

## Chapter 4

### Early Soda Dealers: The El Paso Connection

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Unfortunately, many of the early details about the town of Alamogordo – especially the ones pertinent to the initial availability of soft drinks and bottlers – are missing. The El Paso and Northern Railroad, under the leadership of Charles B. Eddy, arrived at Alamogordo on its way to the mines at White Oaks on February 5, 1898. The stockholders of the Alamogordo Improvement Co. held their first meeting on April 13, 1898, and sold the first lot on June 7 of that year. The railroad reached the fledgling town on June 14 (Glibert 1988:32,38; Townsend 1998:31).

Initially, Alamogordo was only composed of four tents, but the community grew quickly. Unfortunately, the first newspaper, the *Sacramento Chief*, was originally published in Tularosa at some point in 1898, then moved to La Luz, and finally settled at Alamogordo. The earliest extant issue was printed on April 15, 1899 – ten months after the founding of the town. By that time, there were 29 businesses in the new settlement (Anderson 1998:86; Gilbert 1988:57; Grove et al. 1975:316).

#### Houck & Dieter

Prior to the establishment of a bottling works in Alamogordo, the citizens could only obtain soft drinks by rail from El Paso, Texas, approximately 90 miles to the south – or by order from coastal cities even farther away. Because the town was built in conjunction with the establishment of the railroad, sodas from El Paso were probably available from the earliest days of the community. Houck & Dieter, an El Paso liquor dealer, was the first soda bottler to advertise in the Alamogordo newspapers (*Sacramento Chief*, April 15, 1899).

Although the firm only offered liquor in their 1899 ads (Figure 4-1), their soft drinks were certainly available as well. Houck & Dieter stopped advertising in 1900, about the time that Henry Pfaff began advertising and took over the saloon on Block 50 (see more about Pfaff below). Houck & Dieter, re-entered the competition on October 4, 1903, but discontinued its promotions on April 30, 1904, probably because Pfaff had opened his saloon.

## History

Houck & Dieter, one of El Paso's earliest soda bottlers, was founded by Amos Houck and John Phillip Dieter on April 1, 1881, just a few weeks before the first railroad arrived at the previously isolated border town. Theodore L. Reber opened the first bottling plant in El Paso, but, following his typical pattern, he soon sold his equipment to Houck & Dieter. Although essentially a liquor dealer, Houck & Dieter was the only successful soda bottler in town until 1892, when R.F. Johnson, another liquor dealer, became their first long-term competitor (Lockhart 1997a; 2010).

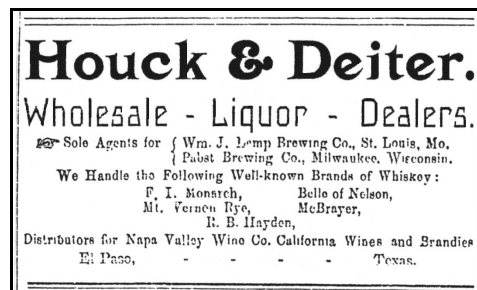


Figure 4-1 – Houck & Dieter ad  
(*Sacramento Chief*, 4-15-1899)

Houck & Dieter bottled sodas until 1912 when the soft drink segment of the business merged with the Purity Bottling & Mfg. Co. (established 1906) to form the Empire Bottling Works. Although Houck & Dieter continued to sell liquor after 1912, the firm collapsed with the inception of Prohibition in Texas in 1918. Empire, however, prospered. The company went through several changes in name and management; distribution of its products became nationwide; and the plant continued to bottle Empire flavors until 1969 (Lockhart 1997a and 1997b; 2010).

## Bottles

Although Houck & Dieter sold various mineral waters (including Apollinaris, Stafford Springs, and Nassau Selters), the firm also bottled its own soda brands. The company used three different container styles during the period when the firm advertised in the Alamogordo newspapers, the earliest of which was a Hutchinson finish bottle. Houck & Dieter was probably still using soda bottles with Hutchinson finishes when the first train rolled into Alamogordo on June 14, 1898. These were embossed “HOUCK & DIETER Co. (arch) / EL PASO (horizontal) / TEXAS (inverted arch)” in a round plate mold (Figure 4-2).



