

*The*  
*Nelsons &*  
*Coca-Cola*



*The story of the Albert Nelson Family  
& their Coca-Cola roots in  
Pine City, Minnesota.*



# *The Albert Nelson Family & Coca-Cola*

The story of one Pine City family.



*Compiled in 2016 by Judy Scholin with the Nelson Family, as a local history  
project in cooperation with*



**Pine City Area History Association**

**Albert & Anna Nelson's daughter, Emily, shared her memories of the early years.**



Emily Nelson Reid

“This story begins at the time of Halley's comet. The place is Gillett, Wisconsin. The year was 1909 or thereabouts. The setting is the location of the first bottling works that our parents started. At least I don't remember if there were any previous "Pop-factory" locations where our Dad was involved. The shop and our home were in the same building. It was built against a hillside at the back. The two top floors were our home and the bottling business was in the basement. The barn was at the foot of the hill.

**The 1910 Census**

Nelson Albert	Head
— Annie	Wife
— Myrtle	Daughter
— Pearl	Daughter
— Emily	Daughter
— Vern	Son
— Marij	Daughter
— Arthur	Son
— Henrietta	Daughter

The 1910 Census shows the family living in Gillett, Wisconsin.

This was almost a one-man operation. Dad was the mixer, the bottler and the delivery man. The bottling machine was worked manually. Each bottle was placed on a small platform, filled and capped using a foot pedal. There was a carbonation tank by the side of the machine. Occasionally a bottle would break when being filled and the glass would fly. The washing was done by hand using three shallow tanks, one was a soaker, the second to wash and the last to rinse. I have a faint recollection that buck-shot was used to clean the inside of the bottles. I don't recall anything about disinfectants but maybe it was used in one of the tanks. Our Grandma and Grandpa Nelson (Annette and Andrew) often helped with the job of washing the bottles. They lived in their own home in another part of town. Mother had a big family to care for and I don't recall that she ever helped in the shop. We children were not allowed in there, especially when Dad was bottling. I do remember that in the summertime we picked berries in the woods behind our house. We would take our pails of berries to the windows of the shop to show to Dad and each got a bottle of pop. On certain days Dad would deliver to his customers.

I suppose he took orders at the same time because I don't remember having a telephone until many years later.

Occasionally in the summer he took one of us with him when delivering pop. He had a big delivery wagon drawn by a team of horses. In the winter he had a big sleigh which had a box on it for the cases. He covered the cases in winter with blankets to keep the pop from freezing. He wore a big fur coat and fur cap. I think the coat was made of bear skin, it was shaggy and had a brown beaver collar. Those were difficult trips and it was usually dark when he got home. He carried a lantern as he drove and then to put the horses in the barn.

We moved from there to Green Valley. The next venture in the bottling business was in Green Bay. Through some contact Dad learned of a bottling works there that was looking for investors. Dad invested \$1500. That was a good sum of money in 1912. when we moved there Dad worked in this shop but unhappily it was not a good investment. It failed in a year or so.

A year or two later we moved to Little Suamico, then to Green Valley again and eventually to Wittenberg. Dad found work there, very difficult work and they were difficult years for the family. Eventually he was fortunate and was hired to work for the Meisner Bottling Company. While working at this place he learned that a "Pop-factory" in Pine City was for sale. We moved there in 1927. Eventually Dad borrowed \$5000 and bought a Coca-Cola franchise.

### The 1920 Census

Nelson, Albert	Head	R	M	w	39
Annie	wife		F	w	44
Emily F.	daughter		F	w	18
Vern E.	son		M	w	16
Marie A.	daughter		F	w	14
Arthur E.	son		M	w	13
Ruby H.	girl		F	w	11
Edmund A.	son		M	w	9
Blanche H.	daughter		F	w	7
Everett P.	daughter		F	w	4
Earl E.	son		M	w	3
Herald W.	son		M	w	1 1/2

By the 1920 Census the family was living in Wittenberg, Wisconsin.

Now you know the beginning of the story as I remember it. Unfortunately I had no one to consult with as I am the only one old enough to remember. There were many amusing stories that I remember and others that were not so funny. This is a brief and sketchy account. We did have a happy and secure childhood. What a hard-working, honest and dependable man our Dad was and with a very caring, good and loving Mother we were indeed a much blessed family."

*Emily Nelson Reid*

## The Albert & Anna Nelson family around 1922



Back row: Marie, Myrtle, Vern, Pearl, Arthur, Emily, Ruby  
Front row: Edmund, Anna, Blanche, Harold, Everal, Albert, Earl

Albert & Anna Nelson had twelve children. In the early 1920s Albert Nelson worked at a soft drink bottling company in Wittenberg, Wisconsin but as his family grew he wanted to own his own business so his children could join him. In 1926 Albert and sons Vern and Art came to Pine City to look at a bottling plant that was for sale. They liked what they saw and they bought the existing business.



Albert and Art Nelson in the basement of the original Pine City Bottling Works plant.

## Pine City Bottling Works

The Pine City Bottling Works had been in operation many years prior to the purchase in 1926 by the Nelsons. Mathew Prochaska was the original owner. The invention of a bottle-making machine in 1899 helped the soft drink business really take off and Mathew was soon involved with this new industry. Initially he sold his wares along the train line. By 1902 he had a soft drink factory but the location is unknown.

Math. Prochaska has had a new carbonating machine installed in his soft drinks factory.

May 25, 1906

In the early years it was known as Prochaska's Bottling Works but by 1914 the name had become Pine City Bottling Works.

My goods are pure and palatable and help you to enjoy every month of the year

**Pine City Bottling Works**  
Math. Prochaska, Prop.

If you want bottled goods, insist on the "Home" brand—the Pine City make

December 31, 1914

**SPECIAL PRICE**  
**On Pure, Sweet Apple Cider**  
Direct from the Eastern Apple Mills; freshly pressed and filtered,  
**50 Cents per Gallon**  
Bring your bottle and try the Real Goods  
**PINE CITY BOTTLING WORKS**

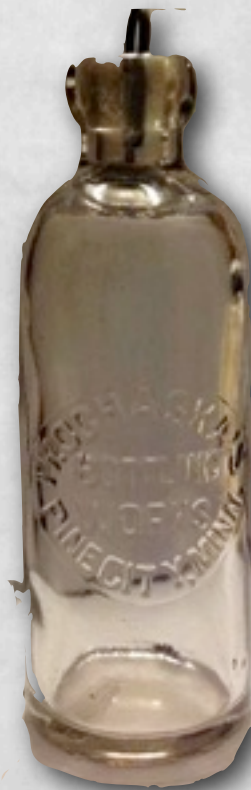
December 6, 1923

—Math. Prochaska, the Pop man spent Wednesday up the line, trying to introduce his sodas and mineral water.

Pine City Pioneer June 15, 1900

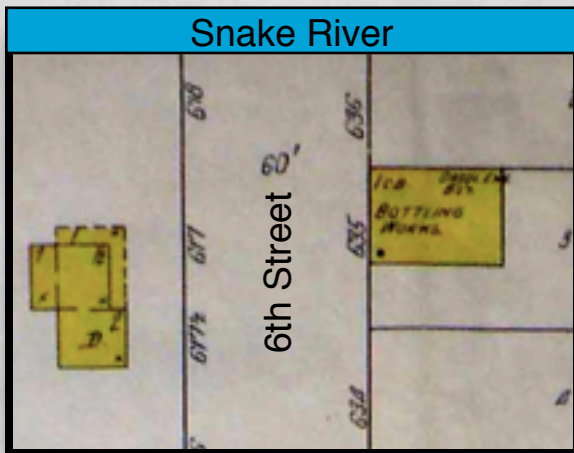
the village. The same can be said of every other home industry. Prochaska's pop factory is turning out just as fine soft drinks as can be made anywhere and our saloon-keepers and those who deal in soft drinks should purchase from Mr. Prochaska. John Stoehl, our popular cigar

From an article on local businesses August 29, 1902



Some recently discovered Prochaska Bottling Works bottles.

## 1911 Map of Pine City



The bottling works appears on the 1911 Sanborn Map of Pine City in the familiar location on 6th Street just south of the river.

Mathew Prochaska continued to operate the Pine City Bottling Works until 1920 when he sold the business to Frank Melsha.

Frank operated the business until October 1926 when he sold it to Albert Nelson.

October 7, 1926

## MELSHA SELLS BUSINESS HERE

Albert Nelson of Wittenberg, Wis., has purchased the Pine City Bottling Works and took possession yesterday. The deal included the purchase of the building, all equipment of the business, including the truck, etc.

F. C. Melsha, former owner of the bottling works, purchased the business from Matt Prochaska in April, 1920, coming here from Iowa, and has operated it since that time. He is undecided as to his future plans but will continue to make his home in Pine City, for the present, at least.

Mr. Nelson, the new owner, has had 22 years experience in this line of business. One son, Arthur Nelson, is here with his father and will assist him in operating the business. Mrs. Nelson and the other children will remain in Wittenberg until next spring, when Mr. Nelson will move his family to Pine City to make their home.

We are pleased to welcome Mr. Nelson and his son to Pine City and hope their business here will be a profitable and enjoyable one.



FRANK MELSHA AND CREW - 1925

Frank Melsha with the delivery truck.

## Vern's daughter Barbara continues the story with her memories.....

"I was born about the same time the Pine City Bottling Company was born. My mom & dad were married on Sept. 29, 1926 in Eland, WI. At about that time Grandpa Nelson bought the Pine City Bottling Company. We lived in a small room over the bottling business so I remember all the processes of bottling. We were right across the hall from the mixing room. I remember that I had a bedroom with bluebirds on the walls.

Everyone pitched in to get this started. Grandma even washed bottles. They finally bought a bottle washer.



Outside the original Pine City Bottling Works plant.

They bottled orange, grape, cream soda, lime and root beer. At first they bottled in small quantities until they had developed a larger business. All of the Nelson sons worked at the plant and some of them drove delivery trucks to deliver to the customers. My mother even would drive to deliver an order. I would sometimes ride along.

