

ACL CORNER #3

[Mike Dickman]



Crown cap from Sioux Beverages. Many ACL bottle collectors, including the author, also collect the colorful bottle caps which in some cases are harder to find than the bottles.

NATIVE

Americans, of course, were the first human beings to inhabit North America and lived in every corner of the continent before the arrival of the Europeans. One of the most popular categories of ACL soda bottles to collect (and my personal favorite) is Indian bottles. Although many brands depicting Indians were bottled in the Western states, the bottles come from across the U.S. Approximately a hundred or more different ACLs depict Native Americans.

“Chief Washakie Beverages” is a 10-ounce soda brand bottled by the Worland Bottling Co. of Worland, Wyoming, the county seat of Washakie County, in 1960. The ACL features a dramatic and realistic



Chief Washakie Beverages, Wyoming Product, 1960

portrait of the noble-looking Chief wearing his eagle-feather battle headdress, framed by a Native American geometric design. Born sometime between 1798 and 1804, Chief Washakie was a fearless and ferocious warrior who led the semi-nomadic Eastern Shoshone Tribe of Wyoming and Idaho. Proficient horsemen and fierce fighters, the Shoshone battled their traditional tribal enemies and, for a time, the growing influx of white settlers and travelers encroaching on their land. Washakie, however, came to realize that the white tide was unstoppable and made his peace.

He must have had a remarkable intellect, learning French and English from the famed trapper Jim Bridger, who married one of Washakie’s daughters. He signed treaties with the United States Government in 1863 and 1868, thereby acquiring the vast reservation in which his people still live today. Then, he and his warriors fought alongside the U.S. Cavalry in the Battle of Rosebud in 1876 against the

[Below] Photograph of Chief Wadena (left) and Joe Critt (right), an Ojibwe and U.S. Army veteran who fought for the Union during the Civil War, circa 1910. It is noteworthy that the other tribal members are wearing Western attire. Photo courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.

[Above] Undated photograph of Chief Washakie, from the Smithsonian Institution. Late in his life, Washakie was challenged by a group of young braves as being too old to lead. Saying nothing and notwithstanding his Christian faith, Washakie left and returned after several days with the fresh scalps of enemy warriors. Apparently, this ended the debate.

[Below] An encampment of Blackfoot tipis (also spelled teepees) on the Great Plains, circa 1910. Photograph by Arthur Rafton-Canning (1864-1952).





Shoshone's enemies, the Cheyenne and Sioux. In 1886, Chief Washakie's friend Brigham Young baptized Washakie into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and in 1897 he was baptized again into the Episcopal Church.

Washakie became known as "the Great Peace Chief" and was admired and beloved by his tribe as well as his Wyoming neighbors. The U.S. Army named one of its military outposts Ft. Washakie (which, as far as I can tell, is the only fort named for a Native American), and, in another unusual honor for the era, he was given a full military funeral and interred at his namesake fort when he died in 1900, well into his nineties. Although scarce, the bottle appears on the market from time to time and a nice example can be obtained for \$100 to \$150.

Chief Washakie embodied President Reagan's famous dictum, "Peace through Strength," but another peace-loving Indian chief lived the uglier side of America's treatment of natives.

[Below] "Hunting Buffalo" by George Catlin, 1844. Although colloquially called buffalos, the animals are actually American bison, and are only distantly related to the true buffalos of Africa and Asia.

"Chief Wadena" is a 7-ounce soda bottle put up by the Wadena Bottling Works of Wadena, Minnesota in 1939. It is a rare bottle typically found with scuffs, scratches and case wear from repeated refilling and reuse. The black-and-white ACL depicts a full-length portrait of Chief Wadena holding a long gun and dressed in traditional Ojibwe attire which he wore throughout his life, eschewing white man's attire.

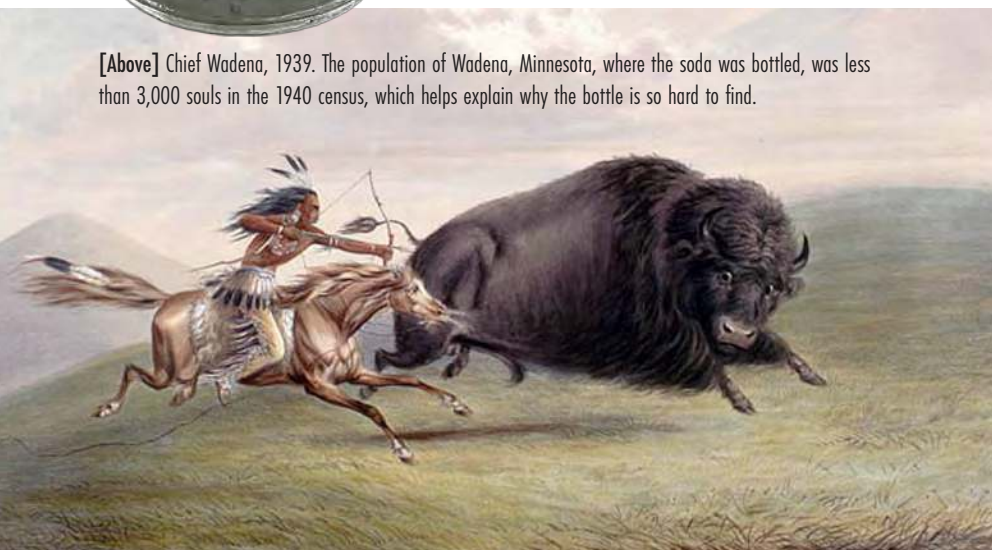
Wadena succeeded his father as the Chief of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwes in northern Minnesota, and he refused to wage war on the encroaching settlers, miners and federal troops as they took over more and more of the traditional lands of the Mille Lacs. That seems to have been Wadena's nature since a local historian wrote, "Chief Wadena was not a warrior by disposition, and I have never heard that he ever joined war parties against the tribe's hereditary enemies, the Sioux, who were at war with the [Ojibwes] for a couple of centuries."

