

# After John Ryan

By Tod von Mechow



One of the last John Ryan bottles.

Much has been written on John Ryan and his Excelsior Bottling Works in Savannah, Georgia. However, the dates on the end of his ownership are varied and that of his successors are not well known. Hopefully this article will clear things up.

John Ryan founded the Excelsior Bottling Works in 1852 after relocating to Savannah. The Works were eventually listed at 110 and 112 Broughton street. Ryan was last listed in the Savannah City Directory as Excelsior's owner in 1882 and is listed as retired in 1883. What is interesting is the quick succession of ownership of these works over the next seven years, with almost one owner each year!

But why did Ryan sell his business? Towards the end of 1881, Ryan published the following advertisement indicating that his business suffering from stolen bottles. The ad ran from November 1st thru the 5th in the *Savannah Morning News*:

#### NOTICE.

*SODA WATER is supplied only on conditions that those who receive it become responsible for the bottles and return them to me when empty.*

*They have no right to sell, lend, give away, use them for other purposes, neither to allow other manufacturers to purloin and use them, as has been done. The present loss of bottles is ruinous. I trust my patrons will be more careful of them.*

*JOHN RYAN,  
110 Broughton street.*

You can see that the “loss of bottles” was “ruinous” and was having a financial impact on the business. A short time later Ryan was fighting two lawsuits. One was filed by Frederick Meincke over accounts. Meincke was somehow associated with Ryan and, in an 1881 advertisement offering a grocery/liquor store for rent, Meincke listed Ryan's bottling works as the location where he could be contacted. The Meincke suit must have had merit as the judge in the case appointed an auditor to review the accounts. While this case was progressing, Ryan ran the following advertisement in the *Savannah Morning News* on April 14, 1882:

#### *Business Opportunity.*

*THE undersigned, on account of poor health, which prevents him from giving to business the attention it should have, would take an active man with some capital as partner or sell to one wishing to purchase. Would give all necessary instructions to conduct the same.*

*JOHN RYAN*

*Manufacturer and Bottler of Soda and Mineral Waters, 110 and 112 Broughton street, Savannah, Ga.*

“Poor health” only compounded the pressures on Ryan's business. Although there is no clear transfer of ownership of Ryan's business, it appears to have been sold to Meincke & Ebberwein sometime between April 15 and June 15, 1882. George Ebberwein was formerly a grocer in Savannah and Frederick Meincke was the litigant in lawsuits against Ryan.

Interestingly these lawsuits were settled on July 8. Even though the names of Meincke & Ebberwein were misspelled and rearranged as Ebberwine & Minche, the following advertisement indicates that they had bought Ryan's business by the time this notice appeared in the June 17, 1882 *Savanna Morning News*:

#### *A Card*

*A notice appeared in yesterday's News, over the name of James Ray, that he had discharged me from his service. Mr. Ray's statement is false. I asked him to pay me more wages, which he refused to do. I then quit Mr. Ray, and was immediately employed by Ebberwine & Minche, successors to John Ryan, who pay me fifty per cent more wages than Mr. Ray did, and I am now selling soda water to Mr. Ray's customers - and that's what's the matter with Hannah.*

GEORGE CAMPSER

The first advertisement from Meincke & Ebberwein as to the purchased Ryan's business is this one that first appeared in the July 25, 1882 edition of the *Savannah Morning News*:

#### *Notice to the Public.*

*ALL persons are notified that we claim ownership in all soda water bottles now in circulation bearing the name of John Ryan, Von Harten, Premium Mineral Water and Trusow & Co., and no one has the right to buy, see or use them.*

**MEINCKE & EBBERWEIN,**  
Successors to John Ryan,  
SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

This ownership is supported by their entry in the 1883 *Savannah Directory* and their bottles, which are embossed 1882. This continued a long-standing tradition of Ryan dating his bottles.

Ryan's poor health caught up with him and he died on March 22, 1885 at age 59. The following notice appeared on in the March 23, 1885 edition of the *Savannah Morning News*:

#### *Death of John Ryan*

*Mr. John Ryan, an old citizen of Savannah, died at his residence, corner of Hall and Barnard streets, yesterday. The deceased was born in New York City, and came to Savannah in 1853, engaging in the manufacture of soda water. He was successful in his business, which he extended to Augusta, Macon, Columbus and other interior places, and amassed a competency. Falling in health, he retired from business about six years ago. He was prominently identified with the city's interests, and was widely known. His funeral will take place at the Cathedral at 11 o'clock this morning.*

