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Delicious and Refreshing – a History of Coca Cola

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Humble Beginnings

Pemberton's invention was first sold to the public at the soda fountain in Jacob's Pharmacy in Atlanta on May 8 1886. around nine people a day bought the drink, and at the end of the year, when he totalled up his Coca-Cola sales, Pemberton discovered that his costs outweighed his income by \$26.96. The following year, in ill health and debt, Pemberton sold his Coca-Cola formula to another Atlanta pharmacist – Asa Candler – for \$2300. Candler introduced an aggressive marketing campaign, and within four years Coke had become one of America's most popular soda fountain drinks, consumed in every American state and territory.

When pharmacist Dr John Pemberton invented Coca-Cola in a three-legged kettle in his backyard in May 1866, he created a household name whose popularity has barely waned in more than a century.



A Tidy Profit

In 1919, the Coca-Cola Company was sold to a group of investors for US\$25m. Four years later Ernest Woodruff paid the same sum to be the outright owner; he then gave the business to his son Robert, who was to be president of the company for six decades. Within two years, Woodruff had raised sales to 6 million per day – yes, that's per day in 1925 and in 1928 sales of bottled Coca-Cola outsold soda fountain sales for the first time. By 1940 the drink was being bottled in more than forty countries, and in 1952 the first novel about Coca-Cola was written. Today more than 7000 Coca-Cola products are consumed EVERY SECOND.

In 1929 – the beginning of the Great Depression – sales of Coca-Cola actually doubled, thanks to the marketing campaign with the slogan : The Pause That Refreshes.



Selling to the Public

The first Coke vending machines, introduced in 1929, were essentially open-top metal ice boxes with the Coca-Cola script emblazoned on them, and ice and soft drink inside. Whilst simple, they relied on the continual supply of ice; when the refrigerated machines were developed they were highly popular, although they were more expensive to run and repair. The coin-operated vending machine gave the store owner a greater likelihood of being paid for the soft drink, but the early types could sometimes short change the buyer, who entered the coin and then pulled the bottle out from behind a glass door. If he wasn't quick enough, he'd end up without either the coin or his drink.



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Clearly some modification was needed, and it arrived in 1937 in the form of a vending machine that dispensed the bottles individually. Made by Californian firm The Vendorlator Company, the early types of these vending machines could hold just 33 bottles. Later examples made by other companies were the size of large refrigerators.

Frank Robinson, who was Pemberton's business partner and bookkeeper, came up with the name Coca-Cola and designed the flowing script that's still used today.

The Distinctive Shape

Coca-Cola was first sold in bottles in March 1894. Apparently these early rubber sealed bottles leaked, and were soon replaced with straight-sided bottles that were sealed with a metal cap. The shape was the result of a marketing competition, but in 1916 it was replaced by the contoured bottle shape that's still used today.

Down to Details

All vending machines were not created equal, and it pays to know what you're looking at before you rush off and buy one for the pool room. If the machine has rounded corner tops it was produced from the 1930s to '50s. Examples from the 1960s tend to have square corners and are known as square top machines. A white top is a Coca-Cola machine manufactured after 1954, when the soda machines were painted red with the top third being white. A slant shelf machine describes a machine in which the shelves are angled so that gravity causes the bottle to feed into the vending rack. You can find a lot more detail on vending machines at the web site: soda-machines.com.