Figure 4-2 – Houck & Dieter bottle with  
Hutchinson finish  
(David Cole collection)



Figure 4-3 – Houck & Dieter’s first crown-finished bottle

Around that time, Houck & Dieter adopted a similar bottle with a crown finish (Figure 4-3). The bottle was embossed “HOUCK & DIETER (arch) / EL PASO / TEX. (horizontal)” – and it was made by the Illinois Glass Co. (I.G.Co. on back heel). The final bottle, probably not used until ca. 1903 – so likely a bit later than the last Houck & Dieter adds – was a six-panel bottle with “HOUCK & DIETER / COMPANY / EL PASO, / TEXAS” embossed on four of the panels – but no manufacturer’s mark (Figure 4-4). The six-panel bottle was used until the merger that created the Empire Bottling Works in 1912, and some of those surely made their way to Alamogordo. For more information on all of these bottles, see Lockhart (2010), Chapter 5a.



Figure 4-4 – Houck & Dieter’s six-panel bottle

### Reber & Co.

As noted in the overview section (Chapter 1), Theodore L. Reber, and his wife, Rebecca (Figure 4-5), spent at least two decades following the same pattern: founding a soda bottling works, building the business, selling out, and moving on. The *Santa Fe New Mexican* (9/16/1898) called Reber “the perambulating soda water manufacturer” and noted that he:

came in from Winslow last night and registered at the Sturges’ European. Since leaving the Missouri state line, years ago, Mr. Reber has started and sold at least fifty soda water factories in that many cities and towns. He carried on business at Winslow for about a year; sold out the other day, and is now on his way to Alamo Gordo [*sic*] where he expects to have a new soda water factory in running order inside of three weeks (*Santa Fe New Mexican* 9/16/1898).

If Reber was on schedule, his works at Alamogordo would have been operational by at least mid-October of 1898. By the time the first extant newspaper was printed, Reber was still in town. On April 22, 1899, the *Sacramento Chief* stated:

If you want to buy a soda water plant call on Reber. He sells them and teaches the buyer to make good soda. He sold the first plant that was ever in El Paso, Texas, to Houck & Dieter, and that makes that good soda for which the people of Alamogordo paid 10 cents per bottle, that they can now buy for 5 cents. I sell the same soda for 2¼ cents per bottle to the private families and dealers.

Although Reber skipped the details, his prices suggest that Houck & Dieter originally sold sodas shipped to Alamogordo for 10¢ a bottle (\$2.40 per case), but the firm dropped its price, probably in response to competition from Reber and Pfaff to 5¢ a bottle (\$1.20 per case). At 2¼¢ a bottle, Reber was selling his drinks for 54¢ per case – but only by the case. It is pretty certain that restaurants and the saloon charged a nickel for the same drink. In addition, this clip lets us know that both Houck & Dieter and Reber made “good soda.”

On April 29, the *Chief* noted that Reber had “just received a new machine for making soda water. He now has two machines and supplies the best of soda water at the lowest prices. Mr. Reber has sold more soda water machines than any other agent in the United states [*sic*].” It appears obvious that Reber was willing to stretch the truth, possibly to the breaking point. It is highly unlikely that Reber, selling to one town at a time, one, maybe two per year, could compete with salesmen in the east – with its closely packed communities and large population.



Figure 4-5 – T.L. & Rebecca Reber  
(Courtesy of Cindy Smith)

On May 20, 1899, the Rebers were listed for what was probably the final time in Alamogordo – when Mrs. Reber visited Phoenix, Arizona (*Sacramento Chief* 5/20/1899). That may indicate that the Rebers left Alamogordo soon after, or they may just have not done anything

newsworthy for awhile. The silence may also have had political overtones. The *Chief* was only in business briefly (April 15, 1899-May 25, 1899) and contained many local ads and much town gossip.

