

Bunchgrass Historian



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● Pullman's Bottling Industry

Whitman County Historical Society

The Bunchgrass historian is published by the Whitman County Historical Society. Its purpose is to further interest in the rich past of Whitman County.

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Pullman native Robert King now lives in Anchorage, Alaska, where he is employed as the State Archaeologist of Alaska. His article on Pullman soft drink bottlers is his third recent contribution to *Bunchgrass Historian*, joining earlier articles on hotels and photographers.

Cover:

Label from a Star Soda bottle, from sometime about 1920-40. Courtesy of Vic and Bobbie Moore, Kennewick, WA.

From your Editor:

If you have not noticed, the *Bunchgrass Historian*, has been inactive for a few months. Your editor had seven months of cancer treatments in early 1998 and the *Bunchgrass Historian* magazine went on sick leave along with the editor. The editor has somewhat recovered in August, and, additionally, the magazine now has another editor who is also working on its production. She is Wendy Blake of Rosalia, known to many readers for her other activities with the Historical Society.

We have numbered this issue with Vol. 2/3, and made it Number 3 for 1997 although we are publishing at a date long past 1997! We will certainly have to do some more adjusting of these mysterious numbers on the next issue.

A number of articles have been submitted in the last year or two and have been on hold until they could be fitted into an issue of the magazine. One is awaiting our ability to locate illustrations. We'll see what we can realistically do.

Thanks for your patience while I was out with illness.

Lawrence R. Stark, editor

Pullman's Bottling Industry

by

Robert E. King

Introduction

For most of the sixty-year period between the early 1890s and the early 1950s, Pullman's manufacturing base included a series of small-scale bottling works. This article recalls their history.

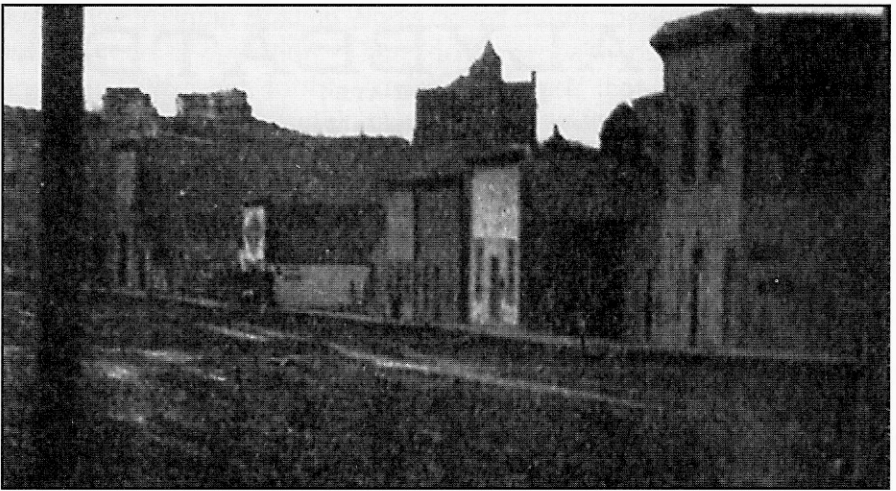
Pullman Bottling Works (1890s)

The key to Pullman's first bottling venture, the "Pullman Bottling Works," established in 1891, was the surprise discovery in the late 1880s of artesian water in the downtown area. This was found when a series of wells struck free-flowing water which spouted from the ground to a height of three or more feet. The first of these was dug by Mark True, pioneer hotel operator, in an area near the southwest corner of Pine and Main streets. There, on a lot purchased to relocate his "Palace Hotel,"¹ True had the delightful surprise of finding Pullman's first artesian well on April 24, 1889.² Soon, similar wells were struck in nearby locations, supplying much of town's water for many years thereafter.

Among those most pleased with the discovery of artesian water were entrepreneurs seeing the potential to cash in on it, including its hoped-for medicinal qualities. Thomas Neill and Philip M. Thompson, were the first to do so, becoming partners in the establishment of a bottling business in Pullman in mid-1891³, as well as a public swimming bath.⁴ Neill, an early Pullman resident, was then-owner and operator of the Pullman's first newspaper, the Pullman Herald, while Thompson lived in Spokane, and served as the bottling company's agent there.

Their plant was located in a two-story wooden building on the north side of Main street, about where today's Mimosa Grill and Bar is located (420 Main). It remained there until closing a few years later, probably falling victim to the countrywide recession of 1893. But during its first year, it became a pride of the growing town.

Thomas Neill's newspaper for October 9, 1891 boasted that the Pullman Bottling Works was already gaining a reputation for its products, including sodas, orange cider, and a special "Chalybeate" drink. Interestingly, "chalybeate" means containing salts of iron or tasting like iron. Thus, while the drink's taste may not have been especially pleasant to everyone, it nonetheless was claimed to have special qualities.



East Main Street, Pullman, 1898. Star Bottling Works building about center, with diamond design on front.

—Whitman County Historical Society

The newspaper explained: “Chalybeate is a natural mineral water from the Pullman artesian wells, artificially charged with carbonic acid gas. It is a mild laxative, tones the system, dispels the blues and cures stomach and kidney troubles.”⁵

Further, the paper claimed that the apparently metallic-tasting drink compared favorably to other more famous mineral waters, such as “Appolinaris, Vichy or Idenna water.”

Adding to Pullman’s pride in the beverage, the same newspaper told that the Pullman drink had been on prominent display at the fall 1891 Spokane, Washington fair, and that Washington “Governor Ferry tried some of it while visiting the exhibition...and ordered a couple of cases sent to him in Olympia.”⁶

The paper further maintained that all the Chalybeate drinks produced in Pullman were “...eagerly sought for by outside dealers, and the [bottling] establishment is run to its utmost capacity.”⁷ Later reports of the fair told that the display for the drink had won awards for “finest exhibit of mineral waters...[and] best exhibit in any class at the fair,” plus that every bottle sold was “an advertisement for the City of Flowing Wells.”⁸

Local newspaper ads from the fall of 1891 onward claimed that the firm manufactured “sodas and all kinds of aerated waters from the Artesian Water of Pullman.”⁹ Also, during its first year of operation, an article written by the editor of the *Walla Walla Daily Statesman* newspaper was proudly reprinted in the Pullman paper on December 25, 1891. It claimed that Pullman’s “large and extensive bottling works are already in full blast, thirteen different kinds of healthful drinks being manufactured and shipped to all parts of the world.”¹⁰

CHALYBEATE

[CHA-LYB-E-ATE]

Is a Natural Mineral Water from the Artesian Wells of Pullman, noted for its medicinal properties. It is equal to the famous Vichy and Apollinar-Waters of Europe. A comparison with any other foreign or domestic mineral water is invited.

MANUFACTURERS
OF

SODAS

And all kinds of Aerated Waters from the artesian water of Pullman, which is noted for its medicinal properties. **OUR GINGER ALE** rank with the finest imported. All our drinks are guaranteed to be absolutely pure. Two diplomas awarded for quality and display at the Spokane Agricultural Fair, 1891. Private families supplied in quantities of one dozen or more, delivered free. Dr. Doolittle uses and recommends it as a pleasant and agreeable water.

