

Elyse Luray: Our next story investigates the origins of an American icon. Atlanta, May, 1886: Something is brewing in the laboratory of 54-year-old inventor and doctor John Pemberton. It's a medical tonic the doctor claims will improve the health of this hot southern city. More than a century later, that medicine is still going strong as the best-selling soft drink on the planet: Coca-Cola.

Song: "I'd like to teach the world to sing, sing with me, perfect harmony, perfect harmony, I'd like to buy the world a Coke and keep it company..."

Elyse: More than a hundred years later, a mysterious card has bubbled to the surface that may shed new light on the bizarre origins of this icon of American advertising. It's in the hands of Gary Traw from Parkersburg, West Virginia, a collector of rare Coca-Cola memorabilia.

Gary Traw: I feel this piece could be the ultimate Coca-Cola item, maybe, of all the items out there. It could be maybe the top piece.

Elyse: I'm Elyse Luray. I'm an appraiser of advertising art. Coca-Cola-related items are some of the most valuable and sought-after, so I'm looking forward to seeing Gary's card. Okay, Gary, what do you have?

Gary: Well, I have an old card.

Elyse: Oh, nice. She's beautiful. She's Victorian. It's a nice card. Oh, and there's a poem on the back.

Elyse [reads]: "One very sultry summer day through Atlanta, toiled on his way a lawyer, overcome with heat, his lips could only just repeat, Coco-Cola."

Elyse: A lawyer sweating. That's pretty funny.

Gary: It's a parody. I just wonder what it's a parody of, some type of poem or a song or something.

Elyse: I have no idea.

Gary: And what about the Coco-Cola? If you noticed, right here where it says "Coco-Cola," it's actually spelled c-o-c-o instead of c-o-c-a.

Elyse: Gary, what exactly do you want to know?

Gary: Well, for one I'd like to know if this card is genuine. And if it is, I'd like to find out if it could possibly be the very first advertisement by Coca-Cola.

Elyse: Coca-Cola is the most iconic symbol when it comes to advertising, and if this is the first, then not only from a collectible point of view but from a historic point of view, you've got one incredible piece there.

Gary: I hope it's the real thing.

Elyse: I want to take a closer look at the card. This is what's known as a trade card, and during the late 19th century it was an inexpensive way to get your product advertised. This was a very cheap way of doing business, but in today's world these cards are really valuable. But then again, there's a lot of fakes and forgeries on the market. So it looks like I have my work cut out. If this card is the earliest Coca-Cola ad, then I need to place it around 1886, the year Coca-Cola was invented. I'm going to start with the poem on the back of the card. I'm plugging some of the lines into internet search engines. In the late 19th century, advertising frequently used parodies of popular poems. Not a whole lot at first... .but then, success. The line "and like a silver clarion rung" brings up a web page bearing a famous poem. And that isn't the only copycat line. It's an 1842 poem called "Excelsior" by poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Wadsworth's poems were best-sellers in the late 19th century, and that's certainly the right time period for Gary's card. I'm off to a good start, but I need more information on Coke's early history. There's only one place to go: Atlanta, Georgia, Coca-Cola's

hometown. On my way, I do some reading into the drink's surprising early history.

Elyse: Hoping to create something exceptional, Dr. Pemberton experimented with exotic ingredients. One of them derived from the leaves of a Peruvian plant. It was cocaine. It's not something the company talks about today, and in 1886 few were aware of the drug's addictive danger. For the first years of its existence, cocaine was a key part of the formula. In the early part of the 20th century, the dangers of addiction now clear, the Coca-Cola Company removed cocaine from the drink entirely. By 1938, Coca-Cola was the best-selling soft drink in the United States and on its way to conquering the world. But what turned a southern novelty into a global icon? And was Gary's trade card the beginning of this transformation? Let's go inside and find out.

Elyse: It's clear from this artwork that it was advertising that helped turn Coca-Cola from an exotic medical potion into a defining symbol of American culture. Incredible artwork; a collector's dream. What's great is that these pieces were not meant to be collected. Coca-Cola gave out these premiums and produced these ads to go into stores, to be displayed on the counters. The colors are screaming. The subject matters are joyful. They make you smile. And for that reason, people paid big money for them. If Gary's card is the forefather of all this advertising, then it could be historically quite valuable. I'm meeting with Phil Mooney, Coca-Cola's chief archivist. This is the card, and I have two questions for you. Do you think it's authentic, and two, if it's the earliest known advertisement for Coca-Cola? Phil's answer isn't going to make Gary happy. Seems he doesn't have the first Coca-Cola advertisement.

Phil Mooney: We know that the first ad for Coca-Cola was a newspaper ad that appears in late May of 1886 in the Atlanta newspaper.

Elyse: But Phil's also been doing some research for us. And, in a company document from the early part of the 20th century, he's found a curious bit of information about a cut, or printing, which sounds very much like our own.

Elyse [reads]: "September 29th a cut was made by James P. Harrison & Company of a parody on Coca-Cola, and it was printed on a small number of cards and distributed as an advertisement."

Phil: Now, this seems to indicate that there was something in the marketplace and perhaps it's the item that you are showing me today.

Elyse: So this could be our card. But Phil isn't so sure. In fact, he seems pretty skeptical. Was Gary's card made by someone who had read the pamphlet years later? The sentence says "a parody of Coca-Cola was printed."

Phil: I would have expected that there would have been a title rather than a literal taking of the word "parody" from this description and placed on a card. The other piece that's sort of troubling is the fact that Coca-Cola is misspelled. It's called "coco-cola" here. I would have thought that John Pemberton, the inventor of the product, would have taken very special care to be sure that an advertisement for this new product had the correct spelling of the product.