In the meantime our family outgrew that little apartment and we moved to a larger home on Cross Lake. It had a huge garage which provided a place to store all of the empty cases for the pop. My friends and I would play with the cases to make a play house.

I spent a lot of time wandering around the plant. But I also spent quite a bit of time at Grandma & Grandpa's house because it was so close. Grandma would save the pancakes she had made for breakfast so when I went to their house she would roll sugar in

### BOTTLING COMPANY INSTALLS MACHINE

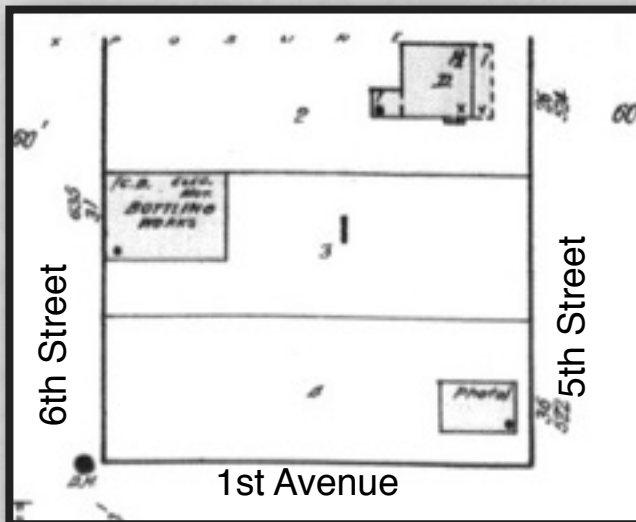
Albert Nelson, proprietor of the Pine City Bottling Works, has installed a new bottle washing machine that is one the latest and most sanitary machines of its kind on the market. The new machine is about 14 feet in length and holds 192 bottles at one time. The bottles are placed in openings on an endless chain and pass thru various compartments where they are sprayed with hot and cold water and a sterilizing solution. There are 32 sprays in all, each spray having a pressure of 40 pounds with the hot water heated to a temperature of 140 degrees. The first compartment, thru which the bottles pass, extracts all dirt and labels from the bottles so that they enter the other compartments absolutely clean and are thoroughly sterilized. The new machine has a capacity of washing 1800 bottles per hour.

The washer, known as the "Liquid Bottle Washing Machine," cost \$2400, in addition to the necessary plumbing for its installation. The Pine City Bottling Works is completing a very successful year and is gradually reaching out until their business now covers a territory of many miles around Pine City. The installation of the new machine now assures consumers of the company's products of drinking from bottles that are absolutely sanitary.

Dec 26, 1929



## 1921 Map of Pine City



This segment of the 1921 Sanborn Map of Pine City shows the location of the original bottling plant. Anna & Albert's house can be seen in the upper right corner of the block.

used bottle caps and make them new. They collected all the used bottle caps from the customers and brought them back to the plant. There we had tubs of water to wash them and soak the cork out of them. My job was to remove the corks, then they stamped them open again to reuse them. They put some kind of artificial liner where the cork had been. After drying and sorting them they reused them. The cartons were not being made anymore so we used pre-cut strips of thin balsam wood and I stapled them together to make a carton. So those were my summer jobs as a teenager.

After the war they built a new building and bought new equipment and everything was back in operation. Those had been difficult years, all the men had gone off to war except my Dad and he had to run the business alone. They had also purchased a cattle ranch and a pig farm. I think it was just for feeding all of the Nelson families. Meat was a big item at that time. When the war ended and every one was back home they all worked to get the family business going again: Ed in Ashland; Earl & Harold in Rice lake; Marshall in Eau Claire bottling 7-Up; Vern & Art in Pine City.

One of my precious memories of Grandma & Grandpa Nelson was when I would go to visit them on Sunday mornings after church. They would listen to

the middle and that was my morning snack. I also did small errands for them or helped a bit but mostly I was in their way.

The Coca-Cola franchise was a really big event! Now they had greater recognition. They continued to bottle some other sodas and later added 7-Up to their list. When they started to bottle Coca-Cola production and sales really increased, especially in the summertime when they worked all day and half the night to meet the demand for soft drinks. Those summers were really hot and a cold glass of soda was refreshing!

During the war it was harder to get supplies. Sugar was rationed, etc. They could no longer get bottle caps with cork inside so they decided to collect all of the

Whoopie John about noon. Grandpa would take Grandma by the hand and they would dance around the kitchen and dining room and the rest of us would laugh and clap for them.”



*Barbara Nelson Johnson*



Albert & Anna Nelson's 50th wedding anniversary party in 1947.

**CELEBRATE GOLDEN WEDDING**

Mr. and Mrs. Albert Nelson of Pine City

Last Saturday, January 11th, Mr. and Mrs. Albert Nelson of Pine City observed their Golden Wedding anniversary when open house was held for friends at the Nelson home from 2:00 to 5:00 p.m. In the evening, a party was given at the Pine City armory for relatives of the couple.

Mr. and Mrs. Albert Nelson were married at Green Valley, Wisconsin, January 11, 1897. They moved to Pine City in October of 1926, when Mr. Nelson purchased the bottling plant here. Since that time, they have resided in Pine City, building the Bottling Company to its present state of affairs, along with the help of their children.

Twelve children, all of whom are living, were born to this couple, and with the exception of Mrs. Albert Gardner of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, attended the gathering with their wives or husbands and families. The children are: Mrs. R. Rothman, Wittenberg, Wis.; Mrs. D. A. McGregor, Chippewa Falls, Wis.; Mrs. E. M. Reid, Baraboo, Wis.; Mrs. M. L. Hughes, Eau Claire, Wis.; Mrs. Albert Gardner, Milwaukee, Wis.; Ed Nelson, Ashland, Wis.; Earl and Harold Nelson, Rice Lake, Wis.; Mrs. Wm. Brady and Mrs. Clarence Hagman, Minneapolis; Vern L. and Art E. Nelson of Pine City.

Along with the children, others who were entertained at the armory were: Mrs. Louisa King, Ervin King, P. H. Paulson, Mr. and Mrs. Wm. Rasmussen, Mrs. H. Helmke and daughter, Mr. and Mrs. A. Thoms of Sheboygan, Wis.; Mr. and Mrs. Gust Stroth, Kirch, Beroun and Mr. and Mrs. J. E. Therrien and Ed Paulson of Pine City.

The Pine Piker-Pioneer joins with the many friends of Mr. and Mrs. Albert Nelson in wishing them many more happy wedded years.

When the Nelsons purchased the Pine City Bottling Works there were no franchise drinks. The company produced its own cream soda, strawberry, black cherry, grape and orange soda.

there



Lime Rickey was a popular flavor. In 1931 Wesley Tate won a case of Lime Rickey by submitting the winning final line to this "Limer-Ad";

*Your party will never get rough  
With food and refreshments enough;  
Your guests will be elated-  
Not in-tox-i-ca-ted*  
Wesley Tate's winning line -  
*"If you give them Lime Rickey enough"*

**FREE** The PINE CTY BOTTLING WORKS **FREE**  
Will Give Absolutely Free One Case of Lime Rickey

TO THE MAN, WOMAN, BOY OR GIRL SENDING IN THE BEST LINE TO

**Complete This Limer-Ad**

Your party will never get rough,  
With food and refreshments enough,  
Your guests will be elated-  
Not in-tox-i-ca-ted.

Fill in the last line making it rhyme with the last word in the first line. Get the correct rhyme!

**Rules For The Contest**

1. Any person is eligible except members of the family or employees of the above firm giving the prize at The Poker.
2. Each person may submit no more than one entry.
3. Don't write the complete Limer-Ad. Write just the line or lines you wish to enter and give your name and address at bottom of the sheet. The only one side of the paper.
4. Each member of the family may enter once.
5. In the event of a tie, prizes of equal value will be awarded to each winner.
6. Do not write any question about the contest.

The winner of the 1 gallon of Malted given by the Gilchrist Auto Company is Miss Esters, R. A. Pine City. His line is "We're winning the world's attention."

1. The name and address of the winner, and the winning line, will be printed on this page two weeks from today.

2. This year's contest closes at 4:50 p. m. on Saturday of NEXT WEEK. All entries must be received or mailed to The Poker office by that time.

3. The winner may select the prize of his own time after his or her name is announced.

**525 IN GOLD TO WRITER OF BEST LINE IN SERIES**  
All those 525 items will give prizes for Limer-Ad lines before the contest ends. 525 will then be awarded to the person whose line is judged the best of the 52.



**WESLEY TATE WINS CASE OF LIME RICKEY**

Wesley Tate, son of Mr. and Mrs. George Tate of Rock Creek, will get a case of Lime Rickey from the Pine City Bottling Works as his line was chosen by the judges, as the best line in the Bottling Company's Limer-Ad contest. His line was "If you give them Lime Rickey enough." Following is the complete limerick:  
Your party will never get rough,  
With food and refreshment enough;  
Your guests will be elated-  
Not in-tox-i-ca-ted,  
If you give them Lime Rickey enough.

Be sure to send in your last line for the Joe Leidinger Motors Limer-Ad contest. Mr. Leidinger is giving a \$5 automobile robe to the winner. Last lines will be received up to Saturday of this week.

Petschel's Cafe have a Limer-Ad in this week's issue and will give the winner a nice big fruit cake. The winner will receive it in time for the New Years dinner.

It's lots of fun thinking of last lines for these limericks. Every member of the family can send in last lines if they wish. If you haven't been sending in lines, start in right away. There are lots of nice presents to be given away by Pine City merchants, one each week for the next three months. The names are cut off the sheet containing the lines and each piece is numbered in duplicate. The names remain in The Poker office and the judges get only the sheet with the lines. After the winner is chosen, the number of the winner is reported to us and we look up the corresponding number to see who sent in the winning line.

In 1935 the Nelsons acquired a 7up franchise.



In December of 1934  
an elaborate  
Christmas Party was  
given.

