

Mrs. Diva Brown

“Original Coca-Cola Woman”

by Cecil Munsey
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You’ve probably heard for years, the rumors about a woman who claimed to have the original formula for Coca-Cola. She really did exist and she did sell products and peddled copies of a formula she claimed was based on the original Coca-Cola invented by John Styth Pemberton in 1886.

The History

Early in 1887, John S. Pemberton, James C. Mayfield, E. H. Bloodworth and A. C. Murphy formed a proprietary medicine partnership called Pemberton Medicine Company in Atlanta, Georgia. The Pemberton Medicine Company sold a soda fountain drink called Yum-Yum that later was renamed “Kola” or “Koke.”

Pemberton was the inventor of several proprietary medicines including Extract of Stylingia, Globe Flower Cough Syrup, French Wine of Coca and Coca-Cola.

On June 6, 1887, “Doc” Pemberton applied to the U. S. Patent Office to register the label of “Coca-Cola Syrup & Extract” that he had invented in 1886. On June 28, the trademark was granted in Pemberton’s name.

On July 8, 1887 Pemberton sold two-thirds of his newly patented Coca-Cola formula to proprietary medicine salesman George Lowndes and Willis Venable, operator of the soda fountain at Jacobs’s Pharmacy in Atlanta where Coca-Cola was first sold in 1886.

The sale to Lowndes and Venable was

not completed before Pemberton had taught James C. Mayfield, a partner in the Pemberton Medicine Company, how to manufacture the Coca-Cola syrup, along with his other proprietary medicines.

“Doc” Pemberton died on August 16, 1888. Partners J. C. Mayfield and E. H. Bloodworth carried on the business of the Pemberton Medicine Company.

In 1893, they sold all their formulas except the Kola formula to T. J. Eady, a real estate speculator.

In 1895, Mayfield bought Bloodworth’s interest in the Kola formula they had received from Pemberton before he died.

Mayfield and his wife **Diva** bottled and sold their Kola soft drink at Atlanta’s Cotton States and International Exposition in 1895. Their product was among the 6,000 exhibits at the fair. Since the fair attracted 13,000 visitors a day and was visited by 1,000,000 total visitors from all over the globe, Koke must have been tried by thousands of fairgoers.

Diva was on the committee that arranged to have the Liberty Bell shipped down from Philadelphia and placed on display at the event [Figure 1]. The fair was held in Atlanta’s Piedmont Park (a former racetrack). 800,000 people viewed the Bell before the event ended in December 1895.

The Cotton States and International Exposition was a huge success from the first day when President Grover Cleveland opened it by throwing, by long-distance,



[Fig. 2]

a switch in Buzzard’s Bay, Massachusetts. In addition to the Liberty Bell display arranged by a committee to which Diva belonged, the fair featured Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show. John Philip Sousa composed and premiered a march for the event – “King Cotton March.” [Figure 2] Among speeches at the exposition was the famous “Atlanta Compromise” address by Booker T. Washington. The speech pleaded for blacks to compromise their demands for equality for the sake of getting jobs. Whites cheered the speech while many blacks were critical.

“My-Coca”

The strain of the event on the Mayfields may have been too much for them. Diva and Mayfield divorced the next year in 1896 and Diva began selling her own kola formula.

It was later, after she re-married, that she was known as **Diva Brown**. She became a minor celebrity in the South around the turn of the century peddling copies of the “authentic” Coca-Cola formula she claimed she and her ex-husband Mayfield received from Pemberton before he died. Although she was labeled by one trade journal as “a humbug and a fake,” she had many bottlers who bought and used the recipe.

In 1909, she established her own beverage company in Birmingham, Alabama. Through her “My-Coca Company,” she sold “My-Coca” syrup in bulk to soda fountains and in take-home bottles with a diamond-shaped label that greatly resembles the early Coca-Cola label. My-Coca labels [Figure 3] feature a picture of “Mrs. Diva Brown” below



[Fig. 1]

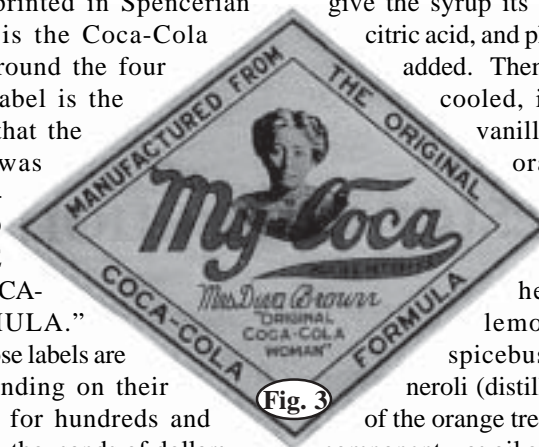
which is the claim, "ORIGINAL COCA-COLA WOMAN." The My-Coca trademark is printed in Spencerian script just as is the Coca-Cola trademark. Around the four edges of the label is the further claim that the product was "MANUFACTURED FROM THE ORIGINAL COCA-COLA FORMULA."

Examples of those labels are rare and, depending on their condition, sell for hundreds and sometimes even thousands of dollars.

Mrs. Diva Brown died in 1914 but her My-Coca Company continued to sell the My-Coca beverage well into the 1920s in the South and Midwest.

The Real Thing

For all who want to know, the original formula for "Doc" Pemberton's Coca-Cola started with 40 gallons of boiling water into which sugar and caffeine were stirred. Next caramel was added for coloring,



giving the syrup its dark, distinctive color. To balance the sweetness of the sugar and give the syrup its "tang," lime juice, citric acid, and phosphoric acid were added. Then as the basic blend cooled, into the mix went vanilla extract, elixir of orange, and several pungent oils refined from various fruits, herbs, and trees: lemon, nutmeg, spicebush, coriander, and neroli (distilled from the flower of the orange tree). The most exotic component was oil of cassia, also known as Chinese cinnamon, made from the bark of a tree found in the tropical regions of Asia.

And, of course, added to this brew was the fluid extract of coca leaves. The exact amount will never be known but it is safe to assume, when mixed with the sugar and pure caffeine, it was sufficient enough to produce an effect on those who consumed the mixture (syrup) along with a spritz of cold, carbonated water.

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