

The Other Side of the Story: A Look at the *Back* of Seven-Up Bottles

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Virtually all collectors' literature (articles and books) shows great photos and/or drawings of the fronts (also called the obverse) of bottles. Indeed, the front is the side devoted to capturing the eye of the customer and luring him or her into making the purchase – the key element of the business world. But round bottles have bases and back sides as well (along with left and right sides on square and rectangular bottles). These are often ignored despite the fact that they contain interesting evidence and variation not shown on the front sides. The base, for example (that is, the very bottom of the bottle – where it rests on the table), frequently has embossed information, such as a manufacturer's mark, possibly a patent date, generally a date code (on ACL bottles),

sometimes the bottler's name, initials, or monogram, and occasionally, pictures.

The back of the bottle (also called the reverse) can contain a great deal of information as well. On ACL bottles, this information can become quite complex. Typically, the back denotes the volume of liquid held by the bottle, required by law since March 3, 1913, when Congress passed H. R. 22526, generally known as the Gould Amendment to the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906. The act also provided an 18-month grace period for compliance, so some bottlers did not adopt bottles marked with the number of ounces until as late as September 1914. The lower part of the back side was usually reserved for information about the bottler or the franchising agency. From the 1930s to the 1960s, ACL bottles usually carried the name of the local bottling franchise along with the city

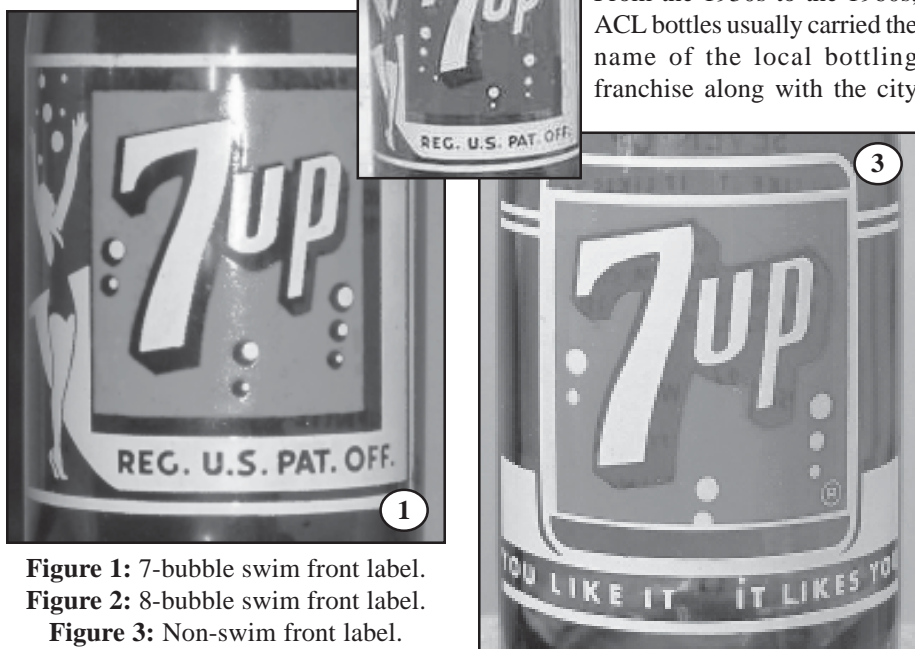


Figure 1: 7-bubble swim front label.

Figure 2: 8-bubble swim front label.

Figure 3: Non-swim front label.

and the state of the bottler. By the early 1960s, most bottlers were no longer “personalizing” their bottles. Instead the name and address of the “home company” appeared in the area formerly reserved for the local information.

A great deal of space still remained. Many companies filled the space with cute slogans, a list of ingredients, or even ads for other brands the company produced. Some of the slogans found on bottles filled in El Paso, Texas, and Southern New Mexico were:

The Yummy Best in the Sunny West – Flores Brothers Bottling Co.

Serve Cold, A New Note in Refreshment – 6-Tone from Seven-Up Co.