One of the most delightful, as well as one of the most unique Christmas parties ever held here, was that given by the Pine City Bottling Company in the armory, last Thursday evening, when the Company was host to some six hundred friends and business associates at a banquet, program of entertainment and a dance.

The guests were seated at seven long tables, set lengthwise of the armory. A large stage had been erected at the south end for use of the orchestra and performers, with dressing rooms at each side. The tables and stage were appropriately decorated with Christmas trees and yuletide designs. A bounteous dinner was served at 7:30, followed by a program of speaking and entertainment that lasted until midnight. An orchestra played during the dinner and for the dance, which followed the program.

Frank Madden, who is known as "Officer Mulcahey" to radio listeners, was the toastmaster. Officer Mulcahey is a second Will Rogers and kept the large gathering in a continuous gale of laughter with his humorous introductions of speakers and comments during the evening. He is a whole show in himself and added greatly to the evening's entertainment. He called on a number of speakers for short talks, the first of whom was Albert Nelson, principal owner and manager of the Bottling Company, who extended a welcome to the guests and extended the season's greetings. The next speaker was Mayor Sullivan, who made one of the few speeches of his career, and welcomed those from out of town and presented the key to the village.

Other speakers were Captain Dick Pugh, commanding officer of the Yellowbanks CCC Camp, and Captain Johnson, medical officer at the camp, who brought greetings and a cordial invitation for everyone to visit the camp. J. J. Farrel Jr., secretary of the Minnesota Bottlers Association, gave a short talk in the course of which he stated the Pine City Bottling Company was recognized amongst other companies as one of the most enterprising as well as one of the most successful and ethical.

Tom Moore of Minneapolis, national president of the American Bottlers of Carbonated Beverages Assn., was also present and gave an interesting talk. Mr. Moore added his commendation to the Nelsons for their successful business. Carbonated water was first used by a Philadelphia druggist in 1807 when it was used in a certain doctor's prescriptions. He then conceived the idea of mixing it with fruit juices and that was the start of the carbonated industry.

His talk was followed by stereoptican pictures and lectures giving a brief biography of the growth of the Coca Cola Company. Coca Cola was first made and put on the market by Dr. J. S. Pemberton in 1886. Twenty-five gallons were sold in 1886 and twenty million gallons were consumed last year. Over seventy million dollars has been spent by the Coca Cola company in advertising its product since the company started in 1886. The Pine City Bottling Company recently purchased a franchise for Coca Cola and are now the exclusive distributors in nine counties. They purchase the concentrated syrup but do all the bottling for their territory in their own plant here.

#### Excellent Program

The stage program was an excellent one that was worthy of an Orpheum show. Leo Semb was master of ceremonies and also did a magical act that made a hit. Other numbers on the program were the Three Woodwards, a musical trio of ability; Ethel Warren, the "Kate Smith" of the Northwest, who has an exceptionally pleasing voice; Ravine & O'Neil, winsome entertainers in a Spanish dance and individual numbers; and Sap Harris & Chuck Parker, comedians who are really funny. The Woodward Sisters also gave an eccentric song and dance and Miss Warren was good in a funny act as Shaghai Lal and a buck dance. The City Club "Spassvogel" fun birds from the Schmidt Brewing Company were one of the feature acts and made a big hit. Sap Harris & Chuck Parker are members of the orchestra. Lloyd Johnson's Orchestra, who played during the banquet, was very good. Two sons of Mr. Nelson, Earl and Harold are members of the orchestra.

Nelsons Came Here in 1926  
Mr. and Mrs. Albert Nelson

## PINE CITY BOTTLING COMPANY ENTERTAINS AT CHRISTMAS PARTY

and family came here in 1926 when they purchased the Pine City Bottling Company from F. C. Melsha, coming here from Wittenberg, Wis. The business at that time was a small one with an output of a few cases of carbonated beverages a day, and serving only a limited territory. The Nelsons are industrious and progressive and their business soon began to increase until today they cover Pine, Chisago, Kanabec, and Isanti counties in Minnesota and Pope and Burnett in Wisconsin, as well as some parts of adjoining counties, and their output is between four and five hundred cases of carbonated beverages per day in the summer months. They also have exclusive distribution of Coca Cola and Schmidt's beer in these counties and do a big wholesale business in candy bars, etc. Their plant is now one of the most up-to-date in the state with the latest automatic machinery for bottling carbonated beverages and washing and sterilizing the bottles. Associated with Mr. Nelson Sr. in the firm are his sons, Verne, Art and Ed. At present they have 8 employees, in addition to themselves, and employ more during the summer months. They operate 6 trucks in distributing their products.

#### Express Appreciation

Many were the expressions of appreciation to the Nelsons on their wonderful party. It was a big undertaking, costing a lot of money, and the entire expense was born by the Pine City Bottling Company. The only assistance they received from any outside source was the number on the program by the Schmidt Company orchestra. There were guests from miles away, an unusual attendance considering the weather. The banquet, the program and the warm hospitality was all greatly appreciated. The Nelsons are fine people to do business with and their many friends will join with us in wishing them a Happy, Healthy and Prosperous New Year.

December 27, 1934



This photo was taken in 1935 after the Nelsons had acquired the Coca-Cola franchise. It shows the original Pine City Bottling Works building constructed by Matthew Prochaska in 1911.

When the Nelsons bought the business the territory included Pine City, Henriette, Rock Creek and Rush City. Highway 61 was not yet complete and snow removal was not practiced in the early days. Muddy roads could be a big problem, especially in the spring. Sometimes they would be forced to leave the truck in Grasston and walk home or leave it in Hinckley and take the train. As the roads improved the Nelsons were able to expand the area they served. When Soderbeck's Ferry was enlarged in 1927, it allowed them to expand into Wisconsin. As they expanded their delivery fleet grew.



**The 1936 Delivery Fleet**

# PINE CITY BOTTLING COMPANY TO CONSTRUCT NEW BUILDING



A new building to house the Pine City Bottling Works will be constructed this fall, work to be started in the next two or three weeks. The new building will be L-shaped, adjoining the south and east sides of the present building, and will cover the entire vacant part of the Bottling Company lot. The lot is 75x92 feet in size and the building which now houses the plant, about 30 feet square, is located on the northwest corner of the lot.

Part of the new building will be two stories high, on the southwest part of the lot, with a frontage of 62½ feet on the highway and 30 feet long on the southside. The east part of the L will be one story high and have a south frontage of 45 feet on the street and will be 92 feet in length, extending back of the present building to the north side of the lot.

The new building will be constructed of brick and tile, with steel beams for the floors and roof, with a basement of sufficient size to take care of the heating plant. The ground floor will be level with the street.

The two-story part of the building will be used to house the plant, with the bottling machinery and equipment on the first floor and the second floor will be used for offices and a day room. All machinery will be moved from the old building into the new addition and the present building will be used for storage purposes.

The one-story part of the new building will be used for a garage and will be 45x92 feet in size. There will be room for about 10 trucks or cars.

Plans are being drawn by F. A. Schwiager, Moose Lake architect, and will be completed in about two weeks. As soon as the plans are received, bids will be called for. Albert Nelson & Sons, proprietors of the Bottling Works, are undecided whether to let a contract for construction or have the work done by day labor. Work will be started as soon as possible in order to have the building completed before cold weather sets in.

The lot, which is from 3 to 4 feet above the street level, will be lowered. The school board has arranged to get the surplus dirt which will be used to fill in the ground at the school house.

October 3, 1935

As the business grew additional space was needed. In 1935 local builder, Frank Bukachek was hired to construct a modern brick building to replace the original wooden structure.



By 1936 the Nelsons had added a Schmidt Beer franchise to their line-up.

## The 1936 Building



This building was started in the late fall of 1935. An addition was constructed at the north end of the building in 1946 as the company grew.

## The 1938 Delivery Fleet





### **The Production and Sales Crew in 1938**

Left side: Vern Nelson, Harold Nelson. Right side: Earl Nelson, Albert Nelson, Art Nelson, Ed Nelson



Earl Nelson with  
bottling company  
employees.



## ol'Smoothie

In addition to the franchise drinks that the Nelsons added to their product selection, they also developed a drink of their own. "Ol' Smoothie" Root Beer was formulated, produced and distributed by all Nelson Bottling plants.



Soft drink sales continued to climb for a variety of reasons.

Art Nelson lists some of those factors in this 1940 article from the Pine Poker newspaper.



December 26, 1940



### Big Increase in Carbonated Drinks

Mr. Art Nelson of the Coca-Cola Bottling Co. of Pine City, states that increasing use of bottled carbonated beverages as ingredients in fruit punch, appetizers, novel desserts and even salads is an important factor in the growing home consumption of soft drinks.

Sales to the home market have grown steadily in the last ten years. Convenient carry-home packages of three to six bottles are featured by soft drink firms to meet this growing demand.

How far the trend to home sales has progressed is indicated by figures from a recent survey of carbonated beverage purchases in retail grocery stores. Ten years ago the average customer bought one bottle at a time. Today the average purchase is two and one-half bottles.

Americans consume far more carbonated beverages than any other people. Consumption last year averaged about 90 bottles for every man, woman and child in the country. The trend to increased use of bottled soft drinks in the home is also credited with helping to maintain winter sales at a high level. Carbonated beverages are now recognized ingredients in many dishes served the year round.

# Pine City

## Coca-Cola Bottling Company of Pine City, Minnesota

Years of Operation: 1926 - 1986

Family Members Involved: *Vern Nelson, Art Nelson & son Bill Nelson*

Territory Served: *Pine, Kanabec, Chisago, Isanti, and part of Carlton Counties in Minnesota, Burnett, Washburn, and parts of Polk and Sawyer Counties in Wisconsin*

Population Base: *Approximately 140,000*

### The Pine City Plant



Pine City was the first bottling company owned by the Nelsons but as sons were ready to strike out on their own the Nelsons added new bottling companies to their holdings.