The *Chief* was replaced by the *Alamogordo News* on June 1, 1899, the paper still in print at Alamogordo. While the *News* continued with local ads and gossip, it was mostly about a different set of people than those featured in the *Chief*. The Rebers may have been in the out-group from the viewpoint of the editor of the *News*. Regardless of the reason, Reber had probably left by September 27, when he was reported in Santa Cruz (north of Santa Fe, near Española), although we do not know whether he was visiting or setting up another business. He was certainly gone by January 1900, when he and Rebecca moved to Bland to begin yet another bottling works.

From all evidence, Reber struck out on selling the Alamogordo business. There is no record of anyone entering the soda bottling business again until George Weigele began advertising “Wiegele’s Pop” in 1910 (see Chapter 5a). It is unlikely that the newspaper would have remained completely silent on the subject for an entire decade. Perhaps the El Paso competition – especially with Henry Pfaff running the Alamogordo saloon – was too strong.

However, Reber almost certainly had continued to use the Hutchinson soda bottles at Alamogordo. When he sold his plant at Winslow to the Winslow Bottling Works, the next owner, A.T. Cornish, used Hutchinson bottles (Miller 2008:140). Since the entire system for filling crown-capped bottles was different, Cornish’s use of Hutchinson bottles, coupled with Reber’s prior use of that type of container, makes it pretty certain that Reber continued to use them when he moved from Winslow to Alamogordo. Meanwhile, the El Paso competition had adopted the crown cap.

## Bottles

T.L. and Rebecca Reber certainly operated soda bottling plants from July 1879 (at Las Vegas, New Mexico) to at least October 1900 (Bland) and possibly until near Reber’s death on December 1, 1912. It is equally certain that the Rebers used Hutchinson bottles during most of that time. At this point, New Mexico collectors have discovered four different bottles bearing Reber’s name, two somewhat early in his career, probably ca. 1880-1881, the other two probably

later – possibly in the 1890s. One was embossed “REBER BOTTLING WORKS (arch) / SANTA FE. (horizontal) / N.M. (inverted arch).” This was certainly used in Santa Fe during either 1892 or 1896, two periods when Reber operated a plant in that city (Figure 4-6).

There is some evidence that Reber experimented with an unusual bottle that used a Christin finish while he was at El Paso in 1881 (Figure 4-7) – which suggests that he was looking at other methods of closure even that early. This idea that Reber was an early adopter leads to some speculation about his use of crown caps. There is no question that bottles with crown finishes began to get popular around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is possible that Reber’s experience at Alamogordo convinced him to adopt crowns. While it is true that no crown-topped bottles have been found embossed with



Figure 4-6 – Reber Hutchinson bottle, Santa Fe (Lynn Loomis collection)

Reber’s name, it is also certain that we have not found Hutchinson bottles with his embossing from most location, either.

Henry Pfaff

On August 2, 1900, Henry Pfaff, another El Paso liquor dealer, began advertising in the *Alamogordo News* (Figure 4-8). As noted above, Houck & Dieter had advertised earlier but had discontinued its promotions in April 1904. This well-established competition apparently dissuaded Houck & Dieter. Although both companies shipped sodas – as well as the more potent alcoholic drinks – to Alamogordo, Pfaff gained a distinct edge with the physical presence of his establishments in the town.

