

Chapter 7 Coca-Cola Bottling Company of Alamogordo (1955-present)

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Figure 7-1 (*Alamogordo News*, November 11, 1937)

of the soft-drink industry. Magnolia rose to the occasion by taking advantage of new technology in the use of vending machines. By November 1947, Magnolia's ads in the *Alamogordo News* (cf. November 7, 1947) depicted Coca-Cola's new dispensers.

By March 18, 1937, Magnolia Coca-Cola Bottling Co. of El Paso, Texas, began advertising in the *Alamogordo News*. Magnolia proclaimed that "Coca-Cola is delivered by us at El Paso's wholesale prices to Alamogordo, White Sands, La Luz, Tularosa, and Mescalero" (*Alamogordo News* October 28, 1937). Although the ads were discontinued on October 28, they resumed in the early 1940s and continued until at least the end of 1949.

The end of sugar rationing on September 4, 1947, created a change in the way Coca-Cola was sold in Alamogordo. Because of World War II, the use of sugar had been severely restricted to the non-military population of the United States (although quite available to military personnel). Because the rationing extended for almost two years after the end of the war, the civilian population of Alamogordo was ready to renew its acquaintance with the sweet beverages



Figure 7-2 (*Alamogordo News*, September 16, 1948)



Figure 7-3 (*Alamogordo News*, June 19, 1947)

The company established a warehouse near the corner of New York and Twelfth Street about 1945. The warehouse owner began existence as Magnolia Bottling Co., originated in 1908 by Hope M. Smith in a one room building on the corner of Main Dr. and N. Kansas St. in El Paso. The firm originally distributed beer along with soft drink sales and added Coca-Cola to its inventory in 1911. Although Coca-Cola has been the best selling soft drink in the United States for many years, it was unknown in Western Texas and Southern New Mexico in the early twentieth century. People were not interested in the new cola drink, and Smith could only sell it by mixing bottles of Coke in a case with other flavors until the new drink finally caught on.

Coca-Cola eventually became the firm's top seller, and, to reflect the popularity of the drink, Smith renamed the firm Magnolia Coca-Cola Bottling Co. in 1916 (Lockhart 2000).

Magnolia grew and survived the sugar shortages of both World War I and II and became the largest and most prosperous of the many soda bottlers of El Paso. Along with the company's popularity and growth came expanded territory. By 1953, Magnolia served El Paso, Hudspeth, and Culberson Counties in Texas along with Otero and Lincoln Counties in New Mexico. When Smith died on November 27, 1959, his wife, Milda Connolly Smith, took command of the business and ran it with great ability until her death in 1973. The family sold the firm to a Fort Worth company in 1975. Magnolia still exists in El Paso, although it has undergone several more changes of ownership (Lockhart 2000).



Figure 7-4 - On the original photo, the individuals are identified as "L to R Sarver, Shoppach, Lucky, Soules, Hope Smith." (Courtesy of Dorothy Lucky)

As part of the El Paso franchise, the Alamogordo warehouse had a local manager and stored the beverages that were used to serve Otero and Lincoln Counties. The Coca-Cola Bottling Co. in Las Cruces served Doña Ana County. Smith established a new corporation for Alamogordo with the intention of providing a means of retirement for some of his employees. Although the Smith family controlled over fifty percent of the stock, Thomas C. Lucky and six or seven others owned the rest (Josselyn interview, Lucky interview, Zink interview). In early 1955, Magnolia sent Lucky to Alamogordo to supervise the construction of the plant for the Coca-Cola Bottling Company of Alamogordo. Lucky had been an employee of Magnolia since 1941 when he was 18 years old. He had served as a route driver, route manager, and manager of the El Paso plant prior to heading the team that erected the new building in Alamogordo. After five years, he returned to El Paso as sales manager, vice president, and finally general manager of the El Paso plant in 1967 (Lucky interview). I was saddened to learn that Tom Lucky died on February 10, 1997.

Although the building was constructed by Hope Smith's brother-in-law, C. A. Goetting, Lucky and his crew installed all the necessary machinery themselves; they even built a shower in back along with a little kitchen. The workers slept on cots in the plant and "lived there 'til we got it done. . . . we had our blood and sweat in it" (Lucky interview). Lucky and his men worked hard and had the plant in operation by October. The building, located at 1130 New York Ave., was built in front of the 1947 warehouse which was still used for storage. Almost immediately, the new, two-story building created problems. Along with



Figure 7-5 - The Original Coca-Cola Plant on New York Ave. (Courtesy of Tularosa Basin Historical Society)

being too small, the structure would have been much more efficient on a single level (Lucky interview).

In the summer, the plant employed between thirty and thirty-five people. Because the plant only bottled every other day, Lucky hired firemen from nearby Holloman Air Force Base. The firemen normally alternated working days at the fire station, so they made an ideal bottling crew. At that time, Alamogordo had more vending machines per 1,000 people than any other community in the United States. Because the term "vending machines" was not yet in vogue, the company's 1957-58 alliterated advertisement proclaimed the machines, "Coin Controlled Coolers." (Lucky interview; ACD1957-1958).