Art &  
Vern  
Nelson



Art Nelson & son Bill

# Ashland

## Coca-Cola Bottling Company of Ashland, Wisconsin

Years of Operation: 1935 - 1981

Family Members Involved: *Edmund Nelson & son Tom Nelson,  
Marshall Hughes (Husband of Marie Nelson)*

Territory Served: *Ashland, Bayfield and Sawyer Counties in Wisconsin,  
Gogebic County in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan*

Population Base: *Approximately 65,000*

### Early Ashland Facility



Ed Nelson on left,  
Marshall Hughes on right



Albert & Anna Nelson,  
son Edmund and  
Edmond's son, Tom



# Ashland



Bottling equipment at Ashland plant. On the left is production manager, Emery Sharon.



Ed Nelson and son Tom



Tom & Ed Nelson



Ed Nelson at new Ashland plant in 1954.

# Cameron

## Coca-Cola Bottling Company of Cameron, Wisconsin

Years of Operation: 1938 - 1941

Family Members Involved: *Earl Nelson & Harold Nelson*

Territory Served: *Baron & Rusk Counties in Wisconsin*

Population Base: *Approximately 40,000*

### The Cameron Plant

From 1938 - 1941 the Nelsons operated the Coca-Cola Bottling Company of Cameron, Wisconsin. In 1941 the business moved to Rice Lake and became Coca-Cola Bottling Company of Rice Lake.



Marshall Hughes with delivery truck



Harold & Earl Nelson



The Pine City semi making a delivery in Wisconsin.

# Rice Lake

## **Coca-Cola Bottling Company of Rice Lake, Wisconsin**

Years of Operation: *1941 - 1986*

Family Members Involved: *Earl Nelson, Harold Nelson & son Jack Nelson*

Territory Served: *Baron & Rusk Counties in Wisconsin*

Population Base: *Approximately 40,000*

### **The Rice Lake Plant**



Harold Nelson  
& son Jack



# Eau Claire

## **7-UP Bottling Company of Eau Claire, Wisconsin**

Years of Operation: 1940 - 1976

Family Members Involved: *Marshall Hughes (husband of Marie Nelson)*

Territory Served: *Eau Claire, Chippewa and part of Wood County in Wisconsin*

Population Base: *Approximately 80,000*

### **The Eau Claire Plant**



Marshall Hughes & Marie  
Nelson's Wedding  
Brother Art Nelson & sister  
Ruby Nelson were the  
attendants.



A 1949 delivery that went awry.

# Wausau

## Coca-Cola Bottling Company of Wausau, Wisconsin

Years of Operation: 1956 - 1972

Family Members Involved: *Jerry Nelson, son of Vern, & Jack Nelson, son of Harold*

Territory Served: *Marathon, Lincoln, Clark and Taylor Counties in Wisconsin*

Population Base: *Approximately 150,000*

### The Wausau Plant

Below: Jerry Nelson, General Manager with Arnold Abraham, Plant Manager.



Jack Nelson, Sales Manager



## Funeral Services Held Here Saturday For Albert Nelson

Death came to one of Pine City's most influential and successful businessmen, when Albert Nelson, president of the Coca Cola Bottling Company of Pine City, passed away at his home here, Wednesday evening, June 20th. Mr. Nelson had suffered a paralytic stroke about two weeks before, which was the contributing cause of death. Up to the time of the stroke, Mr. Nelson had enjoyed exceptionally good health, never having had any serious illness during his lifetime. While members of his family and friends knew that he was critically ill, nevertheless his passing came as a great shock to all.



1871 - ALBERT NELSON - 1946

The last rites for Mr. Nelson, were held Saturday, June 23, at 2 p.m., at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, with Rev. Robert Warren officiating. M. A. Halling was the soloist, accompanied by Mrs. Ben DeBoer. Honorary pall bearers were, Carl A. Thore, Jack Trolles, Edwin Boreen and Nels Trolles. Casket bearers were six grandsons, Delbert A. McGregor Jr., Richard L. McGregor, Roland L. Rothman Jr., James M. Reid and Richard Hegman. Jerry Nelson, another grandson, and a member of the U. S. Air Force, did not arrive home in time to act as one of the pall bearers. Burial was made in Birchwood cemetery.

### Born at Neenah, Wisconsin

Albert A. Nelson was born at Neenah, Wisconsin, June 4, 1871, the son of Andrew and Annetta (Larsen) Nelson, and had celebrated his 65th birthday a few days before he was taken ill. He was united in marriage to Anna Paulson at Green Valley, Wisconsin, January 11, 1897.

He is survived by his wife, Anna, seven daughters and five sons, Mrs. Roland (Myrtle) Rothman, Wittenburg, Wisconsin; Mrs. Delbert (Pearl) McGregor, Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Mrs. Emily Reid, St. Louis Park; Mrs. Marshall (Marie) Hughes, Eau Claire, Wisconsin; Mrs. Albert (Ruby) Gardner, Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Mrs. William (Blanche) Brady, Belleville, Illinois; Mrs. Clarence (Evelyn) Hegman, Minneapolis; Vern and Arthur, Pine City; Edmund, Ashland, Wisconsin; Earl and Harold, Rice Lake, Wisconsin; 29 grandchildren and 9 great grandchildren; a brother, Nels Nelson, Oconto Falls, Wisconsin and a sister, Mrs. Julius Gilbertson, Sheboygan, Wisconsin.

Attending the services from a distance besides the children and their families were Mrs. Sophie Nelson, Mr. and Mrs. Averd Nelson, Bill and Susan and Mrs. William Boehm, all of Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin, Mr. and Mrs. Richard Tamke of Battle Lake.

Mr. Nelson was an active member of the Our Redeemer Lutheran Church and had much to do with the moving and remodeling of the present edifice. Fraternally, he was a member of the local Odd Fellow and Rebekah lodges. In politics, he was a staunch Republican, and while not taking an active part in the workings of the party, he was a

firm believer in the principles for which it stands.

### To Pine City in 1924

Mr. Nelson and his family moved to Pine City from Wittenburg, Wisconsin, where he had been in the bottling business, and purchased the bottling company here from Frank Melina. The business, which at that time was practically a one-man operation, with branch plants at Ashland, Rice Lake and Wausau, Wisconsin. In 1934, Mr. Nelson and his sons, who were associated with him in the business, received their first Coca Cola franchise for the Pine City territory. In 1935 they purchased the Coca Cola franchise at Ashland, Wisconsin and in 1936 became possessors of the Coca Cola franchise for the Rice Lake, Wisconsin territory. The Coca Cola plant at Wausau, Wisconsin, was purchased in January of this year. Besides the Coca Cola franchises at Pine City and Rice Lake, they also have the 7 Up franchises for these two plants. The company also manufactures and bottles other soft drinks, besides being distributors of Pfeiffer, Schmidt's and other brands of beer.

In 1936, a new building was erected for the Pine City plant, which by 1946 was too small for the growing business, and a large addition was built. Along with the larger building, new equipment and machinery was installed, so that today it is a model plant in every respect. Mr. Nelson was the guiding genius in this expansion program with able assistance from his sons Art and Vern at Pine City; Earl and Harold at Rice Lake and Edmund, and a son-in-law, Marshall Hughes at Ashland.

The passing of Mr. Nelson marks the first death of any member of his family since the Nelsons were married 59 years ago and leaves a void in the family circle that only the passing years will fill. We join with the businessmen of Pine City and the large circle of friends of the Nelson family in extending sympathy at the passing of their husband, father and grandfather.

Over the years the Coca-Cola bottling plants had been established in Minnesota and Wisconsin and the legacy continued with Albert's sons and grandsons for the next thirty years, following his death in 1956.



Albert's sons: Edmund, Vern, Harold, Art, Earl

"I am the oldest and best looking" *Vern Nelson*  
Vern served as President of the companies until his retirement in 1973.



Vern, Art, Harold, Earl, Edmund,  
Joyce, Millie, Geneva, Bernice, Andrea

June 28, 1956

## Community Involvement

The Nelson families had a strong presence in their respective communities and made many contributions over the years.

In July 1936, Pine City area children were treated to a circus show, courtesy of the Pine City Coca-Cola Bottling Company and the Challeen store.

**CHILDREN TO GET  
FREE CIRCUS PARTY**  
All children in this community, 12 years old or under, are invited to be the guests of Challeen's Fairway Store and the Coca Colo Company at a special show of the Conroy Bros. Circus at the fairgrounds August 4th, starting at 10 o'clock. Challeen's and the Coca Colo Co. have purchased the circus outright for this special show and each child attending will be given a free bottle of Coca Cola. Free tickets may be secured at the Challeen store or the Bottling Company.

July 9, 1936

Art Nelson not only served as president of the commercial club but the bottling plant provided meeting space for the organization.

### ART NELSON PRES. OF COMMERCIAL CLUB

Art Nelson of the Pine City Coca Cola Company was elected president of the Pine City Commercial Club, at the annual meeting last Thursday evening. Art Johnson was elected vice president and Wm. Korbel secretary-treasurer.

The club voted to join with the local Legion post in sponsoring a testimonial banquet for M. B. Hurley, newly elected state commander of the American Legion. The banquet will be held in the armory the later part of this month. A prominent speaker will be secured and there will be professional entertainers from the Twin cities. In addition to folks from this community, invitations will be extended to Legionnaires from neighboring towns and the Twin cities.

The committee to handle the affair for the commercial club is W. S. McEachern, chairman, Art Johnson, Philo Goodrich and Frank Pehler. The Legion committee is composed of Jess Ingram, chairman, Dr. A. K. Stratte, M. B. Baron and H. V. Jorgensen. These two committees are empowered by both organizations to have full charge of the arrangements for the banquet.

A meeting of the commercial club and businessmen will be held in the Coca Cola Club room Monday evening to consider the advisability of holding a community picnic here again this year.

September 9, 1937

A bowling team was sponsored.

## LOCAL BOWLERS ENTERED THE ST. PAUL TOURNAMENT



Pine City Coca-Cola Bowling Team at the St. Paul winter carnival.

Coca-Cola came in at the bottom with 2258, when some of their "200" bowlers just couldn't get over 150.

