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Canada Dry Club Soda

"BOTTLED FOR THE HONORABLE LYNDON B. JOHNSON VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES"

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by

Cecil Munsey

The Presidency of the United States is certainly a demanding job. The need for relaxation to refresh one's wholeness is imperative for the tough days that always lie ahead. President Lyndon B. Johnson (1908-1973), the 36th president of the United States, maintained a daily schedule that was at the very least, exhausting. From early morning until long after sunset, Vietnam and his Great Society programs consumed his time and energy. On those occasions when he would have some free days he would retreat to his

LBJ Ranch in Stonewall, Texas. This is where he found the peace and serenity, as a gentleman rancher (**Fig. 1**), that was needed to recharge him mentally, physically, and spiritually. He particularly enjoyed his many vehicles; his presidential toys as he called them. Inspecting his ranch in one of his cherished Lincolns were the types of simple pleasures that re-energized our 36th president.

Lincoln Continental convertibles were the cars probably most associated with President Johnson. Here his Special Assistant, Joseph A. Califano Jr., recalls a ride with the President:

> *"In the early afternoon, the President, with me next to him in the front seat, took his white Lincoln convertible, top down* (**Fig. 2**)*, for a drive around the ranch. It was incredibly hot; the dust clouds made it hard to breathe. But there was relief. As we drove around a car and a station wagon followed us with Secret Service agents. The President drank Cutty Sark scotch &* ***Canada Dry soda*** **[**bottled especially for him when he was vice president (**Figs. 3 & 4**)**]** *out of a large white Styrofoam cup. Periodically, Johnson would slow down and hold his left arm outside the car, shaking the cup and ice. A Secret Service agent would run up to the car, take the cup and go back to the station wagon. There another agent would refill it with ice, scotch, and soda as the first agent trotted behind the wagon. Then the first agent would run the refilled cup up to LBJ's outstretched and waiting hand, as the President's car moved slowly along."*

The LBJ ACL 7-ounce Canada Dry club soda water bottle is featured here as figures 3 & 4. The bottle is one of the most well known ACL (Applied Color Label) containers in bottle collecting. It is also among the most valuable, regularly selling from one to several hundred dollars.

What is the story behind the famous personalized ACL Canada Dry club soda bottle made exclusively in 1963 and "BOTTLED FOR THE HONORABLE LYNDON B. JOHNSON VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES"?

In 1993, W. D. Matthews, the former owner of the Canada Dry Bottling Company of San Antonio, Texas granted an interview to political memorabilia specialist Max L. Moe. The purpose of the interview was to get the facts behind the development and distribution of the famous LBJ Vice President ACL bottle.

The 80-year-old Matthews recalled that in the summer of 1963 there was a meeting in the St. Anthony Hotel in San Antonio attended by Vice President Johnson and his assistant, Cliff Carter. Before he became an assistant to the President, Carter the at one time owned the 7-UP Bottling Company in Bryan, Texas and was an old friend of Matthews from their days as bottlers of carbonated beverages.

The meeting was held to discuss Johnson's upcoming scheduled visit as the keynote speaker at the American Bottlers of Carbonated Beverages (ABCB) 1963 national convention in Dallas.

[FYI: Since a name change in 1967, the ABCB became, and still is, the National Soft Drinks Association (NSDA).]

During a cocktail-hour meeting in San Antonio between Cliff Carter and W. D. Matthews the idea of making a personalized soda bottle for the vice president was discussed. The idea was thought to be good because Johnson was known to like to subtly remind people his importance. Matthews requested that Carter, ask LBJ if he liked the idea and suggested that if he got a positive answer, to send a sketch of what he would want on the bottle. Matthews upon receiving an approved sketch promised that he would take it from there and have the bottle(s) made as a gift to the vice president.

The approval of the design came quickly. W. D. Matthews then got in touch with his friend Jack Kirkpatrick of the Laurens Glass Works in Laurens, South Carolina (**Fig. 5**). Kirkpatrick had 100 cases (2,400 bottles) of the personalized LBJ ACL vice presidential Canada Dry club soda bottles produced. They were shipped to Matthews at his Canada Dry Bottling Company in San Antonio where they were filled and shipped to the over-1500-acre LBJ Ranch in Stonewall, Texas (**Fig. 6**) – 50 miles west of Austin and 60 miles north of San Antonio.

(Worth noting is that each of the LBJ ACL bottles is identified on the bottom with embossments identifying the date of manufacture separated by the glass works' identifying letters, e.g., 1963 would be **6 LGW 3**. Also worth noting is the fact that

while the obverse (**Fig. 3**) of the LBJ ACL bottle is personalized for Johnson, the reverse (**Fig. 4**) is the same on the hundreds of thousands of Canada Dry club soda bottles produced and bottled in 1963.)

Matthews indicated that all of the intentioned 2,400 bottles filled with club soda might not have actually arrived at the ranch. A casual and unofficial check that was made some time after the event suggests some of the special-order ACL Canada Dry club soda bottles may have been taken as souvenirs by bottling plant employees. Other bottles that are extant in the collector marketplace today were recovered from the ranch dump according LBJ Ranch employees and local collectors.

As was expected, Vice President Johnson was very pleased with the LBJ bottles and began serving them to guests immediately after they arrived from Matthews' bottling plant early in November of 1963.

They were expected to be part of the excitement at a planned reception for President John F. Kennedy and other dignitaries on the evening of November 23, 1963 at the LBJ Ranch.

The reception never took place. Johnson never did deliver the scheduled address to the NSDA bottling industry representatives at their convention; tragically President John F. Kennedy was assassinated the day before in Dallas and Lyndon B. Johnson was sworn in as the 36th President of the United States on Air Force One on the way back to Washington, D. C. (**Fig. 7**).

At the end of his term of office in 1969, Lyndon Baines Johnson retired to Texas and his LBJ Ranch. He lived and worked on the ranch until he died in 1973. According to his wife Lady Bird (1913-2007), *"… he turned away without a backward glance, because, you see, he had always had the great resource of just living at the ranch. He had always wanted to improve it, to put in some more ponds, some more native grasses, and to build better fences."* Lady Bird and he enjoyed a peaceful, productive, and restful retirement (**Fig. 8**).

Lady Bird Johnson (1913-2007) lived in Austin and worked on her many charity projects from her office at the LBJ Ranch for 34 years – she died quietly in her sleep at age 94.

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