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Introduction

The Coca-Cola Trail

During the first half of the 20th century, large and small towns throughout the United States received special recognition when they became the site for a Coca-Cola bottling plant. Additional pride came when the town's name was placed on the bottom of bottles from their plant.

By 1909 there were 400 community plants providing the exciting new Coca-Cola beverage for customers in their sales territories, which were granted to the plants by exclusive bottling agreements. The number of Coca-Cola plants increased to over 1200 by 1925, and most of them were local family owned businesses.

"The Coca-Cola Trail" traces the history of some of those plants, and of those pioneering entrepreneurs who saw what they believed to be an opportunity, and then took the risk to help create what would become one of the most recognized brand names in the world. Without their dedication and tireless efforts, it reasonable can be assumed the Coca-Cola empire may not have evolved as it did.

"The Coca-Cola Trail" is dedicated to those first bottlers, and in many cases, to the following generations of their families who today still continue to make the enjoyment of Coke products available to everyone.

As the demand for Coca-Cola grew, larger plants were needed in those communities, and often the new buildings became local landmarks. Everyone in town was familiar with the plant, and most had their own Coca-Cola memories. They often recall looking in a large glass window to watch the bottles being filled, or possibly enjoying a group tour of the plant. Also visible were the colorful trucks being loaded and heading out for daily deliveries. Others remember friends or relatives who worked in the plant. The special Coca-Cola promotional activities and community participation were common and appreciated.

However, by the 1960's the improvement in transportation and ease of distribution began to signal the end for small town bottlers. During the decades which followed the smaller plants were being closed, and bottling was being consolidated to larger more modern facilities. Some of the former plant buildings were utilized as warehouse and distribution facilities. Others would find a new purpose in the community, while some were simply torn down.

“The Coca-Cola Trail” visits some of the remaining Coca-Cola buildings to discover how they are being used today. The “Trail” also reveals the history of these facilities and the people who made them possible. The “Trail” begins in Vicksburg, Mississippi where Coca-Cola was first placed in a bottle to be sold. The “Trail” also visits museums and displays, famous old Coca-Cola signs, and other places of interest made possible by “the people of Coca-Cola”.

It was, and still is, the large and small Coca-Cola companies across our nation which continue the Coca-Cola legend with community involvement, creative advertising, and unique marketing and promotions. “It’s the real thing”!

The Coca-Cola Trail

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Acknowledgements

The Coca-Cola Trail

This journey down “The Coca-Cola Trail” could not have been made without the support and assistance of many who wanted the story to be told!

Our appreciation is deep and sincere for those, in the chapters which follow, who took time to share their memories and history. But our appreciation is not limited to those dedicated bottlers, it also is for the researchers in historical organizations, museums and libraries, and for the Coca-Cola “fans” who also had stories to tell. The reader meets many of them along the “Trail”.

However, special recognition and thanks is extended to a Coca-Cola bottler in Texas, who generously shared his unique knowledge of Coca-Cola history, as well as his pride in a way of life for generations of his family. Our appreciation always to Randy Mayo, a direct Biedenharn family descendent, who can trace his roots back to that first bottle of Coca-Cola in Vicksburg.

To all those who contributed time and effort, you helped smooth the bumps in the “Coca-Cola Trail”.