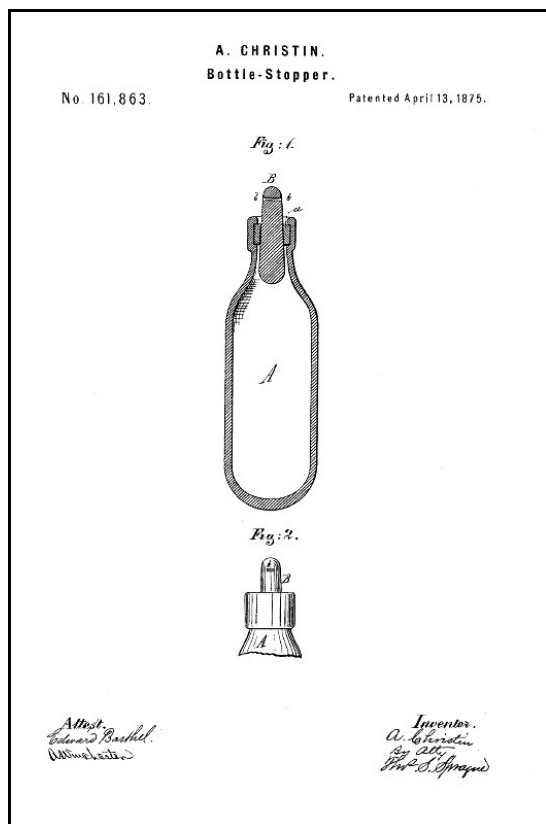


Figure 4-7 – Patent for Arthur Christin’s finish

## History

### Henry Pfaff at El Paso

As noted above, Houck & Dieter, primarily dealing in liquor, opened El Paso's earliest long-term soda bottling business in 1881 and enjoyed a virtual monopoly in the soda business for almost a decade. Robert F. Johnson, formerly of the firm of Julian & Johnson, another liquor dealer, struck out on his own on February 1, 1891, and began his own successful soda business. One of his trusted employees was Henry Pfaff – so trusted that, when Johnson married and moved to California, he left Robert F. Johnson & Co. in Pfaff's care (Lockhart 2010, Chapter 6).

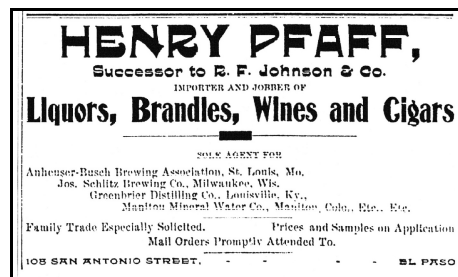


Figure 4-8 – Ad for Henry Pfaff  
(*Alamogordo News* 3/1/1900)

In December 1898, Pfaff became Johnson's successor, calling the new firm only by his own name: Henry Pfaff. Like Johnson, Pfaff was primarily a liquor dealer, also distributing beer and mineral water and manufacturing his own brand of soft drinks – almost certainly fruit flavors. Pfaff remained in business until 1907, when he sold the alcohol business to the Southwestern Liquor Co. and apparently closed the bottling plant. He went on to a successful career in real estate (Lockhart 2010, Chapter 6).

### Henry Pfaff at Alamogordo

As a dealer in alcoholic beverages, Pfaff's presence at Alamogordo – an almost "dry" town – was something of an oxymoron. Because Charles B. Eddy, the primary founder of Alamogordo, was strongly against intoxicants, he had inserted a "liquor clause" in all deeds that denied the right to sell alcoholic beverages in the town – with the single exception of Block 50 (Figure 4-9).<sup>1</sup> The Alamogordo

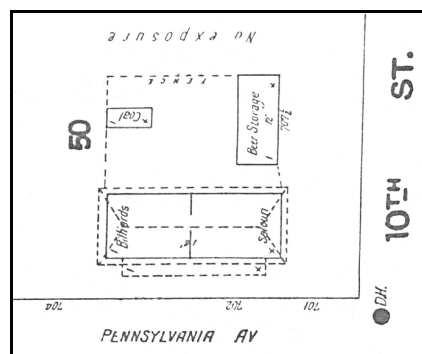


Figure 4-9 – Block 50 and Pfaff's saloon (Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1905)

<sup>1</sup> Gilbert (1988) included a good photograph of the saloon in her photo plate section between pages 46 and 47.