Get in the Spirit! – 76 from Empire Products Corp.

Good! And Good for You – Trone Bottling Co.

It'll tickle yore innards! – Mountain Dew from Pepsi-Cola.

The Advertising is Inside the Bottle – Crystal Beverage Co.

Most ACL collectors are familiar with the changes made over time to the front labels of Seven-Up bottles. The Seven-Up company went through three notable front-label changes between 1936 and about 1968. The oldest bottle was the first of the “swimsuit” series which had the 7-Up emblem, eight bubbles rising on the label, and the silhouette of a woman in a swimsuit to the left [Figure 1]. This first style had two variations, both embossed at the shoulder (the ACL process was still too new to make ACL shoulder labels – the process could handle the curve of the cylindrical bottle, but it would only work on a straight, vertical surface). These included 7up and u7p, although the mark with the “7” in the center is less common and almost certainly earlier. These were

used from 1936 to about 1939. A second label (ca. 1939-1953) was identical to the first, but a new ACL shield was included on the shoulder, and someone in the marketing department counted the bubbles on the front, then reduced the number to seven – more suitable for *Seven-up* [Figure 2]. The final style (1953-ca. 1968) had several minor changes, but the most notable one was the removal of the lady in the swim suit [Figure 3].

This is about as far as most people look. However, there is another side – to the story and the bottle – that is generally ignored. There were at least six variations in the back label during the same period when the front label only changed three times. The earliest back label (#1) was only used on the 8-bubble, swimsuit label.¹ This one began: A COOLER OFF A FRESHER UP. This was followed by what seems like a strange message to 21st-century ears: FOR THE STOMACH'S SAKE DON'T SHAKE OR STIR. Since Seven-Up was originally marketed as a hangover cure, the message makes a bit more sense. It was probably thought that stirring up the carbonation would reduce the efficacy of the cure. Just to make sure you got the message, the company added: YOU LIKE 7Up IT LIKES YOU. After they let you know that the bottle contained 7 ounces, they added a warning: CARRYING THE 7-UP TRADEMARK THIS BOTTLE MUST NOT BE USED FOR ANY OTHER DRINK [Figure 4]. Again, this sounds a bit strange almost 70 years later. In the early 20th century, however, many small bottlers were willing to use just about any bottles they could get their hands on, especially during the Great Depression in the 1930s. By the mid-1940s, virtually no bottlers still used any of the “theft” warnings on their labels. At least in El Paso, the local



Figure 4: Back label #1.

bottler's name was not included on the back; it was embossed on the base. Back label #1 was probably only used in 1936 and 1937.

A slight variation of this first label (#2) was found on both the later 8-bubble bottles and the earliest 7-bubble variation (with the ACL shield on the shoulder). The central portion of the label remained the same (except for a single word), but the top and bottom were different. Apparently someone in marketing noticed that A COOLER OFF A FRESHER UP

was grammatically horrid, so the top two lines were changed to read: A FRESH UP DRINK. The other change was to move the company information (in this case, 7-UP BOTTLING CO. OF EL PASO/EL PASO, TEXAS) from the base to the lower part of the back message. In the center of the message, the slogan YOU LIKE 7Up IT LIKES YOU now reads YOU LIKE IT IT LIKES YOU [Figure 5]. Back Label #2 was used from 1938 to 1944 or 1945.

The second back label (#3) used on the 7-bubble, swimsuit bottles began with THE "Fresh Up" DRINK (with "Fresh Up" in script). For the first time, this label included four lines of contents information. The YOU LIKE IT slogan remained, but the warning had changed to THIS TRADEMARKED BOTTLE MUST NOT BE USED FOR ANY OTHER DRINK. The company information remained the same, but the block fonts in the entire message changed, creating a very different look [Figure 6]. Back label #3 was used from 1940 to at least 1946 but no later than 1948. That created about a four year overlap with

