

The Birthplace of Coca-Cola Historical Marker Report

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The following paper was prepared under the direction of Dr. Jennifer Dickey at Kennesaw State University for an Introduction to Public History course.

The Georgia Historical Marker, “Birthplace of Coca-Cola,” located on Marietta Street Northwest in downtown Atlanta, Georgia, stands in testament to the inception of the original recipe of the famous Coca-Cola soft drink. The historical marker also stands as a symbol of the influential history and legacy of the distinguished individuals who were involved in the creation of Coca-Cola products and the business affairs that led to the establishment of the world-renowned The Coca-Cola Company. The state of Georgia treasures The Coca-Cola Company and the influences the company has had on the state’s history, industry, and other major institutions. The city of Atlanta has been impacted immensely by the actions of The Coca-Cola Company and is proud to be the birthplace of the original product and the international brand of Coca-Cola.

The “Birthplace of Coca-Cola” historical marker was erected in Fulton County, Georgia in 2016, within the domain of the city of Atlanta, and was sponsored by the Georgia Historical Society and The Coca-Cola Company. While the historical marker for the birthplace of Coca-Cola was erected in the 21st century, the rich history of the Coca-Cola recipe and The Coca-Cola Company began in the later part of the nineteenth century.ⁱ The creator of the original Coca-Cola recipe was John Stith Pemberton. He was trained in herbal medicines, and he was a graduate of pharmacy school. In 1869, Pemberton moved to the city of Atlanta and in 1886 invented the product that would become the medicinal drink known as Coca-Cola.ⁱⁱ The original product was advertised and sold as a medicinal beverage for an array of ailments; however, there were

concerns centered around the leading pharmaceutical ingredient in the original recipe of Coca-Cola, which was a trace amount of cocaine. This concern can be observed in the 1891 *Atlanta Constitution* newspaper article, “What’s in Coca-Cola?” The article bears witness to the testimony of an unidentified citizen of Atlanta and his belief that the consumption of Coca-Cola medicinal beverage had contributed to a growing rate of cocaine addictions.ⁱⁱⁱ The small amount of cocaine that was included in the original Coca-Cola recipe was removed from the recipe during the Prohibition era.

Following the creation of the original recipe of Coca-Cola by Mr. Pemberton and successful sales of the medicinal beverage in Jacob’s Pharmacy in Atlanta, the next grand step in the Coca-Cola legacy began with Asa Candler. He became interested in the Coca-Cola recipe and began to acquire the recipe through purchase beginning in 1888. After purchasing the original Coca-Cola recipe from John Pemberton, Asa Candler established The Coca-Cola Company, which became a nationwide distributor of the beverage.^{iv} The newly formed The Coca-Cola Company experienced great success and was a welcomed industry in the Atlanta area. The Coca-Cola Company also became a major philanthropic organization, first in the Atlanta area, and, as the company expanded, more broadly throughout the United States and around the world. According to historian Jamil Zainaldin, “Emory University was an early beneficiary of Coca-Cola philanthropy through the Candler family, which owned the company until 1919.”^v Emory University is now one of the most prestigious universities in the state of Georgia. The Coca-Cola Foundation was The Coca-Cola Company’s next stride in widening their philanthropist horizons to include national and international receptionists. The Coca-Cola Foundation was created in 1984 and the foundation donates to many nonprofits with the company’s vision of enriching and fulfilling educational programs worldwide.^{vi}

A consortium led by Ernest Woodruff acquired The Coca-Cola Company in 1919. Ernest Woodruff's son, Robert Woodruff, became president in 1923 and managed The Coca-Cola Company for a major portion of the twentieth century. Under the leadership of Robert Woodruff, the company flourished.^{vii} The world's love for the Coca-Cola soft drink and The Coca-Cola Company reached unprecedented levels following World War II as new countries and peoples were introduced to Coca-Cola. Coca-Cola is one of the most influential, successful, and recognizable brands throughout the world.^{viii}

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ⁱ The Georgia Historical Society, "Birthplace of Coca-Cola," GeorgiaHistory.com, https://georgiahistory.com/ghmi_marker_updated/birthplace-of-coca-cola/, 1.

ⁱⁱ August Giebelhaus, "Coca-Cola Company," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, (2017): Accessed October 15, 2018. <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org.proxy.kennesaw.edu/articles/business-economy/coca-cola-company>

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Atlanta Constitution*, "What's in Coca-Cola?" June 12, 1891, From Newspapers.com, *Coca-Cola Detractors Ad-1891*, Accessed October 15, 2018, https://www.newspapers.com/clip/410452/cocacola_detractors_ad_1891/

^{iv} Georgia Historical Society, "Birthplace of Coca-Cola."

^v Jamil Zainaldin, "Coca-Cola Philanthropy," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, (2015): Accessed October 16, 2018. <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org.proxy.kennesaw.edu/articles/business-economy/coca-cola-philanthropy>

^{vi} Zainaldin, "Coca-Cola Philanthropy," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*.

^{vii} Giebelhaus, "Coca-Cola Company," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*.

^{viii} Giebelhaus, "Coca-Cola Company," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*.