

ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH

November 2022

Carbonated water, ginger extract, and high fructose corn syrup are the basic ingredients of Ginger ale. This drink, once incredibly popular, now only carries a fraction of the ingredient its named after: Ginger. Most North American companies that still bottle Ginger ale had real ginger as part of their original recipes but have since moved to utilizing an extract, natural flavors, and caramel to mimic the taste and color. There are several companies in North America that boast to being the best Ginger ale brand, and many consumers have their favorites such as Canada Dry, Vernors, Schweppes, and Seagram's. But what about outside of North America?

November's artifact of the month highlights a Ginger ale bottle from Belfast, Ireland found on the Big Cypress Reservation. Belfast has a long history of manufacturing Ginger ale. The Ross company, created in 1879, became incredibly popular because of the ingredients within their Ginger ale product. Jamaican ginger, sugar cane from the West Indies, and the famous aerated waters found in the city of Belfast all contributed to the "champagne" of Ginger ale at the time. Due to the use of ginger and the way the manufacturer treated the plant before use, the product was known to significantly help with digestive issues (The Board of Trade Journal, 1923).



THPO 2008.6.14



Production of Ross's Belfast Ginger ale was largely sent overseas to the United States. In fact, after one of Ross's sons settled in New York, almost one million bottles of Ginger ale were imported into the state in 1883 (Letslookagain.com). The Ginger ale was packaged inside of a torpedo bottle (left) which has a rounded bottom forcing the bottle to be laid on its side for transportation and storage. The bottle was embossed with "ROSS'S" on one side and "BELFAST" (bottom) on the other. Laying a bottle on its side helped to ensure the cork stayed wet and the contents did not lose carbonation (sha.org).

Eventually the company merged with its competitors in 1975 and the Ross name and recipe were phased out in 1986. However, recently companies like Gray Brewing Co. in Wisconsin are aiming to bring back the original taste and flavor of Belfast Ginger ale.

The original location of the creation of Ginger ale is purported to be in Belfast City Center. The plaque "Established in 1852" sits on the front of the Costa coffee establishment which was the original site of Ulster Medical Hall. The Thomas Cantrell factory named for the distributor and chemist who created Ginger ale is located in Victoria Square. The magazine article (top) is from Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News circulated in London in December 1913.