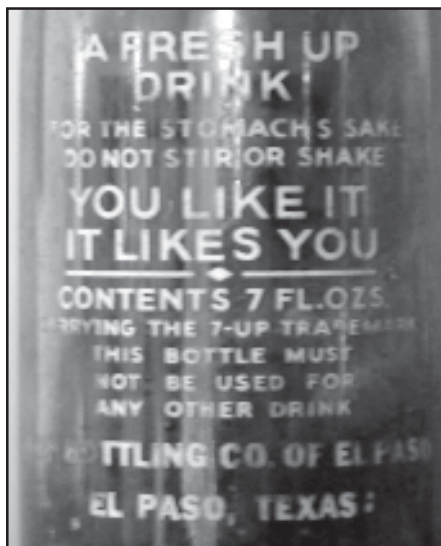


Figure 5: Back label #2.

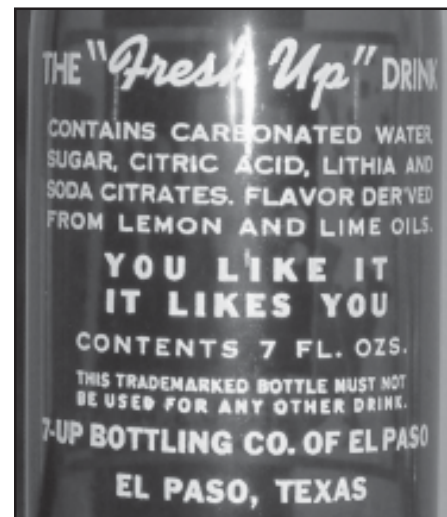


Figure 6: Back label #3.

label #2. Although I have not found a reason for this, it is likely that some local bottlers simply refused to make the change. There is virtually always a lag between the time when the home company requests a change and the actual dates when the local franchises comply.

The third label (#4) again slightly changed fonts and added SEVEN-UP at the top. The ingredients remained the same except that the word LITHIA was changed to LITHIUM [Figure 7]. The final label (#5) included one other very slight change: the word LITHIUM was dropped [Figure 8]. Back label #4 was used by 1949 (and may have only been used during that year), and #5 was used from 1949 to 1953.

When the front label was changed to eliminate the swim suit lady, the back again received minor alterations (#6). YOU LIKE IT IT LIKES YOU moved from the lower center to a place just below SEVEN UP at the top. THE "Fresh Up" DRINK was somewhat altered to read "Fresh Up" WITH 7up and moved to the lower center of the message. All references to lithium continued to be

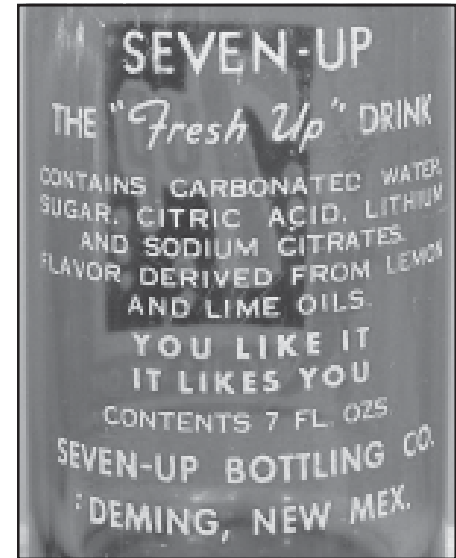


Figure 7: Back label #4.

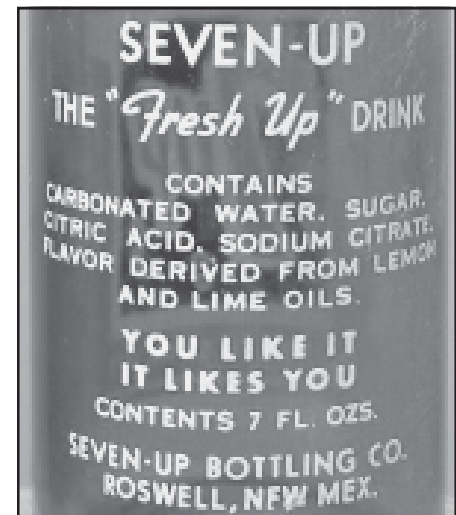


Figure 8: Back label #5.

