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Pemberton's
“French Wine Coca”
(Coca-Cola's precursor)



(Fig. 1)

Researched, illuminated, and presented

by

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE:

Jim Vergo, of Albuquerque, New Mexico, while visiting a flea market recently, discovered an old 11” tall applied-lip clear flint-glass bottle from the **1880s**, that history reveals originally cost **\$1** each,. The bottle features on the obverse of the paper label, information proclaiming that the container once held ***“French Wine Coca; IDEAL NERVE TONIC; Health Restorer; and Stimulant”*** (Fig. 1 - cover). On the reverse of the bottle is a second label headlined **“WINE COCA”** reporting other product information (Fig. 2). In addition to the paper labels, the bottle features, in a block lettering embossment on the shoulder of the bottle: **“PEMBERTON’S WINE COCA”** (Fig. 3).

**(Fig. 2)****(Fig. 3)**

Jim purchased the bottle (a rare survivor from the pre-history of Coca-Cola) for \$4, tossed it into the back seat of his car and drove it home. Shortly after that research revealed his flea market find is only one of three French Wine Coca bottles known to exist and the only one with the paper labels largely intact.

Vergo decided to sell the bottle when a Dallas-based auction house, Heritage Auctions estimated its value at **\$5,000+**. The auction was held over the Internet on Saturday, **May 24, 2014** – the very rare bottle, the oldest Coca-Cola related relic there is, sold for **\$13,750** to one of the seven mail/phone bidders.

JOHN S. PEMBERTON and FRENCH WINE COCA

John Stith Pemberton history remembers as the man who invented, among other things, the world famous **Coca-Cola** soft drink (**Fig. 4**). What history almost doesn't remember is that, among the "other things," he invented was the precursor to Coca-Cola – **French Wine Coca** (**Fig. 5**). [Some of the other compounds he invented included *Extract of Styllinger*; *Gingerine* (a blood medicine); *Globe of Flower Cough Syrup*; *Indian Queen Hair Dye*; and *Triplex Liver Pills*.] His coca wine was an alcoholic beverage, mixed with coca leaves, kola nuts (from Africa that delivered a strong caffeine punch), damiana (the leaf of a small shrub from Mexico that was reputed to possess aphrodisiac qualities) and cocaethylene (cocaine mixed with alcohol).



(Fig. 4)



(Fig. 5)

Pemberton (**Fig. 6**) was born in Knoxville, Georgia on **July 8, 1831**. As a child he was moved to Rome, Georgia, where he grew up. He was educated in medicine and pharmacy. He received a degree in pharmacy from Reform Medical College in Macon, Georgia and in **1850**, when he was 19, he was licensed to practice medicine as an herbalist, chemist and pharmacist.



(Fig. 6)

Pemberton and his young wife Ann Elizabeth Clifford Lewis, a student at Macon's Wesleyan College, moved to Columbus, Georgia in **1855**, where he established a drug business and practiced as a druggist.

He became involved in the fratricidal Civil War in **1862** by enlisting in the Confederate army as a first lieutenant and eventually reached the rank of lieutenant colonel. He organized the Third Georgia Cavalry Battalion that operated primarily in the protection of the locale around Columbus. He was almost killed on Easter Sunday in **April 1865** during the Battle of Columbus. He suffered gunshot and sword wounds in the battle.

He became addicted to morphine as a result of his injuries and after the war he used his chemistry background to develop an alternative proprietary medicine – a cocaine-infused elixir (“French Wine Coca”) that was formulated at the Eagle Drug and Chemical Company, a drugstore in Columbus, Georgia. The “medicine” was part of his dream to give the world a perfect tonic. To understand what a good pain-relieving tonic should do, in Pemberton's estimation, it was necessary to understand what ailed Southerners after the War Between the States (Civil War).

For one thing, thousands of Confederate [and Union] veterans were addicted to morphine as a result of war wounds as he was himself after his brush with death that had come in a cavalry skirmish that occurred *after* the surrender

at Appomattox, one of the last engagements of the war. Along with almost countless others, he was managing an expensive-for-the-time and debilitating morphine habit. The leading medical people at the time leaned toward the opinion that the coca leaf might offer relief from for such a widespread problem.

The other Southern malaise afflicted mostly women, and as so often happened with women’s ailments in those days, it didn’t have a name. It was referred to as ‘a nervous condition’. Later it was called ‘neurasthenia’. Although abandoned as a diagnosis, in the second half of the 19th Century it described people who were jumpy, had a bad digestion, or suffered from unexplained fatigue, headaches, anxiety and/or depression.

