

Klee and

by Steve Lang



Three different embossed Indianapolis, Klee and Coleman bottles

Coleman

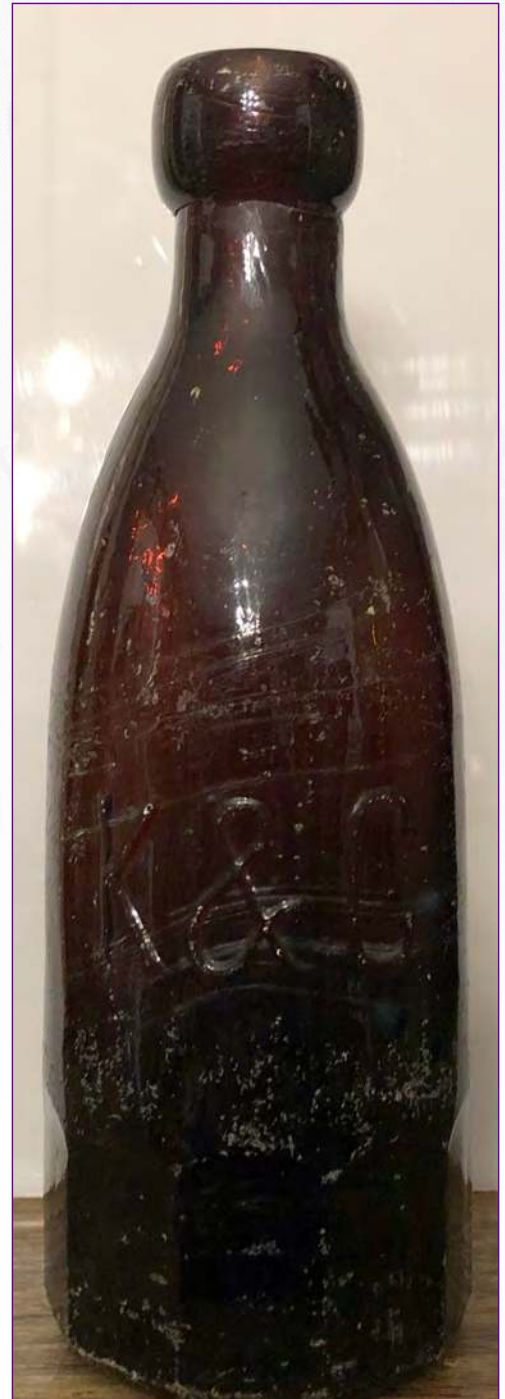
Klee and Coleman was a mineral water manufacturer and bottler of beer and soda for an amazing 80 years in Indianapolis. From 1880 to 1960 they were located on South Delaware never moving more than a couple of blocks. That type of stability and longevity was not typical back then or even today.

John Klee came to Dayton, Ohio from Germany in 1866 and started a bottling company. Wanting to expand his business, John Klee and Henry C. Coleman purchased the Indianapolis based mineral water manufacturing company A. Reed & Company (1868-1879) from A.B Reed (relative?). They announced themselves successors to the Reed Company in an Indianapolis News want ad on January 29th, 1880. The 1880 ad lists mineral water, sparkling champagne cider and being sole agents for Belfast ginger ale and seltzer water. John Klee passed away on August 3, 1913 leaving his older sons Oscar and Oliver Klee running the Dayton Soda business.

In the early days of the company there were small articles in the Indianapolis Newspapers about the K&C workers and injuries they suffered. Henry Ritter, a wagon driver, was overcome by the heat around 11am on July 20th, 1885 and laid down at an adjoining lumber yard where he was found at 2pm in critical condition from exposure. They also had a bottle burst during the filling process and injured Albert Fayh on August 4, 1887. Fayh was filling a ginger ale bottle when the gas in the fluid burst the bottle in his face. A piece of glass hit his right eye and it had to be removed. The Indianapolis Journal article states "and his face greatly disfigured".



John Klee and Henry C. Coleman purchased the Indianapolis-based mineral water manufacturing company A. Reed & Company (1868-1879)




Early Klee and Coleman bottle from Indianapolis, similar to the A. Reed in Style

While John Klee & Henry Coleman remained in Dayton, they employed Simon Leidigh as manager of their Indianapolis Branch. Leidigh is shown as having his residence at the plant address. He remained manager through 1882 when he moved to Louisville to manage the new Klee plant there. Wesley E. Heindel replaced Leidigh as the Indianapolis manager. Heindel was manager until sometime in 1885 when Martin R. Styer was named the new manager. Styer had started working for K & C in 1882.