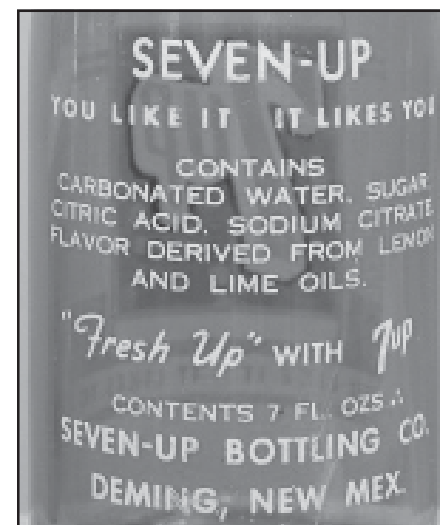


Figure 9: Back label #6.

absent [Figure 9]. Back label #6 was apparently used for the entire life of non-swimsuit bottles, 1953 to ca. 1968. I have observed the labels on bottles from 1955 to 1964.

One strange anomaly remains unexplained. A bottle from Clovis, New Mexico, does not fit the pattern. Although the ACL on the reverse appears to be a variation of back label #3 (with only the

addition of a line and diamond between IT LIKES YOU and the contents information), the date code on the base indicates that the bottle was made in 1956! Bottles and back labels of this kind should have been discontinued a decade earlier. Unless the base was mis-engraved, with a "5" stamped in place of a "4," the bottle does not make sense. It is highly unlikely that the Seven-Up Bottling Co. of Clovis would have commissioned a glass house to manufacture a decade-old design. The back label should be listed as #3a because it is a variant of the #3 label.

This is one story of the evolution of a bottle. Often the little details can become as fascinating as the large. Over a 32-year period, the changes in Seven-Up bottles reflect the changes in the nation and the beverage industry. Advertising on bottles became more literate and grammatically correct. As the number of smaller bottlers gradually decreased, the need for warnings against the reuse of bottles ceased. The inclusion of lithium in the formula moved from being seen as an asset to becoming a liability. And that's the other side of the story.

My gratitude to Lynn Loomis for sharing the information from his

Table 1: Date Ranges for Seven-Up Back Labels*

Label #	Front Label	Dates
1	8-bubble swim	1937
2	7-bubble swim	1938-1944
3	7-bubble swim	1940-1946
4	7-bubble swim	1949
5	7-bubble swim	1949-1953
6	non-swim	1955-1964

*Dates came from bottles in the Lynn Loomis collection and that of the author.

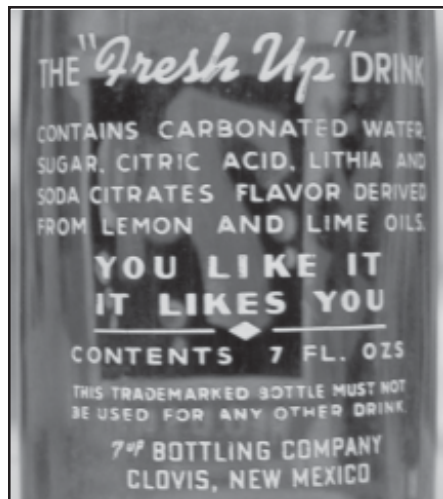


Figure 10: Back label #3a, an unusual variation.

collection of New Mexico bottles.

Postscript

Maybe some of the readers can help fill in some of the dates from Seven-Up bottles in their collections. If you want to help, just send me (or Kathy) the year (date code embossed on the bases of the bottles); whether the bottle is 8-bubble swim, 7-bubble swim, or non-swim; and which back label the bottle has (#1, #2, etc.). If the neck/shoulder area of the bottle is embossed instead of ACL, please let me know if it was 7up or u7p.

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Footnote:

¹ I have looked at every variation of Seven-Up bottles I could find in El Paso and Southern New Mexico. It is possible that still other variations were available in other parts of the country.