Improvement Co. retained lots 1-4 on Block 50 as the site for a saloon. The town's only dispenser of alcoholic beverages was accordingly constructed on the corner of Tenth St. and Pennsylvania Ave. (currently called White Sands Blvd.) – with the property carefully under the control of the founding fathers (Gilbert 1990:49, 108; Sholly 1971:25).

The location of the saloon was well chosen – catty-cornered from the railway station. The short walk was perfect for even a short layover. The south end of the building was devoted to the saloon, with a billiard parlor to the north. A separate beer storage vault was behind the main building to the east (Figure 4-10). However, the saloon license apparently included operating a hotel.



Figure 4-10 – Alamo Gordo ca. 1905: A – Pfaff's saloon; B – Railway Station; C – Pfaff's "Eating House" (Courtesy of Cliff McDonald)

By at least June 15, 1899, the *Alamo Gordo News* was advertising the "New Hotel Alamo Gordo" with breakfast, lunch, and "Fine Course Dinner" daily, with regular rates of \$3.00 per day and "Lunch served after arrival of train at 3 p.m." (Figure 4-11). The August 24 edition described the hotel as "a new three-story structure which under the management of Col. J.F. Harvey, is thoroughly *first class in every respect*" (his emphasis – including beginning in the middle of the word). However, by October 5, Harvey had resigned<sup>2</sup> and was replaced by Arthur Good (*Alamo Gordo News* 10/5/1899).

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<sup>2</sup> By November 2, 1899, Harvey was back in business. With his wife as the cook, Harvey opened Harvey's Café, Buffet and Restaurant in El Paso (*Alamo Gordo News* 11/2/1899).



The editor of the *News* stressed that Harvey was “liberal to a fault, genial and whole souled.” He was all for “liberality and progression” – although that apparently included prohibition. He almost never directly addressed the infamous Block 50 saloon, although he made rare oblique references to it. Although tacit in the *News*, the Hotel Alamogordo and the saloon – called the Club House Saloon when Harvey ran it – were both owned by the Alamogordo Development Co.



Figure 4-11 – Hotel Alamogordo, 10<sup>th</sup> & Delaware (Tularosa Basin Historical Society)

Apparently, the owners only leased the two businesses out as a unit. Typically, the saloon was referred to generically – rather than by name (*Alamogordo News* 10/5/1899; Gilbert 1990:49, 108; Sholly 1971:25).

During the week of November 2, 1899, Henry Pffaf took charge of the Hotel Alamogordo and the saloon. According to the *News*, Pffaf “is well and favorably known here and there is no doubt that he will give the institution the required prestige. . . . it is believed that Mr. Pffaf is the right man in the right place.” O.M. Potter became the manager of the hotel, and H.H. McWilliams “will attend to the liquor business in Alamogordo” – in other words operating the not-to-be-mentioned saloon. Pffaf also had interests up the rail line at least as far as Capitan, where T.J. Caswell managed another Pffaf establishment (*Alamogordo News* 11/2/1899).

Pffaf had met McWilliams in El Paso where he was an agent for the Crescent News Co. at the Southern Pacific Railroad depot by 1892. By 1900, McWilliams had left the *News* and was running the Commercial Bar (EPCD 1892-1900). This is a contradictory entry, however. If McWilliams had moved to Alamogordo in late 1899, he could not have still been in El Paso. The *News* (10/17/1900) noted in October that McWilliams was the “manager of the hotel bar for Henry Pffaf” and had “moved his family to Alamogordo and they will reside here permanently.”

McWilliams continued to operate the Alamogordo concern for Pffaf until at least March 1907 and almost certainly managed the sales in Cloudcroft. Little else is known about

McWilliams, although he obviously planned ahead; he purchased a funeral plot on February 14, 1901 (*Alamogordo News* March 23, 1907; *Cloudcroft Silver Lining* April 7, 1907; Funeral Records, Hamilton-O'Dell Funeral Home, Alamogordo).