Contestant	1	2	3	Tot.
Vic. Nelson	154	124	145	423
Vern Nelson	151	163	172	486
J. Berg	155	134	179	468
R. Wilson	121	172	134	427
A. Nelson	135	141	178	454

716 734 808 2258

The first strike of the teams was made by John Berg, bowling for Coca-Cola, who rolled his ball down the alley and then "nervously" watched the pins fall. John Salvator was doomed for the first split, bowling for Crystal Palace and Victor Nelson made the first spare in the first frame of his first game.

**Columbia Heights Here Sunday**

A Columbia Heights bowling team played their return game with a local squad last Sunday, tying up the contest. The final round will be played in Forest Lake on Sunday, April 20th.

Duracha of Columbia Heights was high in the first series with a grand total of 519 for Columbia Heights, with Harry Gluth of Pine City totaling up 587 pins to rank high in the local teams. In the second series, a Columbia Heights man, Diskrud was high with 473, while Pine City's highest was Vic Nelson with 456.

March 27, 1941

### COCA COLA FORCE HAS FINE OUTING

Albert Nelson and Sons, proprietors of the Pine City Coca Cola Company, entertained employees of the company, and their families, on a real outing last Sunday.

Traveling in two 40-passenger chartered busses, about 75 in number, they left Pine City at 8 a.m. and went to Ashland, Wis., where they inspected the company plant at that place and had lunch at the plant at 12:30. Following lunch, they drove around the lake to Bayfield, where they boarded a chartered boat for a two and a half hour lake trip, which took them around the Apostle Islands. Returning to Ashland, they had dinner at the Elks Club, after which they left for home, arriving at Pine City about midnight.

In September 1937 the Coca-Cola Bottling Company employees of Pine City were taken on an outing that was special enough to merit a write up in the paper. The event included a tour of the Ashland plant, a boat trip in the Apostle Islands and dinner.

September 23, 1937

The Coca-Cola Bottling Company of Pine City was the local sponsor of a national program sponsored by the Coca-Cola Company called Talentsville USA. Contestants could compete in a talent competition. Winning the local competition meant you moved on to a regional contest. The ultimate goal was the national prize of a \$5,000 scholarship.



*photo courtesy of Bob Thiry*

Local winner, Sandra Sewell of Hinckley is pictured with Art Nelson on the right.



*photo courtesy of Bob Thiry*



*photo courtesy of Bob Thiry*



## 650 Attended Musical Talent Show Friday

Approximately 650 people attended the vocal and musical talent show sponsored by the Coca-Cola Bottling company and held in the high school auditorium last Friday evening.

Awarded first place and a chance to represent this area in a contest to be held in West high school in Minneapolis on April 30 was Sandra Sewall of Hinckley. Miss Sewall played a piano

solo titled "Rustles of Spring."

Second place went to Susan Hellerud of Milltown, Wis., who also played a piano solo.

Third place honors went to a flute trio from Pine City. Girls playing in the trio were Stephanie Sauser, Patricia Anderson and Phyllis Merrud.

A total of 18 individual and group entries participated in the contest.

Over a sixty year period the Nelson bottling companies sponsored floats and participated in countless parades throughout their service areas.



*photo courtesy of Bob Thiry*

1956 - featuring Kay Nelson & Georgianna Gillespie.



A 1936 entry.



Ashland, Wisconsin



*photo courtesy of Jackie Rydberg*

1969 - Julie Pangerl rode on this float in the Pine County Fair Parade.



Art Nelson was chosen grand marshal for the Pine City parade August 12th.

## Nelson named parade Grand marshal

Art Nelson has been chosen by the Pine City Chamber of Commerce as Grand Marshall during this year's county fair parade, August 12.

Nelson, a lifetime resident of Pine City, established the Coca-Cola Bottling business in Pine City in 1926 and has served on the Pine City School Board, been past president of the Minnesota Bottler's Association and is currently a member in the American Legion, Lions Club and Chamber of Commerce.

A great backer in community

events and growth over the years, Nelson said he is "very appreciative of the honor of being named Grand Marshall. It's nice to be appreciated by the community."

The Chamber of Commerce selects the Grand Marshall on the basis of community involvement and contributions to the area.

Nelson, who noted he was somewhat modest about the nomination, said it was the "first time I've been the Grand Marshall of anything."



In 1978, Art was chosen by the Chamber of Commerce to be the parade's Grand Marshal.





1980



Vern and Joyce Nelson pictured with Sharon Holmstrom, Minnesota Junior Miss & her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Hugo Holmstrom.



For over twenty years the Pine City bottling company provided Christmas music to the community with loud speakers which were mounted on the roof of the building and donated by Pine City Launderers and Cleaners.

The music was played on a record player and one local businessman recalls that occasionally he would have to call the Coke plant with the message, "Art, your record is stuck. Please fix it!"

In 1962, Coke was the sponsor of the National Junior Miss Contest. Sharon Holmstrom from Mora was selected as Minnesota's winner and the Coca-Cola Bottling Company of Pine City was present to send her to the national pageant.

As I explored the strengths of Pine City in contemplation of buying the bank here, one substantial asset that stood out was Coca Cola Bottling and the strong support the Nelson family gives this community. The bottling company not only is a source of employment for 35-40 full time employees on the average and a summer work place for high school and college students, but the Nelsons have been quick to do an extra share for a wide variety of community causes.

The bottling company has always been a family team operation ever since it was founded by Art's father, Albert, his brother, Vern and Art back in 1926. Over the years brothers Edmond, Harold and Earl became part of the team, as did a brother-in-law, Marshall Hughes.

From 1926 til 1935 the bottling company sold only its own label or brand of pop. Then in 1935, the Coca Cola franchise was added. This was followed shortly by the 7UP franchise, and by the Dr. Pepper franchise in 1970. Currently they serve as the bottler and distributor for the three major brands in a geographic area with a population of 130,000 - 140,000 people year around and an extra 10,000 or more during the summer vacation period.

The scope of the Nelson family operation has been adjusted over the years to utilize the talent of each of the brothers and their family. An independent plant at Ashland was established and operated by Edmond Nelson until he retired. Brothers Harold and Earl operate a bottling company at Rice Lake. Another was set up and operated by Vern's son, Jerry at Wausau. A 7UP franchise was owned in Eau Claire and operated by Marshall Hughes.

OI' Smoothie Root Beer is a private brand developed and marketed by the Nelsons since 1950. Art is very proud of the strong local market for this product. He would like to develop a broader distribution of OI' Smoothie at some point.

The Pine City bottling plant has three primary activities: (1) The actual bottling of pop in glass containers from 6 to 32 ounces in size, (2) Operating a route salesman system in which they distribute 60 different packages of soft drinks to retailers along 8-10 routes, (3) They rent and service can and bottle vending machines and pre-mix soft drink dispensers.

Over the last few years, there has been a tremendous change in the soft drink industry. Large conglomerate corporations have bought up many of the franchised bottlers. Non-returnable containers have increased from substantially over the past several years. Accordingly, production at the Pine City plant has been cut back from 60-80 hours per week in the summer in the early 1960's to about half of that today. All canned pop is shipped in already packaged by the large canners elsewhere.

Despite these changes, Art and Bill Nelson feel the Pine City scale operation is highly efficient, and accordingly can give better service at less cost than the very large franchise holders.

Art still remains very active in the business and has no plans to retire. Art says that "work doesn't kill...inactivity does." He truly enjoys his work and the people he works with. Work is his favorite hobby. Art attributes the success of the bottling operations as a family enterprise as the result of the faith the family has had in each other. "I know Bill will always do a good job."

I commend the Nelsons for their contribution to the local economy, and the good example they set for all of us.

*Cal Clark*

PINE CITY STATE BANK



Member 8 5th Pine City, MN 55063  
612) 828-6713

FDIC

The Coca-Cola Bottling Company of Pine City was well respected and an important contributor to the local economy. Over the years there were a number of articles in the local paper about the bottling company.

COCA-COLA BOTTLING CO. OF PINE CITY, INC.

**Coke**  
*adds life to...*





# Nelson brothers operate successful Coke plant since 1926

by Donna Heath  
Staff writer

Coca Cola is probably the most popular and well known soft drink in the world. Americans abroad are advised to avoid drinking water and instead, quench their thirst with Coke.

The familiar red and white signs are everywhere except Russia, the only country that does not sell Coca Cola.

The Russians apparently do not believe in the proceeds derived from such a capitalistic enterprise. However, they will sell Coca Cola at the Olympics.

Albert Nelson had a soft drink bottling company in Wisconsin. As his sons grew up he wanted to expand his business so they could join him. "It takes a considerable amount of experience to run a bottling business and dad was able to train us," Art Nelson said.

In 1926, Albert Nelson, accompanied by his sons Vern and Art, came to Pine City to look over a bottling plant that was for sale. They bought the business and moved here that same year.

Sharp businessmen, the Nelsons anticipated the boom in the popularity of Coca Cola when they bought their first franchise in 1926. "We cover six and a half neighboring counties with our Pine City franchise," Art said. Other brothers bought Coca Cola franchises in other states.

During the past 50 years, the Nelsons and two of their long time employees have seen many changes take place in the soft drink bottling industry.

"In 1926 our delivery system included one truck and we operated within a radius of 20 miles," Art said. "Now we have 20 trucks and deliver to a large territory."

During the 1930's the plant was a more simple operation than it is today. The family all pitched in to help run things and deliver. Vern's wife Joyce recalls a Fourth of July celebration when she was dating Vern.

"I came down to Pine City for the celebration," she said. "It was a cold drizzly morning and a large crowd wasn't anticipated. By noon the sun came out and it turned terribly hot and humid. The town was filled with people. We started to run out of pop so Vern's mother and I had to hurry down to the plant, wash bottles with a revolving brush washer,

bottle the pop with a foot powered bottling machine and label each container by hand. We managed to keep up with the demand," she laughed.