The partnership of Meincke & Ebberwein did not last long either. On October 1, 1883, this partnership was dissolved and Frederick Meincke became the surviving partner, as noted in the October 4, 1883 edition of the *Savannah Morning News*:

#### *Notice to the Public.*

*THE firm of MEINCKE & EBBERWEIN was dissolved on the first day of October. The undersigned will carry on the business as heretofore, and will be responsible for all debts. Parties indebted will please come forward and settle, and those having claims are requested to present them at once for payment. F. MEINCKE.*

Meincke is listed in the 1884 directory as the Successor to John Ryan, but his bottles are marked as 1882, as it appears that he modified the existing molds from the previous partnership instead of incurring the expense of having new molds made. Ebberwein went on to establish his own soda water bottling business at 232 Bay in 1885. To quell a rumor of his death, a ploy used by competitor to steal business, Meincke had the following published on January 25, 1884 in the *Savannah Morning News*:

#### *He is Not dead.*

*Mr. F. Meincke, successor to John Ryan, manufacturer of soda and mineral water, No. 110 and 112 Broughton street, announces that he is not dead, as reported, but is alive and prepared as usual to supply his customers.*

But unfortunately, this rumor was just slightly premature. Meincke expired under a month later as documented in *Savannah Morning News* on February 24, 1884:

#### *Death of Mr. Frederick Meincke.*

*Mr. Frederick Meincke, formerly of the firm of Meincke & Ebberwein, soda water manufacturers, died in this city last night, at 10:30 o'clock, after a protracted illness superinduced by cancer in the stomach. The deceased was a member in the 51st year of his age. He was a member of*



**RIGHT:** Meincke & Ebberwein were successors to Ryan in 1882.



*the Washington Fire Company and the German Volunteers. A few days ago the deceased sold his interest in the soda-water manufactory to Mr. M. T. Quinan, and was to have retired from participation in the business on the 1st proximo. The funeral notice will appear to-morrow.*

In a March 20, 1884 notice and advertisement, Michael T. Quinan advertised he had purchased the works. Quinan was a saloon owner and grocer, but prior to purchasing the works he was a clerk for Meincke. He is listed as the owner of the works in the 1885 *Directory* and his bottles bear the 1884 date. Quinan was also the secretary of the local Liquor Dealers Association in 1884 and 1885.



Frederick Meincke bottles date from 1883-1884, not 1882 as marked.

But things were not going well for Quinan. His ads stopped on March 20, 1885, exactly a year after they started. Eight days later a Sheriff Sale notice for the soda works appeared for March 31. Somehow he seems to have evaded the Sheriff and ran an advertisement on April 8, 1885 in the *Savannah Daily News* looking for a buyer or partner:

*FOR SALE, the Soda Water Manufactory at 110 and 112 Broughton street; or party with smaall (sic) capital will be taken as partner. Inquire on the premise.*

This advertisement must have caught the eye of James Ray, the longtime competitor of John Ryan and his successors. Ray, being a shrewd businessman, saw an opportunity in the consolidation of Quinan's business with his and the two partnered. But Ray did not partner with Michael T., but with his wife, Mrs. Winfred Quinan, as documented in the notice in the *Savannah Morning News* on May 10, 1885:

*RAY & QUINAN,*

*MANUFACTURERS and bottlers of SODA and MINERAL WATERS, BITTERS, SYRUPS, CORDIAL, SIPHONS, etc., beg leave to notify the public that they have formed a copartnership under the above name, the business to be carried on at*

*110 AND 112 BROUGHTON STREET.*

*where we are prepared to furnish goods in our line of a superior quality and promise to give satisfaction.*

*Country orders will be promptly attended to. We ask a trial to convince all of our ability to meet any demand. Respectfully, RAY & QUINAN.*

*TELEPHONE 232.*

The old Excelsior Bottling Works must have been at a much better location than where Ray had been operating for the past 17 years, and Ray saw an opportunity to move to this better place. Ray also realized that the only suppliers of charged "foun-

tains" or canisters for soda fountains were his business and that of Quinan. If they consolidated, they would have a virtual monopoly on that line of the trade. Ray reported this in *The Industries of Savannah* published in 1886 on the firm of Ray & Quinan:

*The firm has fifty fountains which it supplies throughout the city, and it is the only firm here performing that service.*

This is further supported by the first action the firm took on May 11, 1885, one day after their founding, to raise the prices of "Charged Fountains" to "\$2 each" as announced in the *Savannah Morning News*.