As a fashionable diagnosis, neurasthenia was thought to afflict only the most refined and intellectual people. No matter what the cause of neurasthenia, Pemberton was determined to cure it by coming up with an improved version –a plagiarism he admitted in a newspaper interview– of France’s popular cocaine-laced wine, ***Vin Mariani*** (Fig. 7).

Pemberton had read and was wildly excited by reports of the virtues of the coca plant. The coca plant had been chewed by the natives of Peru and Bolivia for over 2,000 years and was reputed to act as a stimulant, aid to digestion, aphrodisiac and “life-extender”. Accordingly he decided to attempt to base his new drink around it.



(Fig. 7)

Indications that the cocaine found in the coca-leaf could prove addictive were generally ignored.

[Even the renowned psychologist Sigmund Freud enthused about the virtues of the leaf in a famous essay about Coca where he wrote, “...a song of praise to this magical substance”.]

VIN MARIANI

It was in **1863**, **Angelo Mariani**, a French chemist invented the extremely popular and successful **Vin Mariani (Fig. 8)**. It was a Bordeaux wine treated with coca leaves. Apparently, through natural chemical infusion, the ethanol in the wine extracted the cocaine from the coca leaves, leaving it with an estimated 7 mg of cocaine per ounce.

Mr. Mariani is well known for his great use of celebrity testimonials to advertise his product, citing **Thomas Edison**; **Sara**

Bernhardt (Fig. 9); **Emile Zola**; **Queen Victoria** and no fewer than three Popes



(Fig. 8)



(Fig. 9)

in praise of the product [Pope Leo XIII even went so far as to present Mariani with a gold medal “in recognition of benefits received from the use of Mariani’s tonic”] (Figs. 10 & 11).

HIS HOLINESS POPE LEO XIII
AWARDS GOLD MEDAL
 In Recognition of Benefits Received from



VIN MARIANI
 MARIANI WINE TONIC
FOR BODY, BRAIN AND NERVES

SPECIAL OFFER - To all who write us mentioning this paper, we send a book containing portraits and endorsements of EMPERORS, EMPRESS, PRINCES, CARDINALS, ARCHBISHOPS, and other distinguished personages.

MARIANI & Co., 52 WEST 15TH ST. NEW YORK.
 FOR SALE AT ALL DRUGGISTS EVERYWHERE. AVOID SUBSTITUTES. BEWARE OF IMITATIONS.
 PARIS-41 Boulevard Haussmann, LONDON-83 Mortimer St. Montreal-87 St. James St.

(Fig. 10)

MARIANI WINE

MARIANI WINE Quality Restores
HEALTH, STRENGTH, ENERGY & VITALITY.

MARIANI WINE
 FORTIFIES, STRENGTHENS, STIMULATES & REFRESHES THE BODY & BRAIN

HASTENS CONVALESCENCE especially after **INFLUENZA.**

His Holiness **THE POPE**
 writes that he has fully appreciated the beneficial effects of this Tonic Wine and has forwarded to Mr. Mariani as a token of his gratitude a gold medal bearing his august effigy.



MARIANI WINE

is delivered free to all parts of the United Kingdom by WILCOX & CO., 83, Mortimer Street, London, W., price 2/- per Single Bottle, 22/- half-dozen, 45/- dozen, and is sold by Chemists and Stores.

(Fig. 11)

COCA-COLA (Coke)

When temperance legislation was enacted on **July 13, 1885** in Atlanta during the **Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU)** convention it achieved one of its goals, that was to oversee the passing a law to promote temperance in Georgia. The aim, of course, was to curb the growing dilemma of alcoholism in America. Soon ***French Wine Coca*** was illegal – because of the alcohol, not the cocaine!

NOTE: [The **1885** Georgia law was the precursor, by 34 years, to national “Prohibition” that was established by the adoption of the **18th Amendment** to the U.S. Constitution on **January 16, 1920**. (It was the **Volstead Act**, however, – passed on **October 28, 1919** – that clarified the new law. It went into effect on **January 16, 1920**).

Despite Atlanta's **1885** Temperance legislation, production of ***French Wine Coca*** continued until Pemberton's death in **1888**. Indeed, in the year **1887**, ***French Wine Coca*** sold **720** bottles a day – far outstripping ***Coca-Cola*** at that time.

Fearing the new law would negatively affect the sales of his coca wine Pemberton began experimenting with a non-alcoholic version of French Wine Coca that could replace his coca wine if necessary. He created syrup made of cane sugar, coca leaf extract and cola nuts. Thus, was born ***Coca-Cola*** (**Fig. 12**) one of the most legendary beverages of all time! The new formula contained 8.46 mg of cocaine and was advertised as “...*a cure for morphine and opium addictions.*”



(Fig. 12)

One key breakthrough in the development of the new drink occurred when Pemberton had the idea of adding citric acid to counteract the sweetness of the sugar-based syrup. Several days later the drink was first sold to the public on



(Fig. 13)

May 8, 1886 at [Joseph] **Jacob's Pharmacy, #2** Peachtree Street (at 'Five Points') in Atlanta (Fig. 13).