[Below Right] Mound of buffalo skulls, circa 1870. From a continental herd of sixty million animals in 1800, buffalos had dwindled to just 541 animals by 1900. Conservation efforts by various tribes, states and the feds increased the herd dramatically during the twentieth century.



Sioux Brand
Beverages,
1948

[Above] Chief Wadena, 1939. The population of Wadena, Minnesota, where the soda was bottled, was less than 3,000 souls in the 1940 census, which helps explain why the bottle is so hard to find.





Sioux Brand Beverages, 1948

A treaty in 1864 creating a reservation was repeatedly violated by squatters and timber companies, and a subsequent act of Congress attempted to force the Ojibwes off their reservation to open the land to development. Although many in his band gave up and moved onto allotments, Chief Wadena refused to go until a sheriff's posse burned down his village in the early 1900s and forced him and his followers off their land.

Notwithstanding the unfair situation, Chief Wadena apparently turned the other cheek and continued to lead and govern his people in peace. Wadena was revered by his people and died in 1925, over 80 years old (although nobody is certain about his birth date). Subsequently, white men named their city and county in Wadena's honor, as did another City of Wadena in north-

west Iowa, near the Minnesota border. The "Chief Wadena" soda brand, with its dignified portrait of the Chief, seems to reflect the esteem in which the local populace held Chief Wadena, despite the wrongs they had done to him and the Ojibwe. After Wadena's death, his tribe dwindled in size and became mired in poverty. Their circumstances changed,



Big Chief Beverages from Denver, Colorado, 1950

however, after the tribe opened two highly successful tribal casinos in the early 1990s. In 1999, the U.S. Supreme Court restored the Ojibwe's right to hunt, fish and gather on their ancestral lands, and the tribe today has a thriving self-government, a growing population and a decent standard of living.

A collector looking at the two bottles may well ponder the difference in attitudes between the two great chieftains, Washakie and Wadena, and what lessons they might hold for today.

No group of Native Americans has captured the imagination more, both now and during the nineteenth century, than the tribes who hunted buffalo across the Great Plains. In the 1500s, the tribes acquired horses traded and stolen from Spanish troops and settlers, and they developed a nomadic, equestrian culture that followed the vast herds of migratory buffalos. The Plains Indians include some of the most storied tribes, including the Arapaho, Blackfoot, Cheyenne, Comanche, Crow, Pawnee, Shoshone and Sioux, and portraits of their people grace many of the most artistic of the Indian ACLs.

"Sioux Brand Beverages," bottled by the Seven-Up Bottling Co. of Sioux Falls, South Dakota in 1948-52, and "Red Lodge Beverages," bottled in Red Lodge, Montana by Red Lodge Beverage Company in 1947, are two ACL soda bottles that I love. Both bottles contained just seven ounces of soda pop, which seems a remarkably small amount of product in today's age of the 64-ounce Big Gulp. The bottles depict realistic renditions of a Sioux warrior and a Plains Indian encampment, flanked by distinctly Native American design elements.

Neither bottle is terribly hard to find or expensive. In August of 2022, a mint example of the Sioux warrior bottle sold on eBay for \$125, with six bidders vying for it.

[Right] \$5 Silver Certificate, Series of 1899, depicting a portrait of Chief Running Antelope of the Sioux Tribe. After the note was issued, critics pointed out that the chief's war bonnet was Pawnee, not Sioux.





[Above] Big Chief Beverages, Falls City, Nebraska, 1958

[Right] Mingo Beverages, 1954

[Left] Roadside marker near Worland, Wyoming, where "Chief Washakie Beverages" was bottled.

[Above] Calgary, undated and with no bottling company shown. A more common version of the bottle depicts the bison head in white paint, rather than black.

Dramatic renditions of Plains Indians also are found on two versions of "Big Chief Beverages," one from Denver, Colorado in 1946-50 and another from Falls City, Nebraska in 1958. Big Chief was a brand owned primarily by local Coca-Cola Bottling Companies in the West, Midwest and South and were bottled in dozens of cities using many different ACLs. I know several collectors who are attempting to obtain an example of every Big Chief soda bottle made, which is no easy task!

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A wonderful ACL of a bison head is depicted on "Calgary," a 12-ounce bottle from Calgary, Canada, located on the western edge of the Canadian Prairie, north of the U.S. states of Idaho and Montana. Buffalo herds numbering in the tens of millions once roamed throughout the North American plains and were the staff of life for the Plains Indians, who used every part of every animal they killed. However, buffalo were slaughtered to near extinction by Anglo sports hunters during the late 1800s, who would take the skins or trophy heads (or nothing at all) and leave the carcasses to rot. Some hunters shot hundreds of buffalo a day from the windows of trains traveling across the prairies. This, of course, was one of the grievances—and a cause for going to war—of the Plains Indians.

We've only scratched the surface of Native American ACL soda bottles, but let's conclude with "Mingo Beverages" from the Mingo Bottling Company of Williamson, West Virginia, bottled in 1954. Williamson is the seat of Mingo County, named for the Mingo Tribe of Iroquoian Indians who migrated into the area in the 1700s from western New York. The bottle holds nine ounces of soda pop and also comes in a scarcer (but in my view, less attractive) red-and-white ACL depicting the same pretty maiden. The orange-and-black version makes a very dramatic statement on the bottle shelf! And an example won't break the bank, either: my bottle is mint and cost \$65.

If you enjoy attractive, colorful, historically interesting bottles that are reasonably priced and reflect quintessentially American themes, why not start a collection of ACL soda bottles?

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