This firm appears to have been successful and stayed in place for nearly three years. Unfortunately, there are no known bottles from this firm, as they were likely using bottles from all of the predecessor firms, including those of Ray. Later these bottles would be an item of contention. The existence of this firm is supported by directory listings and other documents of the time. One thing is certain, there was nowhere near the level of advertising by this firm as opposed to the all of the predecessor firms at this location. I was only able to find one advertisement after the initial two.

In 1888, the Ray & Quinan partnership was dissolved and Ray was listed as retired. Michael T. Quinan was now partnering with Victor S. Studer as Quinan & Studer. Victor was previously a grocer and saloon owner. The announcement of the new firm was in the *Savannah Morning News* on February 5, 1888:

*TO THE PUBLIC.*

*SAVANNAH, Feb. 4, 1888.*

*The firm of RAY & QUINAN was dissolved THIS DAY. The undersigned, have assumed all the liabilities, are alone authorized to collect the outstanding debts of the late firm. We are prepared to supply the public with a superior article of Soda*

*and Mineral water at short notice. Your patronage respectfully solicited.*

# QUINAN & STUDER

*110 and 112 Broughton street.*

Technically, Ray sold the business to his actual partner, Mrs. Quinan, and she turned over assets to the new firm. This change in business ownership is supported with the 1888 *Directory* listings and their bottles, which are dated 1888. Again continuing the tradition of dating bottles and, like the firms existing before the Ray & Quinan partnership, they started advertising heavily and using the name Excelsior Bottling Works. One of their earliest advertisements involved ownership of bottles and appeared in the February 14, 1888 edition of the *Savannah Morning News*:



Michael T. Quinan bottles date 1884-1885.

## NOTICE TO THE PUBLIC

### QUINAN & STUDER

*Having bought all the rights of Ray & Quinan, hereby claim the ownership in all Soda Water Bottles bearing the names of*

*JOHN RYAN,*

*JAMES RAY,*

*F. MEINCKE,*

*MEINCKE & EBBERWEIN,*

*M. T. QUINAN,*

*H. SCHMIDLMANN (sic), N. Y.,*

*JAMES REDMOND, Newberne, N. C.,*

*JOHN COLLER (sic), N. Y.,*

*And all persons are forbidden to use them under penalty of the law.*

*QUINAN & STUDER,*

*Manufacturers and Bottlers,*

*110 and 112 Broughton street.*

It is interesting that Ryan's bottles were still in use over seven years after the business was sold and that there are no bottles marked "Ray & Quinan," supporting the fact that no bottles were ever made for this firm. Also the "T's" in the New York bottles were replaced with the letter "L." So Cotter became Coller and Schmidtmann became Schmidmann. In addition to increased advertising, this firm entered into an agreement, on June 12, 1888, with George Ebberwein and Edward Moyle to agree on a lower price for fountains, which was significantly lower than the monopoly price charged by their predecessor. Spending more and lowering revenue is not good for business and it appears that things do not appear to have been going to well for this latest partnership, as in August and October of 1888, they were selling unnecessary fixtures of the business, such as wagons, a safe, a boiler, jugs, bitters, and etc.

James Ray came out of retirement in April 1888 and opened a new bottling establishment at Congress and Drayton Streets. Soon after, he claimed that he had purchased all of his old bottles from Quinan & Studer. This ignited a bit of a battle in the newspapers and ended up in a lawsuit that Quinan & Studer won and were awarded damages. But the business declined and the firm was sold to F. J. Ruckert of 111 Broughton Street, as seen in this August 18, 1889 notice in the *Savannah Morning News*:

## DISSOLUTION OF COPARTNERSHIP

*The firm of QUINAN & STUDER, by mutual consent, is hereby dissolved. All parties indebted to us will please pay F. J. RUCKERT, 111 Broughton street, who has brought out their interests.*

*QUINAN & STUDER*



Quinan & Studer bottles date 1888-1889.



During the preceding months, Quinan & Studer were selling material goods, like fountains, from their business. It appears that Quinan & Studer vacated the property at 110 Broughton well before they sold to Ruckert. The 1889 *Directory* lists Quinan as a clerk at Smith Brothers and Studer as a steward at the Harmonle Club. At this same time James Ray stepped back in and was operating the Works at 110 Broughton, moving from his Congress Street location. It appears that Quinan & Studer won the battle of the bottles, but Ray won the war with ownership of the business location. This started a period of stability in ownership of the Excelsior Works.

Savannah City Council approved a renumbering of the streets on June 4, 1896. Bay Street was the dividing line and streets had East or West appended to their names based on their orientation from this dividing line. Decimalization of the blocks was also adopted in the numbering of houses within each block. The changes took place over the next six months. As part of this change, 110 Broughton Street became 24 Broughton East Street.

