives, shaving razors, coasters, ink blotters and bottle openers. NuGrape also gave away free bottles, cartons (six packs), cases of the beverage, and, in Birmingham, Alabama, mail boxes. I



would love to see one of those.

NuGrape also sponsored contests, sporting events, teams and leagues (ten pins, bowling, softball and baseball) and even had a one-hour radio show in several cities.

While the Kelley bottle lasted only about three years, the Double-Bubble was around a lot longer. It was finally replaced by a bottle similar in shape, but with a painted label and flatter sides, around 1941. So the Double-Bubble bottle had an impressive run of about 20 years.

There was plenty of controversy about NuGrape's formula. In 1925, the Federal Trade Commission ordered the company to remove images or depictions of grapes and grape vines from its ads and include "Imitation Grape—Not Grape Juice" on the bottle or label. Many of the Double-Bubble bottles have this disclaimer prominently embossed on the side, just below the name.

This did not sit well with NuGrape, so the company altered its formula by adding "Fritsboro True Grape Aromatics," a grape product of the Fritzsche Brothers Flavoring and Fragrance Co. Then the company removed the "Imitation Grape" disclaimer from its products.

That, in turn, did not sit well with the Federal Trade Commission. In 1931, the FTC ordered NuGrape to resume the "Imitation Grape" disclaimer. In response, NuGrape teamed with Welch's grape juice to find a solution.

On January 19, 1932, a large ad in the *Palm Beach Post* announced "The New NuGrape—Made with Welch's Grape Juice." It was, the ad proclaimed, "The Triumph of Beverage Perfection."

The ad featured a beautiful cluster of grapes with the sun rising over a vineyard. The grapes were back, and the pretty girls were once again standing under the arbors in their beautiful gowns, smiling and holding bottles of NuGrape. The sun was shining...the birds were singing...and NuGrape was leaping off the shelves.

NuGrape had many more ups and downs and experienced myriad changes in later years. But unlike almost all of its competitors, NuGrape still survives. Today there are actually two types of NuGrape, the modern corn syrup version in cans and plastic bottles and the nostalgic "original recipe" (as they call it) version, sold only in glass bottles and made with pure cane sugar. I only drink the cane sugar version because it's waaaay better. You can find it at Cracker Barrel restaurants, World Market stores, and many other places. The NuGrape Twins and the Human Fly are no more, but NuGrape is as tasty as ever.

Well, as they say, all good things must come to end, and so it is with my story. There is much more to tell, enough for a book I think, but I must wrap this up. So, let me leave you with a request: Have yourself a bottle of "Ice Cold NuGrape" (with pure cane sugar) and a bag of hot-roasted peanuts. Think about days gone by. Remember your first baseball game. And ENJOY! ▀

Mike Brown is a writer and retired design engineer in Mableton. Readers with additional NuGrape information, stories to tell, or memorabilia to sell may contact him at nugrapekid@gmail.com.