THOMPSON & NEILL,

PROPRIETORS OF

PULLMAN BOTTLING WORKS.

PHILIP W. THOMPSON,

Resident Agent.

300

WEST FIRST STREET, CORNER POST.
SPOKANE, WASH.

Advertisement for Pullman Bottling Works, about 1890.

—Oregon-Washington-Idaho Gazetteer, 1891-92

By late October, 1891, the Pullman Bottling Works employed around 14 men, with bottles being supplied by train from Salt Lake City.¹¹ The Hutchinson-style, straight-sided bottles were embossed with a spouting artesian well on one side between the words “Artesian” and “Brand,” with “Pullman’s Chalybeate Waters” in raised letters on the other side.

Interestingly, these were the style of bottle, invented in 1879, which gave rise to the term “pop bottle.” Each was sealed only by the pressure of carbonation in the drink holding up a stopper with a rubber gasket in the upper throat of the bottle. Attached to the top of the stopper was a metal wire loop that protruded beyond the neck. To drink from such bottles, the protruding loop was pushed down into the neck of the bottle causing a “popping” sound. Next, the consumer would place his or her mouth on the lip of the bottle, touching both tongue and teeth against the top of the wire loop, before drinking liquid from around it. In 1906, such bottles were identified as unsanitary under the Pure Food and Drug Act, though their use persisted in some areas for a decade or more.¹² Yet the Pullman Bottling Works was long-gone by that time.

The last Pullman newspaper ad for the Pullman Bottling Works appeared on June 30, 1893, with no further mention of the plant until a small “News of the City” notice appeared over two years later. On January 4, 1896, the *Pullman Herald* stated that J. W. McKee of Pomeroy had “purchased the plant of the Pullman bottling works, and will hereafter conduct that establishment.” It added: “He will remove his family here from Pomeroy.”¹³

Based on the lack of advertisements after mid-1893, and the fact that a bad decision hit the country that same year causing many businesses to fail, it seems

likely that the Pullman Bottling Works closed during the summer of 1893, after about two years of operation. Thus, McKee probably purchased it as a closed business in 1896. Yet, further evidence suggests that McKee's hope-for re-opening of the plant either didn't happen or was also short-lived. This again may have been caused by the still-lingering depression which lasted into 1897. In late January, 1899, at the time of its sale to new owners after McKee, the firm was listed in the newspaper as "the old bottling works" which was closed.¹⁴ This latter sale marked its resurrection as the Star Bottling Works, a firm that would continue for over 45 years.

Star Bottling Works/Star Bottling & Manufacturing Company, Ltd. (1899-1946)

In early February 1899, the former Pullman Bottling Works plant on Main street re-opened as the Star Bottling Works. Richard and Rudolph Pfeil, owners of an earlier meat business in Pullman, purchased the plant in January 1899.¹⁵ Richard, the older brother, born in 1862, was a German immigrant. He was about nine years old when his family came to the United States in 1871, settling first in Minnesota. There, his brother, Rudolph, was born the following year.¹⁶

While the Pfeils successfully operated the re-started bottling business in Pullman for over five years, a serious problem occurred within the first two months. It involved its location so close to the South Fork of the Palouse River, which flowed within a few feet behind their plant. High water in March of 1899 seriously undermined the foundations of the north part of their bottling works where ice was stored. The local paper reported that the river "threatened to topple" the structure.¹⁷ As a result, less than a year later, the Pfeils purchased a building about a half-block to the east (still on the north side of Main street) and remodelled it to include the bottling works as well as their residence. Their sister, Bertha, came to live with them as housekeeper.¹⁸ On June 9, 1900, the Pfeil brothers and their sister, all unmarried, were living there, with Richard's occupation listed on the federal census of that year as "bottler."¹⁹

The earliest ad in the local newspaper for the Star Bottling Works appeared on August 12, 1899. Unlike the prior advertisements of the Pullman Bottling Works claiming medicinal qualities to the water, the Star ad began with the word "Warning!" and focused on its health benefits, claiming that its beverages and mineral waters were "absolutely pure and free from contamination."²⁰ Further, it cautioned that due to the "constant danger from typhoid fever," Pullman residents should "beware of all surface waters, whether from the river or a hole in the ground, into which all kinds of refuse" is thrown. This line of advertising apparently was prompted by Pullman's occasional typhoid outbreaks at this time. Yet, using the same unsanitary style of "pop" bottles as the earlier firm, the "pure" contents of the Star drinks ironically were being compromised

anyway. About this time or a little later, the firm also bottled seltzer water in quart or larger siphon bottles, with one surviving example having "Pullman Bottling Works" etched on the side of the bottle below a star.²¹

In April 1902, Rudolph Pfeil was reported in the Pullman newspaper as "fitting up a novel refrigerator in his new meat market," using cool water from "the artesian well back of the market."²² Thus, he may have left the bottling operation by that time, returning to his former trade. Otherwise, Richard Pfeil continued in the firm for another two or three years.

The Star Bottling Works was recorded as a Pullman business in the 1904 city directory, the first printed since 1891. Its listing was as the "Pullman Star Bottling Works, Main st.," with Richard A Pfeil, reported as the the bottler, also living on Main.²³ During this time, the business seemed to have flourished. This continued even following a change in ownership in early 1905.

In February of 1905, the Pullman paper reported that the Lewiston (Idaho) Bottling Works "consolidated" with the Pullman firm, with "water from the artesian well from which the latter plant is supplied" to be shipped to Lewiston. The article also noted that "the spring trade will soon commence and the proprietors are making preparations to meet the demand."²⁴

Probably as part of the 1905 consolidation, Pfeil left the bottling business in Pullman. Subsequently, by later 1905 or 1906, until about 1908 or 1909, the Star Bottling Works was operated by John W. Jesse of Pullman, his brother Woodford D. Jesse of Lewiston, and Calvert C. Gildea, who lived on East Main in Pullman.²⁵ During their control, the August 1908 Sanborn Fire Atlas for Pullman²⁶ recorded the then electric-powered bottling plant was still located at 326 Main Street, the site established by the Pfeils in 1900. The atlas reported the building to be two-stories high, and 16 feet wide by about 40 feet deep.²⁷ Behind it was an attached shed which backed on to the South Palouse River. Sadly, within two years, its location again so close to the water would spell disaster.