On March 28, 1900, James Ray died and his widow, Margaret, is listed in the *Directory*. The business was sold by the estate on July 31, 1900 at auction. His son and grandson, James C., and James C. Jr., took over the Works as James Ray's Sons. The notice of this change was documented in the August 3, 1900 edition of the *Savannah Morning News*:

#### **SPECIAL NOTICE.**

*Having purchased the soda water business of our deceased father, Mr. James Ray, we wish to announce to his customers and the public generally that we will continue the business at the same old stand, and will be thankful for any patronage bestowed on us. Respectfully,*

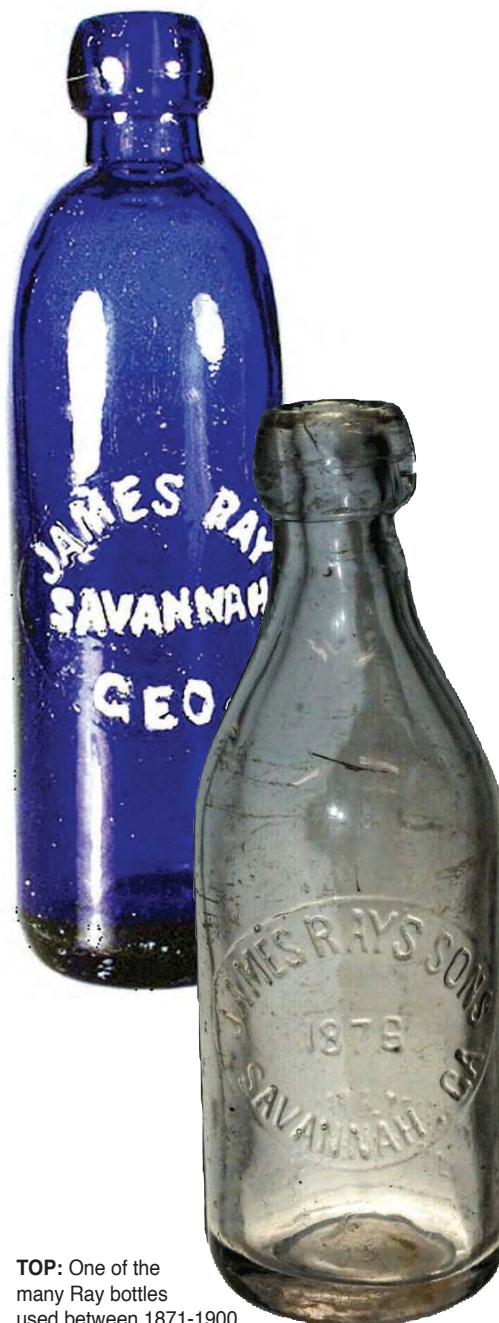
#### **JAMES RAY'S SONS**

The new firm continued their predecessors' practice of not advertising, making tracking them difficult. In 1912 or early 1913, James Ray's Sons moved the Works to 312 and 314 St. Julian Street. They remained there until 1917 when the Works were closed, and this is the last year they appear in the *Savannah Directory*. Likely causes were Prohibition in Georgia and competition of regional and national brands, now resident in Savannah, like Coca-Cola, Lime-Cola, and Chero-Cola. Also breweries were moving into the soft drink market, as they could no longer brew malt beverages. There appears to be no successor firm at this address.

So that ends the chain of ownership of Ryan's Excelsior Bottling Works, starting in 1852 and ending in 1917, a period of 66 years. In summary, the following table outlines the dates of each successor firm to Ryan's Excelsior Bottling Works:

*Photos courtesy of Glass Works Auctions.*

Author's contact information:  
Web Site: [www.sodasandbeers.com](http://www.sodasandbeers.com)  
Email: [Todvon@verizon.net](mailto:Todvon@verizon.net)



**TOP:** One of the many Ray bottles used between 1871-1900.

**RIGHT:** Embossed 1876, Ray's Sons' bottles actually date after 1900.

	Firm	Start Date Or Year	End Date Or Year	Duration
	John Ryan	About May 1, 1852	April or May 1882	30 Years
	Meincke & Ebberwein	April or May 1882	10/1/1883	17 Months
	Frederick Meincke	10/1/1883	3/1/1884	5 Months
	Michael T. Quinan	3/1/1884	5/10/1885	14 Months
	Ray & Quinan	5/10/1885	2/4/1888	32 Months
	Quinan & Studer	2/4/1888	8/1/1889	17 Months
	James Ray	1889	8/1/1900	11 Years
	James Ray's Sons	8/1/1900	1917	17 Years