Styer was the Manager of Klee & Coleman until January 12th, 1889 when he announced he was leaving K & C to start his own mineral water manufacturing business. Styer was in business for himself for 5 years before returning to Klee & Coleman as a driver. William H. Miller had replaced Styer as manager when he left and held

J. KLEE. H. COLEMAN.

KLEE & COLEMAN,
MANUFACTURERS OF
MINERAL WATERS
SPARKLING CHAMPAGNE CIDER.
WESTERN PRIDE,
Ginger Ale and Seltzer Water
Portable Fountains Charged on Short Notice. Fountains to Rent.
DELAWARE STREET, INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA.
M. R. STYER, Manager.



Ad for Klee and Coleman's Mineral Waters, Ginger Ales and Seltzer Water



Martin R. Styer left K & C to start his own mineral water manufacturing business



Three different styles of embossing on these Klee and Coleman Hutchinson style bottles



Three different seltzer bottles, two etched and one Applied Color Label

the position for 17 years. Miller was involved in a 1904 scandal involving his daughter Gertrude's husband D.H. Roberts who was the Superintendent of the Bottlers' exchange. Roberts was accused of leaving town for California (without Gertrude!) and with several hundred dollars of his employer's money. In 1907 Miller committed suicide. He left a suicide note making it known that he was under stress due to the 1907 investigation into alleged theft of thousands of bottles from the Yunker Bottling Company. J.S. Yunker stated in the Indianapolis Star article that appeared on Jan 26, 1907 that during the course of his investigation



Ads for the various drinks that Klee and Coleman sales

he discovered that 12 crates of his bottles had been shipped to A.P. Klee, a bottler in Piqua, Ohio. A.P. Klee or Alfred Klee is the youngest son of John Klee and would eventually take over as President of the Indianapolis Branch in 1920.

Styer returned to the Manager position after Miller's death and held the position until 1929 when he became a bookkeeper for the company before retiring in 1930. Styer worked for Klee & Coleman for an amazing 47 years...more than half the time K & C was open in Indianapolis. He passed away in 1931.

All through Prohibition, Klee & Coleman sold cereal beverages from Falls City in Louisville along with sodas in several flavors including Orange, Grape, Peach Whip and Cherry Blossom. In 1920 at the same address as Klee & Coleman, the Indianapolis city directory lists the Whistle Bottling Works. There are ads in the Indianapolis Newspapers that state K&C were bottlers of Whistle. This continued into 1921 and disappears after. Also sold during prohibition was Green River Soda which was a snappy lime drink according to their ads. In 1925 K&C started bottling and distributing Orange Squeeze Soda as well as adding Kay-O & Grapeola to their line-up in the following years.



Later Klee and Coleman bottles, probably filled with peach whip or grape soda



ACL Squeeze pop bottle from Klee and Coleman

Alfred Klee continued running the business and brought on Clarence H. Mack to replace Styer as the General Manager. An ad in the December 30th, 1933 Indianapolis Star lists Klee & Coleman as distributors of 7-up, a Lithiated Lemon Soda – the one perfect mixer. This would put K&C earlier than Tom Joyce in the distribution of Seven Up in Indianapolis. They continued distributing Falls City products locally switching from the Prohibition cereal beer to their Hi-Bru Beer. Hi-Bru was very popular in town and was even the only beer served at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway for several years. In 1935 they added Virginia Dare Ginger Ale to their product line.



SPECIAL CONSTRUCTED BEER TRUCK—Shown above is one of a fleet of special built refrigerated bodies on General Motors Model T-16L truck sold to Klee & Coleman, Fall City beer distributor. This type of body, built by Broeckel Body Company, assures the transportation of Fall City beer from Louisville to Indianapolis in perfect condition. The trucks were sold by F. L. Williamson of the General Motors Truck Company factory branch, 31 West Thirteenth street.

Special Truck constructed for Klee and Coleman for the transportation of beer

Mack stepped up to the President's position in 1936 and introduced Klee's Trule Beverage. 1938 saw K&C start distributing Anheuser-Busch Budweiser Beer and Howels Root Beer in addition to Falls City Beer and other sodas. In 1942 they added Nichol Kola. After World War II ended, Fehrs began being distributed in Indianapolis by K & C and would continue until they closed. Mack was the President of the company until they shut their doors in 1960 after 24 years of leadership.