Although he almost certainly sold alcohol prior to that, Pfaff obtained his first Alamogordo liquor license on April 10, 1900. On April 1 of the following year, he received a “Retail Merchant” license for the Hotel Alamogordo and renewed his liquor license nine days later. As part of the 1901 fee, Pfaff was assessed \$266.06 for the special school fund plus \$133.34 to the general fund (Otero County Record of Licenses Issued pp. 6, 8, 12).

On June 1, 1901, Pfaff obtained his first liquor license at Cloudcroft – most likely for use at the Cloudcroft Lodge (see below). On December 18, he added a slot machine license for one of the Alamogordo businesses – although it may have been broad enough to include both the saloon and hotel. McWilliams added a slot machine license for Cloudcroft on May 25 (Otero County Record of Licenses Issued pp. 12, 14, 15). Apparently, the founding fathers of Alamogordo were not as concerned about gambling as they were about liquor. The May 3, 1902, edition of the *News* added that:

Henry Pfaff, of El Paso, spent two days in the city [i.e., Alamogordo] this week looking after his large business interest. Mr. Pfaff proposes to erect a cold storage plant adjoining the new saloon building and make Alamogordo a distributing point for his several business [*sic*] along the line of the railroad and at Cloudcroft. The erection of the plant will necessitate a large expenditure of money (see Figure 4-9).

The new “cold storage plant” described by the *News* was almost certainly the “beer storage” building noted on the 1905 Sanborn map. Gilbert (1990:136) noted that “Henry Pfaff [*sic*] of El Paso” operated the “El Paso and Northeastern ‘Eating House’ opened in the Alamogordo Improvement Company Building, just east of the depot.” Since the dining car was always taken off at Santa Rosa the night before the train left for Alamogordo, there was no food available until the “Eating House.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Gilbert cited the *Otero County Advertiser*, August 5, 1903.

By 1903, the *News* (3/21/1903) reported that Pfaff had “the management of Cloudcroft Lodge for the coming season. Also of Hotel Alamogordo and the several eating stations between Alamogordo and Santa Rosa.” In addition to his “Retail Liquor” license for “Blk 50 Alamo” and the hotel license, Pfaff took out three separate licenses for slot machines, two with the notations that they were for the “Pfaff Saloon.” The other was likely for the Hotel Alamogordo. He also retained the Cloudcroft liquor license (Otero County Record of Licenses Issued pp. 16-19, 23).

Although Pfaff's advertisements had appeared in earlier editions of the *Alamogordo News* touting beer, liquor, and Manitou Mineral Water, the April 16, 1904, issue included a second ad with an appended feature. The new section stated, “Family trade a specialty, all orders will be filled promptly at Alamogordo at El Paso prices, freight added. H.H. McWilliams, Manager” (Figure 4-12) In the April 16 issue of the *Cloudcroft Silver Lining*, Pfaff also advertised as “Manufacturer of and Dealer in all kinds of Soda Water.”

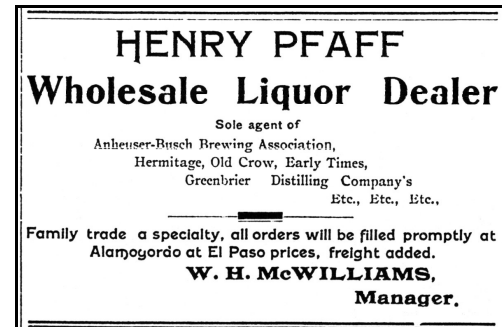


Figure 4-12 – Ad for Henry Pfaff at Alamogordo (*Alamogordo News* 4/16/1904)



Figure 4-13 – Plaza Bar and Café – 1940s (Tularosa Basin Historical Society)

Pfaff renewed his liquor and slot machine licenses for his Cloudcroft enterprises for the last time in early 1904. He also maintained the Alamogordo liquor, hotel, slot machine, and “Eating House” licenses, renewing for the last time on May 26, 1906. Pfaff apparently made a fairly sudden decision to close his Alamogordo enterprises and abandon both liquor and soft drink distribution (Otero County Record of Licenses Issued pp. 30, 33-34).