On March 1, 1910, a great flood devastated downtown Pullman, with over three feet of water inundating many businesses and homes, including the bottling works. The damaged firm is shown in two photographs taken as the muddy flood waters were still rampaging down Main Street.²⁸ One recorded a side view of the firm with its business sign on top of the roof stating "Pullman * Bottling Works" (with the "*" being a five-pointed star below the word "Pullman" and above "Bottling Works").²⁹ What is seen as a collapsed building on the east side of the bottling works is revealed in the second picture as the town's funeral home. Its front had been swept away with a casket precariously perched near the exposed front of the structure. While the bottling works, itself, was still upright, it is shown with much damage, probably including the destruction of its electric plant. In the picture, metal kegs and wooden soda crates are seen in disarray through the windows and open door.³⁰ Apparently, this setback soon



Early bottles used by Pullman Bottling and Star Bottling.

led the Star Bottling Works to relocate to higher ground at 201 Paradise Street, near the southeast corner of High and Paradise streets. It also led to new ownership, with John Jesse moving to nearby Colfax, where he became a driver for the Colfax Brewing & Malting Co., Ltd.³¹

By 1910-11, the local directory called the venture the “Star Bottling & Manufacturing Co., Ltd.” with Nicholas E. J. Gentry of 1501 Star Route, Pullman serving as the firm’s President. Other officers at that time included Hiram H. Curtis of RFD No. 1, Pullman, serving as Secretary; Joshua M. Palmerton, otherwise Pullman’s undertaker, serving as Treasurer; and Perry R. Gray, of Moscow, Idaho, serving as Manager.³²

Gentry (1860-1944), a native of Lincoln County, Missouri and a resident of Whitman County beginning in 1882, moved to Pullman in 1895, where he first operated the Farmers Alliance Warehouse. After involvement in other local businesses and two years spent in Seattle, Gentry returned to Pullman becoming president of the Star Bottling Works, as well as a director of the First National Bank.³³ He later served as mayor for four years beginning in December 1918.³⁴ His obituary reported that he retired “from active business in 1915,” though he remained President of the bottling works through at least 1917.³⁵

During the 1910s under Gentry’s presidency, the daily operation of the bottling works was apparently left to its managers and bottlers. As noted, Perry R. Gray of Moscow was manager in 1910. Subsequently, in later local directories, he was listed in 1912 as a bottler and in 1915 as a salesman for the firm. During the latter year, his son, Percy, joined the business as a bottler.³⁶

The same year of 1915, the Star Bottling and Manufacturing Company was listed in the Pullman phone book (with phone number “29”) at Alder and Paradise, probably being at 201 Paradise as indicated in the earlier 1910 city directory. Later phone books indicate that the business remained there until late

1919 or early 1920 when it moved back to Main street (exact location unknown) under its shorter name of just “Star Bottling Works.”³⁷

During this decade, the firm was also involved in other businesses besides bottling. With electricity at least by 1908, Star was able to produce ice and thus establish a large ice trade. At this time it supplied ice for local ice-boxes and other needs in an era before much electric refrigeration in average homes or businesses. It also supplied ice to other communities. For example, in 1913, an ad in the local paper reported that the Star Bottling and Manufacturing Company had an “ice department” and “shipped a car of artificial ice to Troy [Idaho].”³⁸ The advertisement further reported that regular ice deliveries were scheduled for Pullman’s College Hill on Tuesday, Thursdays, and Saturdays, and to other points in town on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Interestingly, this notice also included a drawing of a young boy yelling enthusiastically to get a Star-bottled drink of Hires Root Beer, for which the firm held the local franchise.

Related to their ice trade, in the summer of 1911, the firm was also selling ice cream and sherbet in special insulated cartons to Pullman customers, offering delivery services for phone-in orders.³⁹ About the same year through 1914, the Star Bottling and Manufacturing Company also operated a branch of its bottling business in nearby Palouse, Washington.⁴⁰ This period marked the time of greatest activity of the company. But in the later 1910s this would change. During this time of transition, new local dairies and ice businesses plus more competition from other bottlers would erode the non-bottling aspects of Star’s business. By about 1919, this led to another reorganization of the firm. New owners, Perry and Percy Gray, previously involved with the firm for several years, streamlined the business, concentrating only on bottling.

The Star Bottling Works under the Gray Family (ca. 1919-1946)

According to family members,⁴¹ Perry Roscoe Gray (1860-1945) and his son Percy William Gray (1887-1980), became sole owners of the Star Bottling Works soon after World War I. The Grays, associated with the business since the 1910s, were listed in the 1921 county directory as sole operators of the firm.⁴² When Perry Gray died in 1945, his obituary⁴³ reported that he had operated the Star Bottling Works in Pullman “for 23 years,” suggesting that he left the business about 1942 or 1943 when World War II sugar rationing all but closed the operation. Subsequently, he retired to the family home in Moscow, dying on November 14, 1945, at age 85. From the time of his father’s retirement, Percy Gray operated the bottling works alone and only sporadically until selling it in 1946.

As for the history of the Grays, Perry R. Gray, a native of Plymouth, Maine, settled in Minnesota, where, in the mid-1880s he married a Swedish-born immigrant, Jennie Palmsteen. After first living at Sandstone, Minnesota, where

their son, Percy, was born in 1887, they moved by 1900 to Mora in Kanabec County, Minnesota, where Perry served as town marshal and sheriff.⁴⁴

Subsequently, about 1902 or 1903, the family moved west by train, settling in Moscow, Idaho. In 1910, the Federal census reported them to be living on a rented farm on the then-outskirts of Moscow. This apparently was their first home located on South Polk Street.⁴⁵ Perry's recorded occupation was "farmer," though, as previously noted, he had become involved with the Star Bottling Works as manager about this same year. Family members recall that he had also worked at one time selling syrups to soda fountains. This was probably during the mid-1910s when he served as a salesman for the Star Bottling Works. During this same time, his only son, Percy, a University of Idaho student in engineering, also became involved with the business. Yet when World War I broke out, Percy quit school just before graduation and went into the army. Subsequently, while in the service, he did some electrical work, including stringing wires. Later, after the war ended, Percy re-joined his father at the bottling works, but as a co-owner, as noted.

By April 1923, the firm, which had moved back to Main Street in the later 1910s, moved again. This time the new address was 705 Grand Avenue, a few doors away from what would become its final location. Percy Gray, then over a decade in the business, was listed as proprietor in 1925,⁴⁶ though family members believe that his father, Perry R. Gray, remained a co-owner as well as active partner in the firm.

By the mid-1930s, Star Bottling Works was reported at 711 Grand, now the location of the southern half of Sims Glass business. It remained there until 1946 when Percy Gray sold the firm to new owners.⁴⁷ During its last years in the mid-1940s, Gray operated the bottling plant alone and only occasionally, due to an inability to obtain much sugar during World War II. According to the owner of an adjacent business, Percy Gray in the fall of 1945 was still doing bottling when limited supplies were available, and was also making deliveries.⁴⁸

During the more than 25 years that the Grays owned and operated the Star Bottling Works, they continued living at the family home they built on 6th Street in Moscow in the 1910s, after moving there from their nearby previously rented home. Their routine was for the two men to go to work each day, leaving approximately 4:00-4:30 am in the summertime when the demand for soda was the highest, and not returning until late, around 8:00-8:30 each night, six days a week. During the long hours, Perry and son Percy performed all aspects of the business, from bottling, to bookkeeping, to delivery. Perry, only learning to drive motor vehicles in his middle age, mostly left the delivery part of the business to Percy, especially in later years, with both men variously running the bottle-washing and bottling equipment.