It was a far cry from the sophisticated bottling equipment in the Coke plant today. There is special equipment for the 16 and 16 ounce bottles and the big machine in full operation can put out 200 cases per hour.

Today Art is office manager, his son Bill has

roles," Hoefler said, "and always inquires about him. He had a good relationship with the customers."

Many people don't realize that besides Coca Cola, the Pine City plant bottles 7-Up, Dr. Pepper, a variety of diet drinks and all of the common pop flavors under the name of Sunrise soft drinks. "Ol' Smoothie" root beer was developed right here at the Pine City plant by the Nelson family.

poiled out with a wire gadget. When the stopper was opened it made a popping sound and that is where the name "pop" originated.

In his collection Vern also has an amber brown Coca Cola bottle. "I thought I had the only one in the country like it," he said, "but a museum in Bakererville, California has six."

Vern vividly recalls what it was like trying to deliver and sell their products when the roads were snowbound much of the time in the winter and muddy in the spring.

"One time I got stalled and had to walk home from Graston in light clothing during a snowstorm," he said. "Another time I took the train home from Hinckley."

"One time I got stuck in a bad storm on my way home from Graston," Vern said. "I couldn't see, and the snow was wet and heavy. I would fall down and I was so tired I just wanted to stay down but knew I must get up and find shelter or I would freeze to death."

Vern made it to a farmhouse where he called Art.

"Art got out there with the little old rubber tired wooden spiked truck that came with the original plant and he got me out. I wish we still had that old truck," Vern said. There were many times in the old days when the Nelson brothers made their deliveries with a wooden sled.

The Nelsons have mixed feelings about the "Ban the Can" movement. "The consumer wants a one-way container and the ecologists don't," Vern said. "We will continue to use disposable containers until government regulations prohibit it."

"When the government banned cyclamate as an artificial sweetener we had to ease after case of our products to the dump. It was very costly," Vern said. "Now there is talk of the ban on cyclamate being lifted as it is a far more effective artificial sweetener than saccharin."

The old frame plant was remodeled and expanded to the present brick structure and what was originally a family operation now employs over 60 persons. In honor of their contribution to the community Art Nelson was chosen to be Grand Marshal of the Pine County Fair parade this year.

"At first we debated our decision to come," the brothers said. "We're really happy we made the move. It's been a good life."



An early photo of Coca Cola Bottling in Pine City.

followed in his father's footsteps and is plant manager, and Jerry Hoefler, an employee who has been with the company for 27 years became sales manager when Vern semi-retired in 1973.

"I worked here as a kid," Hoefler said. "I've seen lots of changes in the years I've been an employee. For instance, in the beginning, we only had small bottles and everything was returnable. We've expanded into larger sized bottles, screw caps and disposable cans."

"People really miss seeing Vern on the sales

"We wanted to make a really good candy stick flavored root beer like the kind found at root beer stands," Vern said.

Art Nelson said he and his wife Millie are not memorabilia collectors but Vern and Joyce have an outstanding collection of Coca Cola souvenirs which have become very collectible and valuable.

Vern displayed an original bottle with a Hutchinson bottle stopper. The stopper was one of the first used and was made of glass. It

October 11, 1978

# Coca Cola Bottling Company helps city prosper

When the Nelson family purchased Pine City Bottling Works in 1926 they delivered beverages to 15 customers as groved streams and roads.

If the weather was good the deliveries were made by car. Winter snows and muddy roads in spring meant deliveries made by sled, with only six to eight cases on board at one time.

That's a far cry from the operation which now serves 1,600 individual accounts in a huge territory and sold 600,000 cases of pop in 1982.

Coca Cola Bottling Company of Pine City is a family owned and operated business that has met the challenges of an ever-changing world. It has grown with the community and contributed immeasurably to Pine City's growth.

The story of Pine City's Coca Cola Bottling Company begins in 1926 in Wisconsin, Wis. where Albert Nelson learned the soda pop business. It was there he trained his oldest sons, Art and Vern, in running the business.

When Albert decided to expand his business it was Art and Vern who came with him to Pine City where they'd heard a new-age pop factory, Pine City Bottling Works, was available.

Nelson purchased the plant from Frank Melchior in 1926, and in the spring of 1927 the entire family moved to Pine City.

At that time there were no franchise drinks. The plant produced its own cream soda, strawberry, blackberry, grape and orange sodas and also handled the Green Bull Near Beer franchise it had obtained in the original purchase of the plant.

The territory included Pine City, Hinckley, Rock Creek and Rush City. In 1927 Nolebeck's Ferry was enlarged, allowing the territory to be expanded into Wisconsin.

The production area for the first couple years consisted of Art Nelson who now operates the plant, and his father, Brothel Vern handled sales and Art doubled as the bookkeeper.

As road conditions improved in the area Nelsons expanded their territory to include Brevas and Mission Creek. Highway 61 was not yet complete so when the trucks were muddy they were forced to use old Highway 23. This route allowed them to reach customers "as far away" as Hinckley.

Snow removal was not practiced in those days, and the mud in the spring was so deep Nelsons would sometimes be forced to leave the truck in Graston and walk home or leave it in Hinckley and take the train.

Jacob Schmidt Brewing Company of St. Paul approached the Nelsons in the early 1930s, asking them to distribute Schmidt City Club Beer and Select. At the

end of Prohibition in 1933 they took on that franchise and operated it until the early 1960s.

The first franchise from the Coca Cola Company of Atlanta came in 1934, followed in 1935 by Nelson's acquisition of the 7-Up franchise. The Dr. Pepper franchise was added in 1971 and 7-Hitler in 1979.

Next year Nelsons will celebrate 50 years as the Coca Cola Bottling Company of Pine City.

In addition to their franchise pops, Albert Nelson and his sons formulated their own root beer line, Ol' Smoothie, which is still produced and distributed today.

Another expansion of the operation came in 1948 when Nelsons purchased Coca Cola Bottling Company of Rice Lake which is run today by two other brothers, Harold and Earl Nelson.

Today Coca Cola Bottling Company of Pine City produces 10 oz. and 16 oz. returnable glass containers and all five gallon tanks used in bulk dispensing or premix.

According to Bill Nelson, who assists his father, Art, in the operation of Pine City's plant, bulk dispensing has been a big item for their business in the past 10 years. Two hundred accounts in this area use bulk dispensing, which accounts for 30,000 five gallon tank sales or the equivalent of 140,000 cases of pop.

In the production of the

beverages made in Pine City all steps are made from scratch with the exception of that used for making Coca Cola. The plant receives sugar in 120 lb. bags, usually 400 bags at a time. It has its own water treatment and purification system for producing carbonated water used in the finished product.

The 2,000 pop vending machines seen throughout this area are serviced by Coca Cola Bottling Company of Pine City.

The territory now served by the company reaches as far north as Moose Lake in Carlton County, as far south as Wyoming, west as far as Ogishie and 60 miles east of Spooner, Wis.

Eight route trucks deliver to the Pine City territory, two of them based at a warehouse in Spooner. The total population served by the Pine City company is about 200,000. It employs 35-40 people, depending on the season.

The Nelsons have built a successful business in their years in Pine City. It's a business based on respect for their many customers and a desire to see the community and its businesses grow and prosper.

Coca Cola Bottling Company of Pine City has been an asset to the community for many years, and will continue that tradition for many more.



FATHER AND SON TEAM. Art Nelson learned the soda pop business from his father, and Bill, Art's son, has learned it from him. The two now run Coca Cola Bottling Company of Pine City, a business that has grown with the community and contributed much to the town's success.

## Business of the Week

July 28, 1983

# For 50 years, Nelsons have helped city to grow

When the Nelson family purchased Pine City Bottling Works in 1926 they delivered beverages to 13 customers on gravel streets and roads.

If the weather was good the deliveries were made by car. Winter snows and muddy roads in spring meant deliveries made by sled, with only six to eight cases on board at one time.

That's a far cry from the operation which now serves 1,600 individual accounts in a huge territory.

Coca Cola Bottling Company of Pine City is a family owned and operated business that has met the challenge of an ever-changing world. It has grown with the community and contributed immeasurably to Pine City's growth.

The story of Pine City's Coca Cola Bottling Company begins in 1926 in Wittenberg, Wis. where Albert Nelson learned the soda pop business. It was there he trained his oldest sons, Art and Vern, in

running the business. When Albert decided to expand his business it was Art and Vern who came with him to Pine City where they'd found a one-man pop factory, Pine City Bottling Works, was available.

Nelsons purchased the plant from Frank Melhus in 1926, and in the spring of 1927 the entire family moved to Pine City.

At that time there were no franchise drinks. The plant produced its own cream soda, strawberry, blackberry, grape and orange soda and also handled the Great Bell Near Beer franchise it had obtained in the original purchase of the plant.

Its territory included Pine City, Honeoite, Rock Creek and Rush City. In 1927 Soderbeck's Ferry was enlarged, allowing the territory to be expanded into Wisconsin.

The production crew for the first couple years consisted of Art Nelson who now operates the plant, and his father, Brother Vern

handled sales and Art doubled as the bookkeeper.

As road conditions improved in the area, Nelsons expanded their territory to include Honeo and Mission Creek. Highway 61 was not yet complete so when the roads were muddy they were forced to use old Highway 23. This route allowed them to reach customers "as far away" as Honeoye.

Snow removal was not practiced in those days, and the mud in the spring was so deep Nelsons would sometimes be forced to leave the truck in Grasson and walk home or leave it in Honeoye and take the train.

Jacob Schmidt Brewing Company of St. Paul approached the Nelsons in the early 1920s, asking them to distribute Schmidt City Club Beer and Select. At the end of Prohibition in 1933 they took on that franchise and retained it until the early 1960s.

The first franchise from the Coca Cola Company of Atlanta, Ga. came in 1934, followed in 1935 by Nelson's acquisition of the F&P franchise. The Dr. Pepper franchise was added in 1971 and Hankin in 1973.

This year Nelsons celebrate 50 years as the Coca Cola Bottling Company of Pine City.