From April 7 to May 18, 1907, he advertised in the *Cloudcroft Silver Lining* that he was a “Wholesale Liquor Dealer” with a “Branch at Cloudcroft, New Mexico. Wines and liquor for medicinal and family use a specialty.”

Despite the ads, Pfaff closed his Alamogordo affairs by the end of May 1907. W.R. Eidson [probably Edison] obtained the Alamogordo liquor license in June of 1907, and William Burno, of the S.W. Hotel & Wine Co., took the Cloudcroft liquor license during the same period (Otero County Record of Licenses Issued p. 36). It is highly likely that this was also the same time that Pfaff closed all his bottle-related El Paso concerns and entered the real estate business. He would never sell liquor or bottle sodas again.

### Location

Pfaff's saloon and billiard parlor attracted customers at the northeast corner of Pennsylvania Ave. and Tenth St., catty-cornered from the railroad depot. The saloon buildings remained essentially unchanged until after 1930. At some point prior to 1942, the old structures were razed and newer buildings erected. These were now called the Plaza Café and Plaza Bar (Figure 4-13).

The “Eating House” was in the building immediately east of the depot, on the southeast corner of Railroad Ave. and 10<sup>th</sup> St. Later Sanborn maps called the building the Southwestern Hotel. The Hotel Alamogordo was located at the northwest corner of 10<sup>th</sup> and Delaware, just two blocks east of the saloon, and only three blocks from the railway station (Figure 4-14).<sup>4</sup>

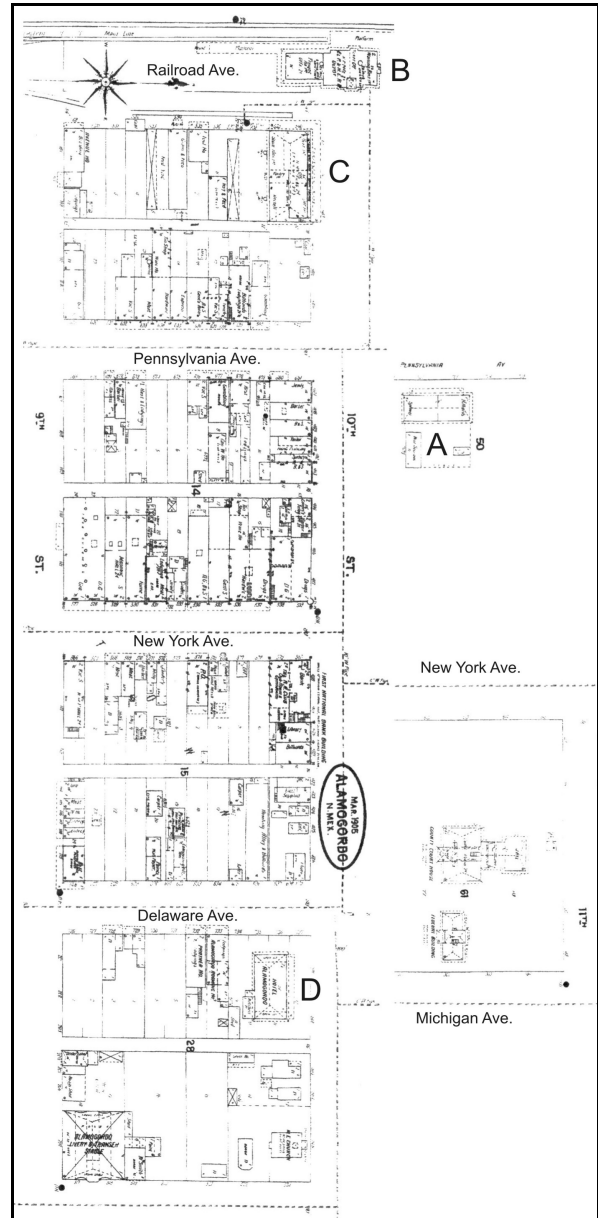


Figure 4-14 – Pfaff’s businesses along 10<sup>th</sup> St.: A – Pfaff’s saloon; B – Railway Station; C – “Eating House”; D – Hotel Alamogordo

<sup>4</sup> The map in Figure 4-13 was created by combining four separate segments of the 1905 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map.