March 1, 1910 flood at Pullman, with bottling works buildings in foreground.
—Washington State University Libraries

Over the years, the Grays updated the machinery in their one-room plant at least once, with a newer bottling machine added in early 1928. This device, later called “a wonderful help” in a July 1, 1928 family letter, allowed the Grays to avoid hiring additional workers, which they had done some at times in the past (as noted). The new machine probably was the reason for a special photograph made about that time. In 1929, on the eve of the Depression, they also hoped to add a labeler to their small plant, according to the prior-noted family letter.

Throughout their 25-plus years of ownership of the business, bottling at the Grays’ plant was a simple operation, essentially one bottle at a time using hand labor in the filling and capping processes while aided by relatively simple machinery. As for operating the bottling machine, family members recalled that after a particular flavor of soda was mixed for a batch run, it was poured into the bottling machine from above by Percy Gray. A partial second floor-balcony was built over the bottling machine for this purpose.

For distribution, Percy's typical delivery circuit included various Pullman businesses, such as nearby Reynold's Grocery on Grand Avenue and the Grange, plus outlets on the college campus, as well as many in Moscow. Percy also served various small towns in the region including Moscow, Boville, Deary, Troy, Viola, Julietta, and Kendrick, all in Idaho.

According to the family, Percy Gray in the early 1920s owned a big Maxwell car with isinglass curtains. The back seat was filled with wooden cases holding 24 bottles for delivery. Later, he owned a Ford sedan from which he removed the rear seat to stack cases of bottled soda. He never used a truck, according to family members. They also recalled that Perry Gray made business trips to Spokane by train as late as 1936, when he was 76 years old, to purchase bottles and haul them back to Pullman.

Overall, family members today characterized the Grays as hard-workers who made a good living in the bottling business, though the Depression years brought leaner times. Over the years, the business enabled the Grays to build a nice home in Moscow and send their two children to college, with their daughter earning a Masters degree.

The soda produced by the Grays during their years operating the Star Bottling Works included at least eight flavors: root beer, strawberry, lime, lemon-lime, grape, "Star cola," orange, and a Cream soda colored with caramel and having a rich vanilla taste. Of these, all were carbonated except grape. The cost of the Star sodas in the later 1930's was five cents, plus a two-cent bottle deposit.⁴⁹ An existing color label from the later 1910s or 1920s lithographed in Denver,⁵⁰ shows that at least some of the sodas were called "Artesian Brand." This suggests that the firm, like the earlier Pullman Bottling Works in the 1890s, capitalized on the city's artesian water. Indeed, Pullman's better tasting water, compared to the "rusty taste" of Moscow's water at this time, explains why the Grays never relocated the business to their residential city.

As for packaging, the Star sodas were bottled in plain bottles, with different colored bottle caps identifying the contents. Paper labels were used, but not always such as where a grocery used a chest-type cooler. In those cases, bottles were hung by their necks between metal tracks with the bodies of the bottles submerged in iced water, thus making paper labels impractical. Reportedly, business was brisk during the warmer months, but would slack off during the winter.

The first bottles used by the Star Bottling Works in the early 1900s, like the Pullman Bottling Works of the 1890s, were the older "pop" Hutchinson-style bottles, with two- and four-piece mold examples known from private collections.⁵¹ Embossed on the sides of those was: "Star Bottling Works, Pullman, Wash." Subsequently, during the 1900s or 1910s, Star began using straight-sided, crown-top, greenish-blue bottles sealed shut by metal bottle caps with cork liners. One variety had an embossed five-pointed star placed on the front

Star Bottling & Mfg. Co.



Pure Artesian Water Ice and
Carbonated Beverages all Flavors

ICE DELIVERIES

College Hill—Tues., Thurs. and Sat.,
10 a. m. Methodist, Military and Sun-
nyside Hills—Monday, Wednesday and
Fridays, 10 a. m.

HIRE'S ROOT BEER A SPECIALTY

Advertisement for Star Bottling and Mfg. Co. Pullman *Tribune* Jan. 10, 1913.

of the bottle between curving embossed “Star Bottling Works” and “Pullman, Wash.,” with the lower part of the based faceted like some whisky bottles of the time.⁵² Another Star bottle variety was embossed on the sides with: “Star Bottling & M’F’G Co. Lt’D Pullman, Wash.” By the time the Grays became sole owner-operators around 1919, such embossed bottles were going out of style, being replaced nationally by non-embossed bottles. Increasingly, in later 1920s, virtually all of their bottles were of the new plain style, distinguished only by caps and paper labels.

As noted, the end of the Grays’ business finally came in 1946, after being forced to suspend normal production levels several years earlier due to sugar rationing during World War II. When that occurred, the Grays also ceased their associated trade in supplying tanks of carbon-dioxide gas obtained from a wholesaler in Spokane for carbonation to other Pullman businesses. They gave the CO-2 business to long-time friends, Ralph C. Hamilton, Jr. and his uncle, with their business continuing today in Pullman as “Hamilton Beverages.”⁵³

Following the sale of the Star Bottling Works in 1946, Percy Gray, who never married, worked as a carpenter’s helper on one of the local college buildings. Subsequently, he was employed at an iron foundry until it burned, afterwards retiring in the late 1940’s or early 1950’s. Thereafter, he lived in the Craftsman/Bungalow style family home at 725 East Sixth street in Moscow, near the East City Park. He passed away on Dec. 17, 1980 in Moscow at age 93, and was buried near his parents in the Moscow cemetery.⁵⁴

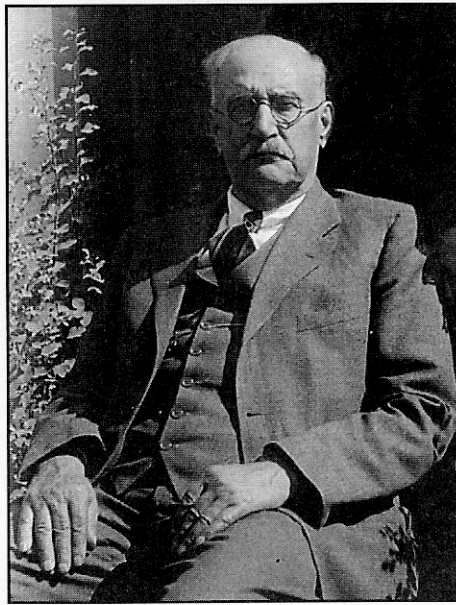
Cougar Beverage Company (1946-1951)

The last bottling firm in Pullman was started by two partners, James E. "Jim" Rowlan and his brother-in-law, Kermit D. Findell. They purchased the old Star bottling plant from Percy Gray and then modernized it with some new machinery and other equipment using the same building.⁵⁵ Soon after becoming owners, Rowlan and Findell contracted with Marion L. Johnson's Sheet Metal Shop next door to build a new bottle washing outfit. They also purchased a new tank to hold dry ice for cooling the CO-2 used for carbonation,⁵⁶ plus bought a new bottling machine. Just over a year after the end of World War II, the "Cougar Beverage Company," so-named because of the cougar mascot for the local college, was bottling soft drinks at 717 Grand, the site of today's Sims Glass and the former Star Bottling Works location. Cougar's first listing in the then-yearly Pullman phone book was in the November 1946 edition (with phone number 1272).

