

Caleb Bradham and the Invention of Pepsi-Cola*

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No matter how old you are, “you’re in the Pepsi generation.” Before the cola wars, singer Britney Spears, or the Pepsi 400 race at Daytona International Speedway, Pepsi-Cola was part of American culture.

When Pepsi was invented in 1898, people bought carbonated sodas at the local drugstore. The beverages we think of as soft drinks were considered medicines in the late 1800s and early 1900s. They were used to treat everything from stomach problems to lack of energy. Pharmacists experimented with different ingredients and came up with flavored syrups for ginger ale, root beer, Coca-Cola, Dr. Pepper, and other beverages that we still sip today.

Carbonated water was added to these syrups to make soft drinks at the drugstore’s soda fountain. People in small towns and big cities gathered at soda fountains to meet and



Over the years, Pepsi-Cola has been sold in bottles of different designs and colors. (Left to right) These bottles date from approximately 1934 (clear with red and white logo), 1890 (amber), 1940 (clear with red, white, and blue logo), 1925 (green), and 1900 (amber). Caleb Bradham estimated that he mixed about 7,968 gallons of Pepsi syrup in 1903. In 1907 about 104,029 gallons were mixed for sale through franchises. Image courtesy of the North Carolina Museum of History.

catch up on the latest news. Great-tasting beverages helped to attract more customers.

Pepsi-Cola’s inventor, Caleb Davis Bradham, was born in Duplin County on May 27, 1867. Bradham attended local academies and then attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for three years. He left that school to study medicine at the University of Maryland but had

to drop out when he ran out of money. Later he returned to Maryland to study pharmacy. After holding several other jobs and completing his degree, he opened a drugstore in New Bern.

Like other druggists of his time, Bradham concocted different syrup mixtures for his store. Brad's Drink, as Bradham's friends first called it, was his customers' favorite beverage. He eventually renamed the drink Pepsi-Cola for the pepsin and cola nuts that were among its ingredients. In 1902 Bradham hired a manager for his pharmacy and began devoting more time to marketing his product, at first mixing the syrup in large barrels himself, selling it to other soda fountains and drugstores, and making deliveries by horse and wagon.

Pepsi-Cola expanded quickly, and by 1909 there were more than 250 bottlers in twenty-four states. By 1915 the company was worth more than one million dollars! But disaster struck. The price of sugar, one of the main ingredients in the drink, quadrupled when World War I erupted. Bradham bought a large amount of sugar because he thought the price would continue to rise. Instead, prices dropped a lot. Bradham also lost money when he invested in a new bottling method that failed to pay off.

In 1923 Bradham's drink company declared bankruptcy. Roy C. Megargel, a Wall Street broker, bought the Pepsi trademark, business, and goodwill for \$35,000 and formed the Pepsi-Cola Corporation. Bradham's luck ran out, but his invention lives on—around the world.

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Caleb Bradham (1867-1934) invented Pepsi-Cola in his New Bern drugstore. Image courtesy of the North Carolina Museum of History.