Elyse: Well, have you ever seen any other ads where Coca-Cola is misspelled?

Phil: We have. These ads were placed in newspapers by druggists and drug stores. And so, it's much more likely that a druggist wouldn't take the same amount of care with the product as the inventor himself would.

Elyse: So what's your overall opinion? Phil's not prepared to call it a fake, but he's not convinced it's the real thing.

Phil: It's a strange piece and one that raises a lot of questions.

Elyse: Okay, so my investigation is losing its fizz. I think I need a pick-me-up.

Elyse [talking to Soda Fountain Attendant]: Sam, I think I need a drink.

Sam: How about a Coke? I'll make you a Coke the way they used to make them at the soda fountain. [hands her glass with holder] And, since it was not considered ladylike for you to hold on to a glass.

Elyse: Why, thank you. Cheers. My trip to Atlanta has cast some doubt on the authenticity of Gary's card. I know some colleagues in the New York area who may be able to help. Judith Solodkin is a master printer who specializes in the 19th century. She should be able to tell me if this card was printed in the 1880s. I have this card. Here she is. What do you think about her? What's your first impression?

Judith Solodkin: I always look at the ink on paper first. And in this case we have a very transparent brown, then a warm black, and a white, and then a very distinctive texture in the background. And that texture looks like the texture from a lithography stone.

Elyse: What is stone lithography? How is the process done?

Judith: The artisan would take a lithography crayon just as the one I have here, or a pencil, and actually draw. You can see I'm actually drawing on this stone. Wherever I draw with this greasy pencil is where the ink will stick. And if I then take a roller that has ink on it, the ink will stick to the greasy dots of the pencil. If I put a piece of paper on top of the ink stone and run it through the press, then the ink will transfer from the stone to the paper. And voilà, I have a print.

Elyse: And when was this commonly used?

Judith: It's a relatively recent process but was in its heyday in this country in kind of the mid-1800s.

Elyse: Now, do you think that our piece was made around that time period?

Judith: If you look at it on the magnifying glass, you can see that there's a very specific grain, and that grain looks like the surface of a stone lithograph.

Elyse: Judith is confident that our card is from the late 19th century. But I'm not sure what to make of her verdict.

Judith: It seems unlikely that someone would have made a fake Coke advertisement back then, because there was no market for collectibles at that time. The drink still wasn't that well-known.

Elyse: I've come to Hackensack, New Jersey. Allan Petretti has been a friend for many years and is considered one of the country's leading experts in Coca-Cola memorabilia. He shows me some of the oldest pieces in his collection. And what does that sell for?

Allan Petretti: This is upwards of 25,000. I would say between 25,000 and 50,000.

Elyse [shows card]: Here she is.

Allan: Kind of exciting to see this close-up. And if we take a look closely at this, we can see -- very carefully -- we can see that this card is just about as crude a printing process as you could ever come across.

Elyse: Now, the archivist was concerned that it did not say Coca-Cola on the front. To them, it's a problem that it doesn't say Coke on the front.

Allan: Well, I could understand the concern of that. You have to realize that this card was produced in the product's infancy. This is when it was first invented.

Elyse: Allan says that John Pemberton, Coke's inventor, was more concerned with his drink's secret formula than with its early spelling.

Allan: They didn't even think that the product was going to sell. As a matter of fact, they only sold 25 gallons for the first year, and they paid \$25 for advertising. So this product was in its infancy. The fact that Coca-Cola, their logo, is not on

this card is not surprising to me.

Elyse: Thirty years as a connoisseur of Coke memorabilia has given Allan a good nose for a fake.

Allan: Coca-Cola is such a popular collectible today that we do have quite a few fakes and it's something you have to be aware of. There have some record-breaking prices for fake and phony items.

Elyse: How do you personally tell if something's been faked?

Allan: I've been in the printing business since the 1960s and been collecting Coca-Cola since 1972, so you get to look at this stuff. You get to look at trade cards and see the feel of the paper, the type that was used. Do this over and over again and it becomes...

Elyse: What Allan told me next gave me what I needed to go back to Gary. I tell Gary his card is based on the poem "Excelsior" by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. And what's amazing is if you look at your card, you can see the exact same lines on your card as in the poem.

"And like a silver clarion rung the accents of that well-known tongue.

Gary: "The accents of that well-known tongue." Well, that sure is proof. [chuckles] That impresses me that you guys found this book.

Elyse: Now, you asked me whether this card was the first piece of advertising for Coca-Cola. And I have good news, and I have bad news. The bad news is that it's not the first advertising piece of Coca-Cola. The first advertisement was actually a couple months prior in the Atlanta Journal. Then I tell him what Allan Petretti had to say about the card.

FLASHBACK TO ALLAN PETRETTI INTERVIEW

Elyse: So, what do you think?

Allan: In my opinion, this is one of the earliest pieces of Coca-Cola advertising. Here we have one of the very, very first pieces of advertising for a product that has become part of Americana. And this is exciting to see a piece like this.

BACK TO REVEAL

Elyse: Although advertising collectors pay more for rare artwork than historical firsts, Allan believes Gary's card is an incredibly rare piece. It takes us back almost to the moment of creation for this icon of American advertising. And I tell Gary that, as a professional appraiser, I'm also certain he's got the real thing.

Gary: I'm really glad to hear that. That's tremendous. Thank you very much.

Elyse: You know what it means, Gary: It's time for a Coke and a smile.

Gary: You're on.

Elyse: Just two years after he perfected Coca-Cola, John Pemberton died. He never knew how famous his concoction would become. To this day, the Coca-Cola formula remains a trade secret.

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