Besides involvement with the Cougar Beverage Company, Rowlan, a World War II Army veteran, had been engaged in other Pullman business ventures for several years. By the earlier 1940s, he was employed by the local Milk House dairy, where he gained experience in bottling and distributing beverages. Then after the war, the local newspaper in mid-January 1946 reported that Rowlan and a partner, George Ferguson, had bought the Smoke House. This was a long-established (since 1904) fountain and sandwich service in Pullman, with pool tables and retail smoking supplies.⁵⁷ Months later, Rowlan became manager of the newly-established American Legion Club in Pullman, located on the southeast corner of Paradise and Kamiaken streets, where city hall and the community center are located today. Following this, on January 3, 1947, the local paper reported that he resigned "to devote all his time to operation of the Cougar Beverage company" with Findell.⁵⁸

Subsequently, in 1948, Rowlan obtained the local Budweiser Beer distributorship. Due to a concern over possible conflict of interest, Rowlan, in later 1948, sold his interest in the Cougar Beverage Company to Ralph E. Johnson.⁵⁹ Johnson, a Spokane native and young World War II Coast Guard veteran, had come to Pullman in 1946 after the war's end to help his brother, Marion L. Johnson in a sheet metal business. This was established in 1945 at 719 Grand, being on the north side of the old Star Bottling Works and what later became the Cougar Beverage Company in 1946.⁶⁰ Thus, Ralph Johnson and Jim Rowlan became acquainted while working at adjoining firms.

After Johnson's purchase of Rowlan's share, he and Kermit Findell continued operating the business as a partnership until declining economics forced them into bankruptcy in late 1951. Johnson recalls ending the venture just before Christmas 1951, "giving the keys to the bank." Thus, about five years after the end of the Star Bottling Works, Pullman's third and final soda bottling business also ended. Yet the reasons for the two closures were different, and to



Perry R. Gray, co-owner 1919-1942.
—Kathryn E. Meyer, Pullman, WA

better explain the difference and why no later soda bottling plant was reestablished in Pullman, it is necessary to examine how the Cougar Beverage Company functioned and what was happening nationally in the soft drink industry in the post-World War II period.

In 1946, Rowlan and Findell began the firm buying three variations of specially designed bottles from the Illinois Bottle Company, which were shipped by boxcar to Pullman. The 7-ounce, clear and dark green glass bottles featured a cream- or crimson-colored, painted-on cougar leaping over the word “Cougar,” with “Pullman, Wash.” below. The idea was that by using the cougar, the mascot of the local college, Washington State College (later University), the new beverage would attract a viable local business. And for a while that worked.⁶¹

The first Cougar beverages were sold in late 1946 or early 1947, with the earliest ad carried in the local newspaper on January 17, 1947.⁶² It showed a boy happily sipping a bottle of soda with a straw, adding: “Kiddies love the choice of flavors that are Cougar Beverages.” It also stated that “All Flavors [are] at your grocers or favorite fountain.” Two weeks later, the ad was reprinted but with a plea for people to “PLEASE RETURN BOTTLES,” explaining that “the shortage of bottles is now extremely acute with no relief expected for several months.”⁶³ On March 23, 1947 another ad asked patrons to “Please Return Empty Bottles,” while stating that “sales have far exceeded our expectations.” The ad also thanked customers “for the splendid acceptance given our

products.”⁶⁴ Soon after that, the newspaper began carrying ads for the Cougar Beverage Co. using the distinctive Cougar design on the bottles.⁶⁵

The Cougar bottling plant, itself, was small but self-contained. Its main equipment included an oil-fired bottle washer and a “Shield’s Bottler” machine, which was more sophisticated than the one used by the Grays in their Star plant. The Shield’s Bottler performed all the major functions as bottles passed through different parts of it on a turning, circular table. Freshly cleaned bottles were fed into the machine by hand which then routed them to different stations in sequence. First, flavored syrup went in followed by carbonated water. Then, the bottles passed through the copper part of the machine and exited to an area where they were picked up by hand and fitted into wooden cases holding 24 bottles each. The usual daily production was 25-50 cases per day, five days a week. Normally, Findell did all the bottling with Johnson serving as the delivery man, but when demand was high during warmer weather, Johnson also helped at night to catch up.

For their main supplies, they used local Pullman tap water (not specific artesian water) charged with carbon-dioxide gas. Johnson recalled that they purchased sugar in 100-pound sacks from Morgan Brothers out of Lewiston, Idaho. Flavors for their drinks came from a supplier in the Seattle area who called on them during regular business rounds.

For delivery, Johnson typically backed their delivery truck up to the large doors on the Grand Avenue side of the building and loaded filled wooden cases of soda after unloading empties into the plant. Their first vehicle was a 1.5 ton Chevrolet truck with a homemade bed and side rails. Later, they bought a regular soda delivery truck, being a used one from the Coca-Cola company. This they repainted yellow. Much of Johnson’s day was involved with trips to small towns in the local area and into Idaho. Johnson recalled that his longest run was Troy, Boville, Deary, and Elk River, Idaho. Another run was to Pottlatch, Palouse and Colfax. In Pullman, Johnson would leave crates of drinks at all grocery stores, clubs, college dorms, and fraternity houses, also supplying coolers for beverages. In Moscow, the route included grocery stores and one fraternity, with further stops in Genesee, Colton, and Uniontown.

The flavors bottled by the Cougar Beverage Company included ginger ale and lime in the green bottles, and then orange, root beer, grape, and a vanilla-flavored drink in clear bottles. All were stated on the bottle as “Made with Artesian Water,” and each was sealed by a cork-lined metal bottle cap bought from the Crown Cap Company. All caps were marked to indicate the flavor. Additionally, the orange, root beer, and grape sodas were bottled in quart-size clear, unmarked bottles to which paper labels were attached as well as the marked bottle caps. Also, Tom Collins mix and plain seltzer water were bottled and sold in quart bottles.

Further, the Cougar Beverage Company obtained the franchise from Quench Bottling Company of Seattle and bottled their fruity-flavored drink in green bottles with painted-on yellow Quench labels.