Alamogordo was clannish during the mid 1950s, and Lucky found it difficult to get close to the townspeople. A great opportunity arose when he joined the Rotary Club and became a member of the committee to erect the town Christmas tree on the courthouse lawn. When the time came, only two people showed up to decorate the tree, so Lucky dismissed the six-man bottling crew from their tasks at the Coke plant to help with the decoration. That "cleared the way into the hearts of the [local] people," and from that point on, he was one of their own. Lucky enjoyed the rest of his stay in Alamogordo and learned to love the people here (Lucky interview). When Lucky returned to El Paso, he hired Kenneth Josselyn, probably the last person he employed in Alamogordo. Except for a short break with the company in the early 1970s, Josselyn was employed by Alamogordo Coca-Cola from 1960 until February 1997 (Josselyn interview).

Around 1956, the new company instituted Alamogordo's first full service route to serve Holloman Air Force Base. The new service began soon after the price raise from five to six cents. The rise in price was apparently insufficient because the cost shortly went up again--this time to ten cents (Josselyn interview). On full-service routes, delivery personnel only filled vending machines. Unlike the earlier plan where businesses rented machines and bought "product" to fill them, in full-service, the bottling company retains full control of the machines including stocking drinks, collecting money, and making repairs. The customer provides space and electricity and receives a commission check for product vended through their machines.

By 1964, William H. Vanderland was the plant manager, followed by Irwin G. Sarver in 1971. Dr. Pepper first appeared in the company advertisements during Sarver's tenure. L. W. "Buz" Zink, the last manager under the auspices of the Alamogordo Coca-Cola Bottling Co., replaced Sarver the following year. Like Tom Lucky, Zink had previously been employed by Magnolia Coca-Cola Bottling Co. in El Paso. He had been in charge of special events, premix, coolers, and advertising. Zink came to Alamogordo on November 1, 1970, to manage the plant (ACD 1964-1975; Zink interview). When he first took command of the plant, the bottling machinery was old and outmoded. This "shaker-type" system deposited one ounce of syrup into each bottle followed by five-and-one-half-ounces of water, then shook the container to mix the ingredients. Zink was dissatisfied with the method and sought a means of improvement (Zink interview).

About this same time, Tom Denton, owner of Roswell Coca-Cola Co., became dissatisfied with Roswell water for use in bottling Coke. He expanded his business by purchasing the Carlsbad Coca-Cola Co. and relocated his bottling operation to Carlsbad. The Carlsbad water was better, but Denton now had unneeded machinery at Roswell. The timing was perfect. Zink bought the Roswell system and had it installed in Alamogordo in 1971. Zink instituted another major change around 1973 when he hired Paul McGregor to build a steel warehouse at the southeast corner of Indian Wells Dr. and Stanford Ave. for use as a truck garage, cooler department, and extra bottle storage area (Zink interview).

During this period, the Alamogordo plant served both Otero and Lincoln Counties, and its territory extended from McGregor Range (almost to the state line near El Paso, Texas) to Corona. Previously, route salesmen were responsible for sales as well as deliveries on their routes. Zink instituted the pre-sell system where a separate salesman canvassed the area, and delivery personnel concentrated on stocking "product" for their customers. Alamogordo supported two advance salesmen, one for Alamogordo and Holloman Air Force Base and the other for outlying areas. Although routes changed periodically, there were generally two or three routes in Alamogordo and two or three routes serving the remainder of Otero and all of Lincoln Counties, along with full-service routes that tended machines (Zink interview).

The old, two-story building remained a problem. To maximize use of space and minimize transfer of equipment between floors, the offices were located upstairs along with storage for liquid sugar and syrup. Cracks in the floor were the main problem; details of this type were monitored by periodic federal inspections. Additional storage was available in the building's full basement. The steps to the second floor provided an additional problem; the risers were built too short for comfort. The steps had been constructed so that Hope Smith could climb them after his back had been injured. For other people, however, they were "too short to take one at a time and too long to take two at a time. . . a real back-breaker" (Zink interview).

Following the death of Milda Smith in 1973, the Smith family began disposing of its soft drink holdings. On January 6, 1975, the family and other stockholders finalized the sale of the Alamogordo business to the Pecos Valley Coca-Cola Co. of Roswell, New Mexico, although the Alamogordo plant retained its separate franchise. Pecos Valley had previously taken over the plants in Hobbs and Carlsbad and was looking for a new direction to expand. The Alamogordo territory bordered that of Pecos Valley and was the logical direction for an extension. The new firm placed Ronald L. Milburn as plant manager and Carl L. Sage as route manager and supervisor. The new company soon began advertising Fresca, Sprite, and Tab, although they were probably sold in Alamogordo much earlier (Coca-Cola first introduced Sprite in 1960, followed shortly by Tab; six years later Fresca joined the product line). By mid-1975, the new company shut down the bottling operation and began shipping "product" in from their Carlsbad bottling plant. By the early 1960s, some of the larger bottlers had predicted a trend in the direction of large bottling centers shipping product to smaller distributors. Although many of the smaller franchises thought the era of family bottling would never end, the predictions proved correct, and progressively fewer bottling plants served increasingly larger areas. The increasing

popularity of cans and plastic containers made it difficult for smaller bottlers to keep up with the rapid technological changes. The era of bottling in Alamogordo was at an end. From then on, all soft drinks were shipped in from outside sources. By 1997, the only Coca-Cola bottling plants left in New Mexico were located in Las Cruces, Albuquerque, and Santa Fe (ACD 1975-1977; *El Paso Times*, May 30, 1973; June 28, 1977; Josselyn interview; Russell letter).