In addition to their franchise pops, Albert Nelson and his sons formulated their own root beer line, O' Smoothie, which is still produced and distributed today.

Another expansion of the operation came in 1949 when Nelsons purchased Coca Cola Bottling Company of Rice Lake which is run today by two other brothers, Harold and Earl Nelson.

Today Coca Cola Bottling Company of Pine City produces 16 oz. and 16 oz. returnable glass containers and all five gallon tanks used in bulk dispensing or pre-mix.

According to Bill Nelson, who assists his father, Art, in the operation of Pine City's plant, bulk dispensing has been a big item for their business in the past 10 years.



PINE CITY BOTTLING COMPANY was the name of the business Albert Nelson and his sons, Art and Vern, purchased from Frank Melhus in 1926. This photo was taken in 1934 or 1935 after Coca-Cola franchise was acquired. The present structure is built on the same site.



ART NELSON and his son, BILL, work together at running the Coca Cola Bottling Company of Pine City. The business has been passed from father to son for many years.



THE BUILDING PICTURED is the southern one-third of the present structure. This shot was taken in 1938.

## Business of the Week

Two hundred accounts in the area use bulk dispensing, which amounts for 35,000 five gallon tank sales or the equivalent of 145,000 cases of pop.

In the production of the beverages made in Pine City all syrups are made from scratch with the exception of that used for making Coca Cola. The plant receives sugar in 100 lb. bags, usually 400 bags at a time. It has its own water treatment and purification system for producing carbonated water used in the

finished product. The 1,000 pop vending machines seen throughout this area are serviced by Coca Cola Bottling Company of Pine City.

The territory now served by the company reaches as far north as Moose Lake in Carlton County, as far south as Wyoming, west as far as Ogilvie and 60 miles east of Spooner, Wis.

Eight route trucks deliver in the Pine City territory, two of them based at a warehouse in Spooner. The total population served by the

Pine City company is about 200,000. It employs 35-40 people, depending on the season.

The Nelsons have built a successful business in their years in Pine City. It's a business based on respect for their many customers and a desire to see the community and its businesses grow and prosper.

Coca Cola Bottling Company of Pine City has been an asset to the community for many years, and will continue that tradition for many more.

**Coca Cola  
Bottling  
Company  
of Pine City**

April 26, 1984

*"It had to be good to get where it is"*

Refreshed Coca-Cola is pure, refreshing, delicious, and delicious—but that's all. There's also refreshment built into the formula. Everybody recognizes the refreshed feeling—the refreshment of complete satisfaction. Coca-Cola does things.

**THE PAUSE THAT REFRESHES**

Coca-Cola Bottling Co. of Pine City, Inc.

When there's a slack moment... pause and

*Turn to Refreshment*

Refreshed Coca-Cola is pure, refreshing, delicious, and delicious—but that's all. There's also refreshment built into the formula. Everybody recognizes the refreshed feeling—the refreshment of complete satisfaction. Coca-Cola does things.

**THE PAUSE THAT REFRESHES**

Coca-Cola Bottling Co. of Pine City, Inc.

*"-and after lunch, that refreshed feeling"*

Refreshed Coca-Cola is pure, refreshing, delicious, and delicious—but that's all. There's also refreshment built into the formula. Everybody recognizes the refreshed feeling—the refreshment of complete satisfaction. Coca-Cola does things.

**THE PAUSE THAT REFRESHES**

Coca-Cola Bottling Co. of Pine City, Inc.

## Citizen of the Year

In 1982, Pine City bestowed its greatest honor on Art Nelson by declaring him the citizen of the year.



CITIZEN OF THE YEAR ART NELSON took time off from his business at the Coca Cola Bottling Company in town to chat with Donna Heath about the honor the Chamber of Commerce has bestowed on him. Nelson bought the local franchise many years ago and has spent his time since then helping Pine City and his business grow and prosper.

For his many contributions

### Chamber applauds outstanding citizen

by Donna Heath

Art Nelson has been a staunch booster of Pine City ever since he came to town in 1925. This year he is being honored by the community for his enthusiasm and personal contributions made toward the betterment of Pine City, his hometown.

"The first thing that crossed my mind when the Chamber of Commerce notified me I had been chosen as Pine City's Citizen of the Year was, 'is it really someone such as I am?'" Nelson said. "I do, I am certainly thankful to the people who selected me."

It was a lucky day for Pine City when Albert Nelson expanded his Wisconsin-based soft drink bottling company to include this area. His sons, Art and Vera, joined him in the operation of the Pine City plant.

Artistic businessmen, the Nelsons anticipated a boom in the popularity of Coca Cola when they bought their first franchise in

1905. What many people don't realize is that the Pine City plant also bottles 7-Up, Dr. Pepper, a variety of diet drinks and all the common pop flavors under the name of Sunrise soft drinks.

Oil Smoothie root beer was developed right here at the Pine City plant by the Nelson family. They developed their own formula to make a really good candy-stick flavored root beer like the kind served at root beer stands.

The company grew from a one-truck delivery system, operating within a 10-mile radius, to a fleet of 20 trucks covering over six counties. The original frame building was remodeled to the present brick structure and today, the once family-operated business employs over 40 persons. Some of them began working at the plant when they were in high school and stayed on after graduation.

"We've helped a lot of boys earn money for their education by providing summer jobs,"

Nelson said, with almost a fatherly sense of pride.

But providing employment was just one of the many ways Nelson contributed to the betterment of Pine City. He has served on the school board, is president of the Dr. Nethercott Medical Foundation which awards a scholarship each year to a deserving student entering medical or para medical training; is a member of the American Legion; past president of the Chamber of Commerce; a charter member of the Pine City Lions Club; a member of the Presbyterian Church and past president of the Minnesota Business Association. He was grand marshal of the parade in 1979.

While many of his contemporaries have long ago retired to warmer climates where they seek refuge from cold Minnesota winters, Nelson has no plans to follow suit.

"I came from a family of 12

children, and I guess I was always the maverick," he laughed. "I don't ever plan to retire. My son, Bill, has assumed much of the responsibility here, and I believe there is a certain amount of recreation in work if you are accomplishing something. I find work to be stimulating and fun."

As for spending the winters down south Nelson said, "Why would Millie and I want to do that?" "Pine City is where our family and friends are. This is our home and this is where we are happiest."

Nelson keeps in shape by walking and swimming.

"I've been an advocate of brisk walking for over 25 years," he said. "I've talked a lot of people into walking a couple of miles every day. I believe it's healthier exercise than jogging, where they are jarring all of their vital organs."

See Art Nelson, Page 2

## Art Nelson

Continued from Page 1

Living on Cross Lake gives him easy access to swimming during the summer months.

"I've toyed with the idea of adding a solar room to my home with an enclosed pool," he said. "That would extend the season considerably."

Art Nelson and the beverage bottling company founded by his father are an important part of Pine City's history.

During this year of our Heritage Celebration, as citizen of the year, Nelson will be an outstanding representative and ambassador of good will for Pine City.

A banquet in his honor will be held at the American Legion Club Saturday, May 15 beginning at 7:30 p.m. Reservations can be made by calling Chamber of Commerce Secretary, Shawn Davis at 629-3861.

May 1982

PINE CITY PIONEER, THURSDAY, MAY 20, 1982 - 5



CITIZEN OF THE YEAR Art Nelson is congratulated by Chamber of Commerce President Jim Nelson at the party in his honor last Saturday night in the American Legion Clubrooms. Nearly 200 guests turned out to thank Art and his wife, Millie, for all they've done for Pine City in the many years they've lived here.

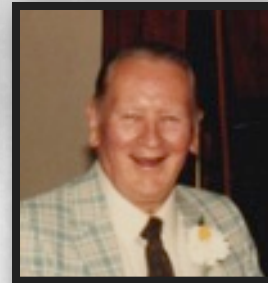
by Donna Heath

"Things go better with Coke" is a well-known advertisement all over the world.

"Things go better with Art," was the consensus when Art Nelson, president of the Coca Cola Bottling Company in Pine City was honored as citizen of the year Saturday night.

Well-wishers, friends, and

# Overflow crowd on hand to honor Art Nelson Saturday



Art Nelson



Jim Dennison

Chamber of Commerce president Jim Dennison, as he presented Nelson with the Citizen of the Year plaque, said "Congratulations, Art. It's people like you and your wife who have helped make Pine City a better place to live and do business."



Doug Carlson  
*State Representative*

said, "Art comes from a family that has always been friendly. There is no way, no matter who you are, that you can get a snub out of them. They're good to everyone."



Gerry Robbins

Ike Gillespie summed it up as he recalled their younger days. "No one ever had a better friend or business associate. Art's name was always first on the list for any goodwill drive on Main Street. He has always been a booster for the betterment of Pine City. He never dropped out of community activity."



Ike Gillespie

Jerry Robbins reminded the audience that Art is an expert in crisis management. "Whenever a crisis is needed, he can manage it," Robbins said. He added that 14 years ago when he and Jane were making the decision to buy the local radio station it was Art and his positive attitude about the great community Pine City is that tipped the scale in their favor. "His recommendation made it possible for us to own the station," Robbins said.