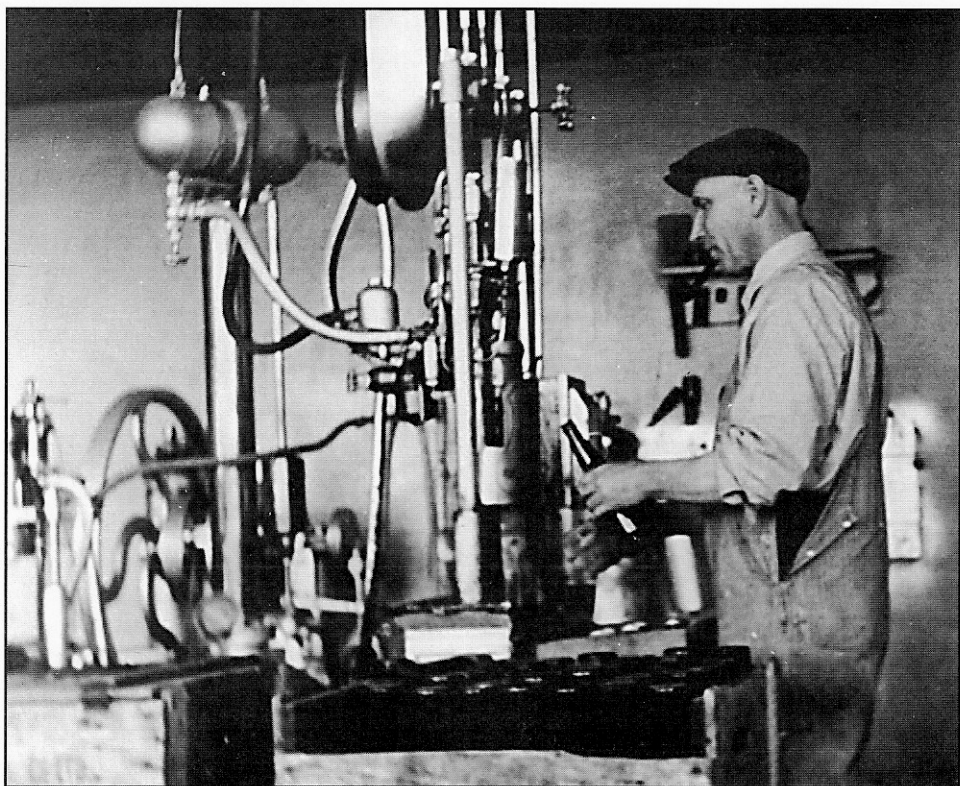
Ironically, the bottles, themselves, ultimately became a major factor for the end of the Cougar Beverage Company. Using their washer, they were able to recycle not only their own specially-marked Cougar bottles, but also other clear, unmarked 7-ounce and quart-size bottles, adding Cougar paper labels. However, the deposits on bottles did not cover their expense, and when a case of bottles was not returned, it was a net loss of 50 cents. Increasingly, this began shaving profit margins.

Yet the final blow to the firm was a change in the beverage industry itself, again involving bottles. In the later 1940s, the two major giants of today, Coca-Cola and Pepsi-Cola, were expanding.⁶⁶ Their marketing strategy, first by Pepsi and then by Coke, was to offer larger bottles for the same price. Thus, in the later 1940s, for a nickel, you could buy a 7-ounce Cougar drink or a 10-ounce (and later 12-ounce) Pepsi or Coke. As a consequence, market share gradually eroded for the Pullman firm and in retrospect the end was inevitable for the small business.

To compete would have meant going to larger bottles, but just buying the bottles was impossible for the financially strapped Cougar Beverage Company. By early 1950, Johnson recalled that the firm “just didn’t have enough financial backing” and was “barely able to pay [his and his partner’s] wages.” According to Johnson, the inability to switch to larger bottles meant that their firm “got left in the wayside” as the industry changed. Consequently, with mounting debts and declining revenues, including failure to pay an overdue mortgage loan for \$3,115.30 on January 6, 1949, the struggling Pullman firm closed just prior to Christmas 1951.

On December 21, 1951, to pay creditors, Findell and Johnson signed over the remaining assets of the company to the First National Bank of Pullman.⁶⁷ A list of their property included their 1948 truck, their bottle washer, their bottling machine/filler, and various smaller equipment for measuring and mixing flavors, adding carbon-dioxide for carbonation, and refrigeration. Also listed were various office equipment, such as files, an adding machine, a safe, their desk and desk lamp, and even the two window shades on the front windows. As for bottles, their inventory included 39,464 7-ounce bottles (worth \$1,973.20), 2,352 10-ounce bottles (worth \$141.12), 840 quart bottles (worth \$84), 1,788 wooden cases (worth \$1,072.80), and about 400 gross of bottle caps (worth \$100). Their cash assets included only \$23.75 in a checking account.

In the wake of the company’s demise, Johnson recalled that he and Findell lost a lot of money in the bankruptcy, but quickly turned to other opportunities. Three days after closing their plant, Johnson went to work for local businessman, Earl H. Nelson, the Richfield Oil agent, serving as a driver for four years



Percy W. Gray, co-owner, operating bottling machine.

—Kathryn E. Meyer, Pullman, WA

before returning to Spokane where Johnson became a tire salesman for the Goodyear Company. Today, he lives in retirement with his wife in Stanwood, Washington, but periodically continues to visit relatives in the Pullman region.

Johnson's partner, Kermit Findell, left Pullman after the closure of the Cougar Beverage Company settling in Kalispell, Montana. By the late 1960s, he reportedly worked for the Morrison Knudsen Corporation in Saudi Arabia which was doing canal construction. Findell's job was to do soda bottling for company employees.⁶⁸ Subsequently, he returned to Montana, later dying on August 21, 1990, at age 78.⁶⁹ Otherwise, Findell's earlier partner, brother-in-law, and co-founder of the Cougar Beverage Company, Jim Rowlan, continued for some years with the Budweiser distributorship in Pullman. Later, he also moved to Montana where he worked as an accountant.⁷⁰

As to the Cougar plant on Grand Avenue, on July 19, 1952, to repay debts to the First National Bank of Pullman, all the bottling equipment and bottles were sold at public auction.⁷¹ A man in Moscow, Idaho purchased them but apparently never later did any soda bottling. Years later, some of the remaining

bottles were found abandoned in an old building in Moscow, with bottles from salvaged cases being sold by Pullman and area antique dealers in the late 1990s.

After the closure of the Cougar plant at 717 (now 215) Grand Avenue, its site was occupied by a tire recapping firm for a time, and then two glass firms preceding "Sims Glass," which was established by Harold Sims in the early 1960s. Subsequently, in the 1960s, Sims remodeled the front of the building, removing the wooden double garage doors and pair of windows to the north of the doors, replacing them with a larger metal and glass roll-up door, and a modern doorway. Later, in the 1970s, Sims Glass expanded into the neighboring business space to the north, removing part of the wall between them. (As noted earlier, this was the former site of Marion L. Johnson's sheet metal business.) Lewis Welter subsequently acquired Sims Glass in the early 1980s and continues in the business today.⁷²

To conclude, today, memories of Pullman's bottling works are fading. Yet for 60 years, they were important local businesses first capitalizing on Pullman artesian water in furnishing welcome products and revenue to the local community. Their histories are examples of how the bottling industry of America developed and changed in the later 19th and early 20th centuries in one community.



Percy W. Gray, with his cousin, in front of last location of bottling works at 711 Grand (now occupied by Sims Glass).

—Kathryn E. Meyer, Pullman, WA

NOTES

¹ Mark True's Palace Hotel, by Robert E. King, *Bunchgrass Historian*, 1996, Vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 4-12.

² *Pullman Herald*, Sept. 27, 1940, p. 5

³ *The Pullman Bottling Works is not listed in Bensel's 1891 Pullman Directory, which probably was written in late 1890 or early 1891. The next directory dates to 1904.*

⁴ *The Pacific Magazine*, July 1891, as reported in *Washington Sodas: The Illustrated History of Washington's Soft Drink Industry*, by Ron Fowler, 1st edition, Dolphin Point Writing Works, Seattle, March 1986, p. 238.