Ken Josselyn took over as manager in 1977 and retained that position until 1989. Although the name remained the same, the company again changed hands in 1981 or 1982 when the Coca-Cola Co. of Lubbock, Texas, bought Pecos Valley. The Lubbock group in turn sold the franchise in 1989. The new owner, The Coca-Cola Bottling Group, Southwest, Inc., simply renamed the local plant the Coca-Cola Bottling Co. with Dennis Podzemny as the new plant manager. Southwest, administrated by Robert and Edmond Hoffman, is currently (1997) the fifth largest independent Coca-Cola franchiser in the United States with its main office in Lubbock, Texas. The company's five divisions support sales in parts of New Mexico, Texas, and Oklahoma with the division responsible for Alamogordo located in Odessa, Texas. Concurrent with the purchase of the business in 1989, Southwest closed down the New York Ave. plant and opened a new operation at 2409 N. Florida Ave. Because Southwest bottles all of its commodities at its production facility at Abilene, Texas, the bottling operation in Alamogordo was not restored, and the current plant serves as a warehouse, office, and distribution point. Interestingly, at a time when the popularity of plastic containers and cans was high, Southwest continued to use six-and-one-half-ounce returnable Coke bottles until 1994 or 1995. The current plant manager in 1998 is Steve Peacock (ACD 1978-1997; Peacock interview).

Location

The original plant of the Coca-Cola Bottling Company of Alamogordo, built by Tom Lucky and his crew in 1955 at 1130 New York Ave., still stands. The currently unoccupied structure (1997), along with the original warehouse in back, occupies the southeast corner of New York Ave. and Twelfth St. Its cinder block construction is a radical departure from the metal siding on the present warehouse at 2409 N. Florida Ave. The building has recently been bought for use as a woodworking shop.



Figure 7-6 - Present Location of the Coca-Cola Plant

The Bottles of the Coca-Cola Bottling Co. of Alamogordo

The oldest Coca-Cola containers sold in Alamogordo were probably those offered by Alamogordo Bottling Works in 1921. By this time Coke was sold in the familiar Georgia Green, "hobble skirt" bottle originally patented in 1916. The second slight change in style was the so-called "Christmas" Coke bottle that contained the embossment "BOTTLE PAT'D DEC. 25, 1923." This style was used until at least 1937. Although Christmas Coke bottles were featured

in Magnolia Coca-Cola Bottling Co. ads in the *Alamogordo News*, they were probably not embossed with the Alamogordo name on the base. None of the early containers with an Alamogordo designation on their bases have been found, although they should exist until at least the early 1930s.

Glass Coca-Cola containers went through ten slight stylistic changes between 1916 and 1965, allowing investigators to establish fairly short date ranges in individual bottle identifications. At this point, I have only been able to find variations of the IN U. S. PATENT OFFICE style that was first used in 1951. This is not surprising as Alamogordo was served by the El Paso company until 1955. In 1989-90 a commemorative bottle was circulated that mimicked the 1923 "Christmas" Coke bottle including the patent date, although the original "Christmas" bottles were embossed with larger basal letters than the imitations. Ten-ounce bottles, introduced in 1955, also bore the city/state designations (although I have not found one from Alamogordo), but larger containers generally did not (cf. Kendall 1978:7; Munsey 1970:62-63; Pollard 1993:45). See Lockhart 2000 for two dating tables and a discussion about dating Coca-Cola bottles.



Sprite

Although not specifically connected with the Alamogordo plant, Coca-Cola introduced a program that advertised national parks and monuments on the bases of Sprite bottles [at this point, I have not discovered a dating period for these bottles]. Each individual bottle base was embossed with the name of a specific park/monument, including White Sands National Monument. At least four variations of the White Sands bottle occur, all based on the familiar forest green bottle with debossed circular designs. A 16-ounce variation is labeled in white ACL with Sprite (star dotting the "T")/TRADE MARK ® stenciled into a white, six-pointed irregular background with ONE PINT below. A 10-ounce version is identical except for size and the lack of the ONE PINT designation. The third variation has Sprite (block letters–star dotting the "T")/TRADE MARK ® (all upwardly slanted)/10 FL. OZ. The fourth is identical except that it adds BOTTLE.



[Keith Austin] [Keith Austin] MONEY BACK