## Bottles

Henry Pfaff only used one bottle style from 1898 until he sold the business in 1907, so this bottle undoubtedly appeared at Pfaff's Alamogordo and Cloudcroft establishments. Each bottle was mouth-blown into a mold with two side leaves, and the crown finish was completed by hand. Although I have never seen a bottle with a manufacturer's mark, they were made at least twice, once in light blue and again in colorless glass that contained manganese – and solarized to an amethyst color. The bottles were embossed "HENRY PFAFF (arch) / EL PASO, / TEXAS. (horizontal)" but had no other markings (Figure 4-15).

### Summary

Thus, the first period of soft drink sales came to an end – although not completely. Houck & Dieter stopped advertising, but their beverages were only a telegram or a letter away – along with a fast train ride. Houck & Dieter carried on a thriving railway business – in all directions from El Paso.

T.L Reber had a reputation for starting soda bottling plants, selling out, and moving on, but Alamogordo appears to be one of the places where he failed. Although I have found no documentary evidence, Henry Pfaff's crown-capped bottles may have been Reber's undoing. If Reber still used Hutchinson-style bottles – a reasonable assumption given Reber's long-term use of that bottle type, his adoption of that bottle type at his last business prior to Alamogordo, and the continued popularity of Hutchinson bottles into the early teens – then Alamogordo residents may have been quick to see the superiority of the crown cap. If this was the case, no one would have bought Reber's bottling outfits.

There is no question that Henry Pfaff completely dominated soft drink sales at Alamogordo from 1899, when he gained control of the town's only saloon and the lucrative hotel trade until he quit the beverage business in 1907. It is likely that he abandoned a profitable business because he feared that the increasingly popular prohibition movement would destroy his alcohol sales. If ads give any clues, liquor, wine, and beer were his primary sources of income.

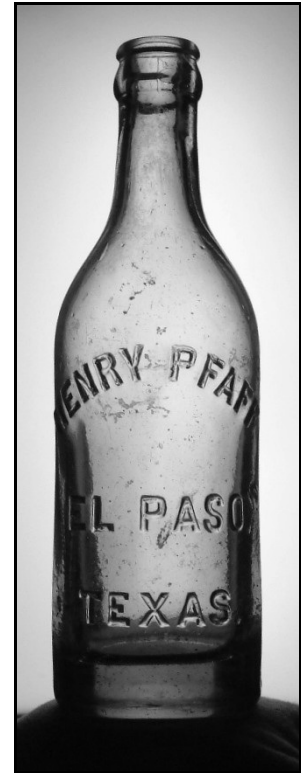


Figure 4-15 – Bottle used by Henry Pfaff

There is no evidence that Pfaff's successor, the Southwestern Liquor Co., sold *any* soft drinks. However, this does not mean that Alamogordo lacked for sodas. By 1907, Houck & Dieter had plenty of competition. Martin R. Sweeney had begun his bottling works – eventually known as the Woodlawn Bottling Co. – in 1905, and Lawrence Gardner had started the Purity Bottling & Mfg. Co. the following year. Purity merged with Houck & Dieter in 1912 to form the highly successful Empire Bottling Works.

Although both Woodlawn (eventually capturing the Pepsi-Cola franchise) and Empire were resounding successes, a newcomer appeared in 1907 who would eclipse them both. Hope Smith opened the Magnolia Bottling Co. and received a contract (later a franchise) with Coca-Cola in 1911. His name would eventually become intimately connected with Alamogordo, but that still lay in the future. With Houck & Dieter, Woodlawn, Purity, and Magnolia just a train ride away, we can be sure that there were still plenty of soft drinks in Alamogordo. And local bottling was about to return.