⁵ *Pullman Herald*, Sept. 27, 1940, p. 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁸ *Pullman Herald*, Oct. 16, 1891, p. 1.

⁹ For example, such ads were in the *Pullman Herald* on Nov. 20, 1891, p. 3; and June 30, 1893, p. 4.

¹⁰ *Pullman Herald*, Dec. 25, 1891, p. 4. The title of the reprinted article was "Chalybeate City," probably added by town boomer and bottling plant co-owner, Thomas Neill, also the newspaper owner.

¹¹ *Pullman Herald*, Oct. 30, 1891, p. 1.

¹² "Basic Bottle Identification," Jim Rock, U.S.D.A. Forest Service, Yreka, Calif., 1990, p. 24.

¹³ *Pullman Herald*, Jan. 4, 1891, p. 1.

¹⁴ *Pullman Herald*, Sat., Jan. 28, 1899, p. 1. Note: A search of Whitman County deeds for records of the disposal of the bottling plant by Neill and Thompson, McKee, and by later Star Bottling Works operators turned up no information. This suggests that they all rented their plants instead of owning them.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ 1900 Federal census of Whitman County, Washington, Precinct 41, South Pullman, p. 240, census taken June 9, 1900.

¹⁷ *Pullman Herald*, March 11, 1899, p. 1.

¹⁸ *Pullman Herald*, March 3, 1900, p. 1.

¹⁹ 1900 Federal census of Whitman County, Washington, Precinct 41, South Pullman, p. 240, census taken June 9, 1900.

²⁰ *Pullman Herald*, Aug. 12, 1899, p. 5.

²¹ Rob Rodeen, Pullman, Wash., Personal communication, March 24, 1998.

²² *Pullman Herald*, April 12, 1902, p. 5.

²³ Polk's Whitman County Directory for 1904, pp. 216, 218.

²⁴ *Pullman Herald*, Feb. 18, 1905, p. 5.



Newspaper ad for Cougar Beverages, showing the design used on bottles. Pullman Herald July 4, 1947.

²⁵ Polk's Whitman County Directory for 1905/06, pp. 155, 159.

²⁶ Sanborn Fire Atlas of Pullman, Sanborn Map Co., New York, August 1908, sheet 9.

²⁷ This address in 1998 is now part of the parking lot between the Mimosa Grill & Bar at 420 Main and the Subway sandwich shop at 460 Main. (Note: In 1972, Pullman renumbered most addresses in the city, with the 300-block of Main becoming the 400-block.)

²⁸ Washington State University Archives, Pullman photograph folder.

²⁹ During this time, the Star Bottling Works was also called the Pullman Star Bottling Works.

³⁰ Photo owned in 1998 by Washington State University Archives. The small soda bottle crates shown in the 1910 flood picture are similar to one owned by the author. It size suggests that it have held Hutchinson style bottles.

³¹ Washington Sodas: The Illustrated History of Washington's Soft Drink Industry, by Ron Fowler, 1st edition, Dolphin Point Writing Works, Seattle, March 1986, p. 69.

³² Polk's Whitman County Directory for 1910/11, pp. 195, 202, 204, 224, & 234.

³³ Biographical sketch of Gentry's life in the History of the City of Spokane and Spokane County, Washington; From Its Earliest Settlement to the Present Time, Vol. III, The S. J. Clarke Pub. Co., Spokane, Wash., 1912, pp. 388-389.

³⁴ Pullman Herald, Friday, Dec. 6, 1918, p. 1

³⁵ Pullman Herald, Friday, Sept. 29, 1944, pp. 1, 7. Polk's Directory of Whitman and Garfield Counties, Washington for 1917/18, p. 236.

³⁶ Polk's Whitman and Garfield Counties Directories for 1912/13 (pp. 236, 255, 266), and 1915/16 (pp. 211, 236). Alvin E. Olsen of Pullman was listed as the firm's manager in both these directories. In the 1917/18 Polk's directory of Whitman and Garfield Counties, President Gentry's son, Grover Cleveland Gentry, was listed as manager.

³⁷ April 1920 Pullman phone book (phone number 73).

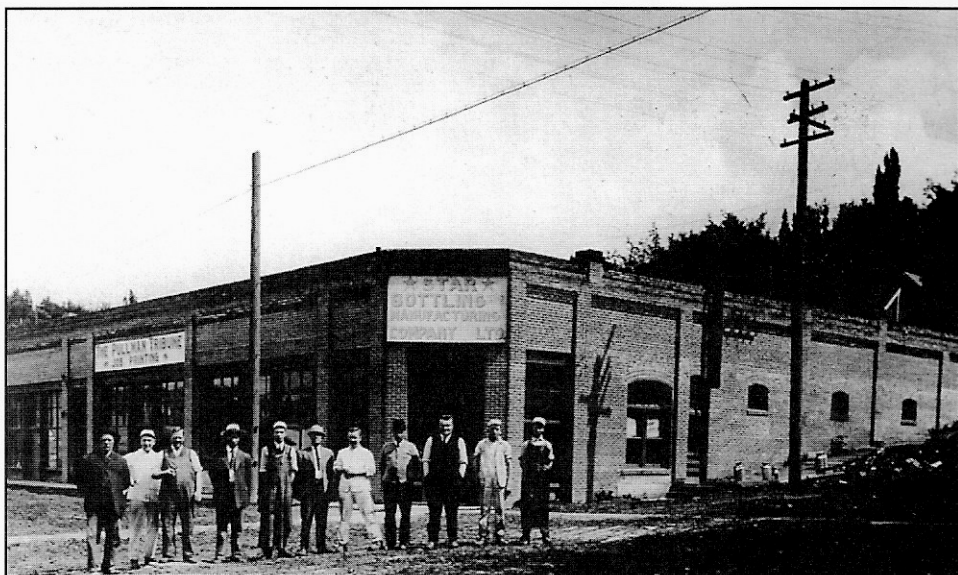
³⁸ Pullman Tribune, Feb. 21, 1913, p. 6. The Star Bottling Company's graphic appeared in the Jan. 10, 1913 issue of the same paper. The July 11, 1919 Pullman Herald reported that "Benjamin F. Burns, an employee of the Star Bottling & Manufacturing Co., forsook the ice delivery car long enough last Saturday to go to Moscow to claim as his bride Miss Virginia Hall, a charming Lewiston girl" (article reprinted in the Pullman Herald, July 7, 1944, p. 2, under news of 25 years ago).

³⁹ Pullman Herald, Aug. 4, 1911, p. 3.

⁴⁰ Washington Sodas: The Illustrated History of Washington's Soft Drink Industry, by Ron Fowler, 1st edition, Dolphin Point Writing Works, Seattle, March 1986, p. 297.