[Jacob's owned a chain of drugstores "all over Atlanta" (Fig. 14).]

Pemberton initially sold "**Coca-Cola**, [as] the temperance drink",

a patent/proprietary medicine, for **5¢** a glass.

Partially because of the popular belief, at the time, that soda (carbonated water) was good for the health made, his claims for the infused-with-carbon-dioxide drink seemed plausible. He claimed that his new drink cured many diseases "*including morphine addiction, dyspepsia, neurasthenia, headache, and impotence,*" were generally believable in that heyday for patent medicines.



(Fig. 14)

Pemberton's **French Wine Coca**, and later **Coca-Cola**, were marketed mostly to upper class intellectuals, afflicted with diseases; believed to have been brought on by urbanization and Atlanta's increasingly competitive business environment. In an **1885** interview with the **Atlanta Journal**, Pemberton claimed the **French Wine Coca** would benefit "*scientists, scholars, poets, divines, lawyers, physicians, and other devoted to extreme mental exertion.*"

John Pemberton, shortly after creating *Coca-Cola*, ran his first advertisement in the *Atlanta Journal* on **May 29, 1886** (Fig. 15).

COCA-COLA
SYRUP * AND * EXTRACT.

For Soda Water and other Carbonated Beverages.

This "INTELLECTUAL BEVERAGE" and TEMPERANCE DRINK contains the valuable TONIC and NERVE STIMULANT properties of the Coca plant and Cola (or Kola) nuts, and makes not only a delicious, exhilarating, refreshing and invigorating Beverage, (dispensed from the soda water fountain or in other carbonated beverages), but a valuable Brain Tonic, and a cure for all nervous affections — SICK HEAD-ACHE, NEURALGIA, HYSTERIA, MELANCHOLY, &c.

The peculiar flavor of COCA-COLA delights every palate; it is dispensed from the soda fountain in same manner as any of the fruit syrups.

J. S. Pemberton,
Chemist,
Sole Proprietor, Atlanta, Ga.

(Fig. 15.)

Coca-Cola quickly caught on as the 'intellectual beverage' among well-off whites. But when the company started selling it in bottles in **1899**, minorities who couldn't get into the segregated soda fountains suddenly had access to it.

Grace Elizabeth Hale, a writer for the *New York Times* recently put the perceived racial/cocaine problem this way:

“Anyone with a nickel, black or white, could now drink the cocaine-infused beverage. Middle-class whites worried that soft drinks were contributing to what they saw as exploding cocaine use among African-Americans. Southern newspapers reported that “negro cocaine fiends” were raping white women, the police powerless to stop them. By 1903, then-manager of Coca-Cola, Asa [Griggs] Candler claimed to have bowed to white fears (and a wave of anti-narcotics legislation), removing the cocaine from the drink and adding more sugar and caffeine.”

Pemberton did not live to reap the profits from his invention. He progressively sold off two-thirds of his interest in the company to other investors, including the transplanted Northern pharmacist Asa G. Candler. Pemberton died the night of **August 16, 1888** of stomach cancer and probably complications of his longtime morphine addiction. At the time of his death, he was broke and left his wife in a difficult financial situation. Despite the vast fortunes that were made from Pemberton’s invention by others, his wife Ann Eliza Clifford (Lewis) died a pauper in 1909.

He was immensely loved and respected in Atlanta. His obituary described him as *“the oldest druggist of Atlanta and one of the best-known citizens and an especially popular Gentleman.”*

Besides his wife Ann he was survived by his only son Charles (“Charley”) M. Pemberton. [Little did he know that his son Charley would be dead from a morphine overdose only six years later in **1893** at the age of 34.]

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By 1905 fresh coca leaves had been removed from the drink. **DOES COKE STILL CONTAIN COCAINE?** The Coca-Cola we know today still contains spent coca leaves, the part of the plant after the cocaine is extracted. But today the ecgonine alkaloid is removed from it. Perfecting that extraction took until 1929, so before that there were still trace amounts of coca's psychoactive elements in Coca-Cola. A company called Stepan now does the extraction at its New Jersey chemical processing facility. In 2003, Stepan imported 175,000 kilograms of coca for Coca-Cola. That's enough to make more than \$200 million worth of cocaine. They refer to the coca leaf extract simply as "Merchandise No. 5".

By the way, the Stepan company facility is guarded 24 hours a day....

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See **Article 1307** for concluding AFTERTHOUGHTS FOR PEMBERTON'S
"FRENCH WINE COCA" ARTICLE.

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