⁴¹ Much of the information on the Gray family came in phone calls and e-mail during January-April of 1998 from Perry's great-granddaughter, Dr. Kathryn E. Meyer of Pullman, Wash. Additional help was provided by Dr. Meyer's mother, Mrs. Norma Evers of Dayton, Wash., and her sister, Mrs. Patricia Mallery of Everett, Wash.

⁴² Polk's 1921/22 Whitman County Directory, pp. 162, 184. Otherwise, Polk's combined 1921/22 Directory for Whitman County, Wash. and Latah County, Idaho listed Percy W. Gray as an "electrician," (p.365). Perhaps initially he also worked in that capacity at the Star Bottling Works.



Star Bottling building about 1910-12.

—Kathryn E. Meyer, Pullman, WA

⁴³ *The Idahonian*, Moscow, Idaho, Thurs., Nov. 15, 1945, p. 2.

⁴⁴ 1900 Federal census of Mora, Arthur Township, Kanabec County, Minn., p. 163b, taken June 1900.

⁴⁵ 1910 Federal census of Southwest Moscow Precinct, Latah County, Idaho, p. 197, taken May 3, 1910. The 1905 Polk's Directory of Latah County, Idaho (p. 43), listed the Grays at 234 S. Polk Street in Moscow.

⁴⁶ 1925 Pullman phone book.

⁴⁷ Pullman phone books for Nov. 1935 and Nov. 1942. It was not listed in the next phone book dated Nov. 1943 or in later ones.

⁴⁸ Marion L. Johnson, phone interviews, April 23-24, 1998.

⁴⁹ Communication to the author on Feb. 28, 1998, from his cousin, Dwight Robinson, a former Pullman resident, but now also of Anchorage, Alaska.

⁵⁰ This label was a gift to the author in February 1998, by Vic and Bobbie Moore, of Kennewick, Wash., formerly of Pullman. The date of the label is uncertain but is similar to the types of labels used in the 1930s by other bottlers.

⁵¹ *Washington Sodas: The Illustrated History of Washington's Soft Drink Industry*, by Ron Fowler, 1st edition, Dolphin Point Writing Works, Seattle, March 1986, pp. 298-299. For additional information on Star bottles, the author is grateful to Russ Wheelhouse, Richard Rodeen, and Rob Rodeen of Pullman; and Gordon Bryan of Colfax, Wash.

⁵² Richard Rodeen, Pullman, Wash., Personal Communication, March 24, 1998. This bottle is marked as made by the Streater Bottle and Glass Company of Streater, Illinois, reportedly in business from 1881 to 1905. Thus, this bottle was made not later than 1905.

⁵³ Ralph C. Hamilton, Jr., personal communication, March 23, 1998. Mr. Hamilton also reported that Percy Gray was "a great guy," giving his family a case of soda each Fourth of July for years. He additionally related a story from a mutual friend, the late Ernie Held whose business, "Held's Electric," was across Grand Avenue in Pullman from the last location of the Star Bottling Works. Held told Hamilton that he would buy a case of soda from the Grays in the summer and give bottles to neighborhood children to mow his lawn.

⁵⁴ *The Idahonian*, Moscow, Idaho, Thurs., Dec. 18, 1980, p. 14.

⁵⁵ Thus, the Cougar Beverage Company can be viewed as a continuation of the Star Bottling Works after World War II, but under new ownership. Another Pullman business on Grand Avenue, Struppler's Cafe and Fountain, also shut down during the war, resuming business in early January of 1946 after being closed for nearly three years (*Pullman Herald*, Friday, Dec. 28, 1945, p.1).

⁵⁶ Marion L. Johnson, phone interviews, April 23-24, 1998.

⁵⁷ *Pullman Herald*, Friday, Jan. 18, 1946, p. 1. The Smoke House was located at the northeast corner of Main and Grand, now Rico's Tavern site at 200 Main.

⁵⁸ *Pullman Herald*, Friday, Jan. 3, 1947, p. 4.

⁵⁹ Much of the history of the Cougar Beverage Company came from a phone interview on March 14, 1998 and later correspondence with Mr. Ralph E. Johnson, age 73, a resident of Stanwood, Wash. One document he loaned the author was his paid-off promissory note for \$250 to Rowlan, dated Dec. 30, 1948, being the last part of the payment Johnson made for Rowlan's share in the bottling works.

⁶⁰ Marion L. Johnson, now age 81 and living at Worley, Idaho, opened "Johnson's Sheet Metal Works" at 719 Grand Avenue in October 1945 (Pullman Herald, Friday, July 5, 1946, p. 8).

This was a location previously used by Virgil Reynolds for a carpenter shop and repair business (Marion L. Johnson, telephone interviews with author, April 23-24, 1998). After Johnson's shop closed, the location by the mid-1960's became the office part of Sims Glass after its expansion into the adjacent 719 Grand Avenue location, being in the adjoining brick building (Lewis Welter, interview with author, March 23, 1998).

⁶¹ About the same time, "Husky Beverages" of Marysville, Wash. began operation using a husky dog design on their bottles. It marketed soft drinks in a similar 7-ounce bottle, but with an eye toward capturing customers at the University of Washington in Seattle, who had a husky for a school mascot.

⁶² Pullman Herald, Friday, Jan. 17, 1947, p. 9.

⁶³ Pullman Herald, Friday, Jan. 31, 1947, p. 12.

⁶⁴ Pullman Herald, Friday, May 23, 1947, p. 10.

⁶⁵ Pullman Herald, May 23, 1947, p. 14. The first bottling of Cougar beverages in late 1946 or early 1947 may have been in plain bottles as the distinctive painted-label bottles are marked in their bases as made in 1947.

⁶⁶ The demise of the Cougar Beverage Company might have come even sooner had another planned event in 1946 occurred. The same year that Cougar opened, the local paper carried a story that the Coca-Cola Bottling Company of Walla Walla had purchased a site in Pullman, with plans "to build a large soft drink bottling and distribution center" in the town (Pullman Herald, Friday, April 26, 1946, p. 1). This did not occur, however.

⁶⁷ Whitman County, Wash. Deed Book 285, pp. 404-409, in the Whitman County Courthouse, Colfax, Wash.

⁶⁸ Marion L. Johnson, phone interviews, April 23-24, 1998.

⁶⁹ Social Security database, L.S.D. Family History Center, Anchorage, AK.

⁷⁰ Marion L. Johnson, phone interviews, April 23-24, 1998.

⁷¹ From "Notice of Chattel Mortgage Sale" document, dated July 8, 1952, prepared by Neill and Atkins, attorneys for the First National Bank of Pullman. Original copy supplied to the author by Mr. Ralph E. Johnson in March 1998.

⁷² Lewis Welter, Robert Ohnemus, and Jackie (Sims) Keller, personal communication, March 23-24, 1998. On March 23, 1998, Mr. Welter showed the author lingering features of the old Cougar (and earlier Star) plant facilities now part of his business. This included the partial second story/balcony from which syrup was poured into the Grays' bottling machine, and an area near the southwest part of the shop (where glass is stored) where thick walls lined with heavy insulation mark the site of the former cold-storage area. Also, still visible are remains of old pipes at the northwest corner of the shop where water entered the bottling plant.