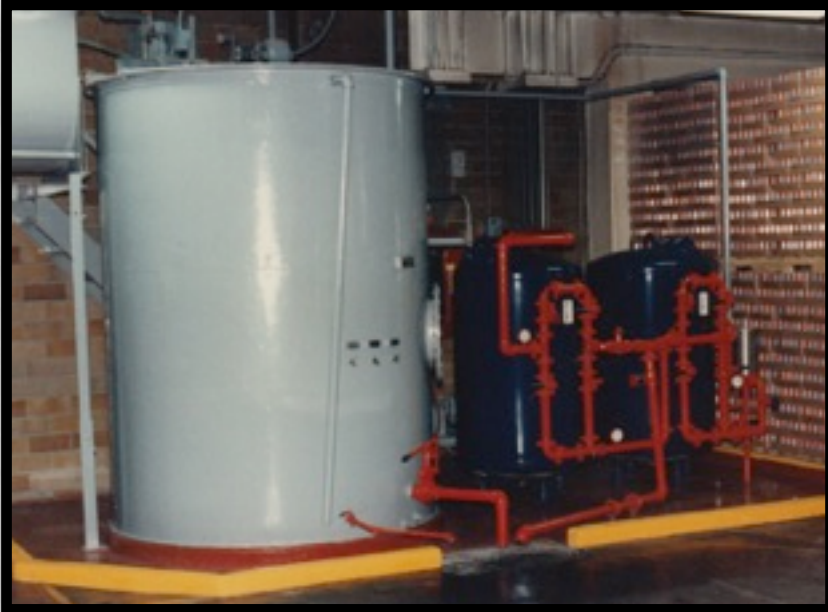


Florence Nethercott

reached out to most of them. Leona Carlson, office manager at the bottling company for over 30 years, had the audience in stitches with her remarks as she got the roast rolling. "Art will never get old. He's too busy making the rest of us age," she said.

## Plant Operations

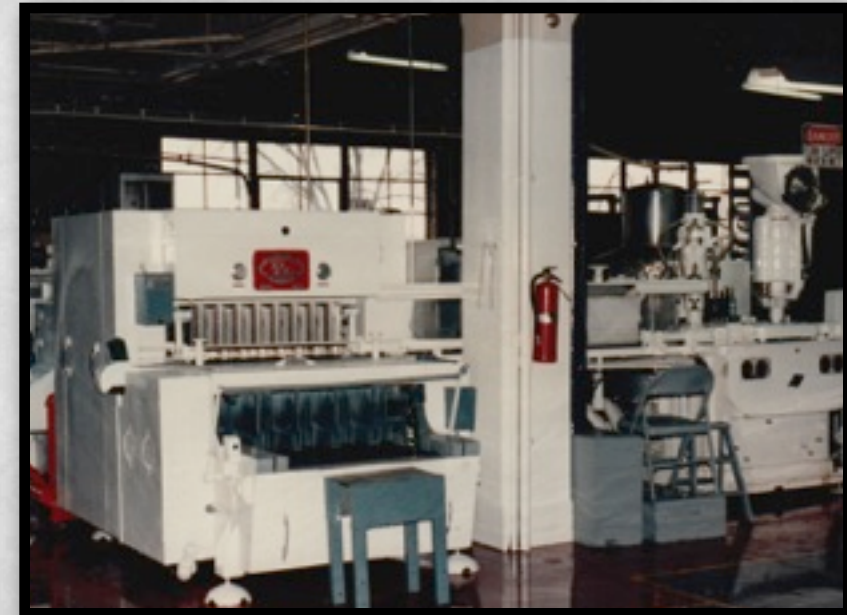
While each bottling company was unique they shared common production characteristics.



Water filtration & purification system

The use of pure ingredients (sugar, syrup, water, etc.) was essential to assure a quality controlled, consistent product. A water filtration system to treat city water was an important first step.

The syrup was mixed in large stainless tanks in a special sterile environment designated as the “syrup room” in the upper floor of the plant. Syrup was then transferred to the main level via stainless lines where it was placed into each bottle on the bottling line. Carbonated water was added to the bottle by the filling machine, then capped and sent to the tumbler for mixing. Take note, Coca-Cola syrup was received pre-mixed in bulk to protect the “SECRET FORMULA”.



Bottling line & bulk production



Canisters for bulk distribution (restaurants, bars, special events) were prepared in much the same way.

Bottles and cans were stacked in the warehouse until they were loaded onto trucks for delivery to the customer.



# Nelsons sell Coke plant

by Steve Prinsen

One of Pine City's oldest family businesses and Pine City's oldest industry was sold Dec. 1 when Coca Cola Bottling Company was purchased by Viking Coca Cola of St. Cloud.

Officials of Viking said actual ownership of the Pine City Coke Plant will be by a group of Minnesota Coke bottlers, with Viking handling the operations of the business. The new plant name will be St. Croix Valley Bottling Company.

The purchase price of the business was not disclosed. The purchase includes the company's franchise agreements to sell Coke, 7-Up and other soft drink products within the territories of the Pine City operation and also the Rice Lake, WI operation, which was operated by members of the Nelson family.

Long-time residents of Pine City, Art Nelson and his son, Bill, have operated the Pine City Coke plant since Art's father, Albert, founded Pine City Bottling Company, as it was then called, in 1927.

The Nelsons acquired the franchise rights to sell Coca Cola in a six-county area in 1935. Shortly after, the franchise rights for 7-Up and other soft drinks, such as Dr. Pepper, were acquired.

The business has employed from 25-40 people over the years. Officials at Viking said all present employees, with the exception of two positions, were retained. The plant employs approximately 20 full and part-time people.

"John Sandford has been named sales manager," Doug Heinen announced last Thursday. Heinen, general manager of Viking in St. Cloud will work with Sandford until the operation is running smoothly.

## The End of an Era

In 1986 Pine City's oldest industry, the Coca-Cola Bottling Company was sold to Viking Coca-Cola of St. Cloud. The sale also included the Coca-Cola Bottling



Sandford, of Mora, has worked as a salesman for Coke for the past 12 years. He replaces Jerry Hoefler, an employee of Coke for 35 years, who resigned after being named division manager.

Sandford is active in the Jaycees and has served as state vice president. He is a member of the Mora Chamber of Commerce.

Heinen indicated the new owners will continue to play an active role in the community. "We plan to continue that type of thing. We plan to stay here. We're not moving anywhere," he said.

Over the years, Coke has become known as a very benevolent community industry and has donated much of its product to various community events. Coke has also sponsored the annual Labor Day golf tournament at the Pine City Country Club, and Heinen said the new firm will continue those types of activities.

Art Nelson, who has been office manager for the past several years, and Bill, who has been plant manager, will help

Company of Rice Lake, Wisconsin. The Ashland, Wausau and Eau Claire plants had been sold in previous years.



Earl Nelson, attorney  
Steve Riley, Harold  
Nelson

December 1986

# Nelsons sell plant

Continued from Page 1

Viking in the transition. Art plans to stay in Pine City, and Bill said he has made no immediate plans other than working with Viking during the transition period.

The Coke plant serves an area approximately 45 miles in any direction from Pine City. The Rice Lake operation covers approximately the same distance, and together, they serve a population of about 200,000.

For the past few years, the Pine City plant has produced very little of the actual bottled product, and Heinen said most of the Coke and other soft drink products sold through this plant will be bottled or canned in St. Cloud or Rice Lake.

At one time Coke was bottled by a foot powered machine and bottles were hand washed and labeled. Through the years, more sophisticated equipment was purchased. At one time the plant could produce up to 360 cases of pop (10-or-16-ounce bottles) in an hour. When canned pop became more popular, the Pine City plant was not updated with canning equipment, and pop was shipped from Rice Lake and other canners.

Members of the Nelson

Brothers Art and Vern, who is now retired and living in Edina, operated the Pine City plant, while Harold and Earl operated the Rice Lake plant and Edmund the Ashland plant. The Ashland operation was sold in the late 1970s.

One of the traditions that won't be carried on by the new owners is the root beer, Ol' Smoothie, which originated in Pine City. The Nelson's developed Ol' Smoothie in the early 1950s.

Sandford said St. Croix Valley Coke elected to phase Ol' Smoothie out of the operation and instead distribute nationally advertised Barq's Root Beer. Ol' Smoothie will be available until present supplies are purchased.

Besides distributing Coke, St. Croix Valley Bottling will sell 7-Up, Dr. Pepper, Mellow Yellow and a number of other diet soft drinks and flavors of pop.



THE COCA COEA BOTTLING COMPANY of Pine City officially became St. Croix Valley Bottling Company Dec. 1 when the Nelson family sold their operation to a group of Minnesota bottlers. The firm will not be affiliated with Viking Coca Cola of St. Cloud. Here, Art Nelson congratulates Doug Heinen, general manager of Viking. Heinen will assist the Pine City operation and help new sales manager John Sandford for the next several weeks.



# Nelson 'Coke' Era Is Over

By Peg Lamkin

"Coke Is It," a widely-publicized slogan for Coca-Cola, could have been the slogan for the Nelson brothers during their 45 business years in Rice

Lake. It was, for the Nelsons, "The Real Thing."

Now the Nelson era in the Coca-Cola industry, Rice Lake version, has almost—but not quite—come to an end with the formal retirement of Harold

and Earl Nelson, brothers who built the local plant back in 1941, have owned and managed it since, and whose son and nephew, Jack (Harold's son), has served as sales manager in recent years.

Jack Nelson will be their link with Rice Lake's Coca-Cola future—or, to borrow Coca-Cola's current slogan, who will "Catch the Wave." Jack is remaining active at the Rice Lake plant, and moves up to the position of general manager for the new owners, St. Croix Valley Coca-Cola Bottling Co., with corporate headquarters in St. Cloud, Minn.

The new ownership transaction was finalized this Monday, but Harold and Earl were still at their desks Tuesday, and expect to be there for another few weeks. "We have corporate affairs to settle," they explained.

And then? "It's too soon for us to know yet," demurred Harold Nelson. They have no present plans of engaging in new business adventures, but they do intend to remain in Rice Lake, where they have been well-known in community affairs over the years.

Both are charter members of the Dean's List Orchestra, members of the Barron County Campus Foundation, and have been active with the Chamber of Commerce and service clubs including the Elks, Rotary, Kiwanis and Moose. Service veterans

(Earl, air force; Harold, army), they are also American Legion members.

"We've seen the soft drink business, especially the Coca-Cola business, grow," remarked Earl. "We recently helped celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Coca-Cola business in Atlanta." Counting their pre-ownership work experience, Rice Lake's Nelson brothers have been a part of it for 50 of those years, and their father and older brothers for even longer.

The Nelson family hailed from the Green Bay area, and included, besides the parents, seven sisters and five brothers. The father, Albert, and all five sons were involved in the bottling business.

Albert Nelson, who began in lumbering, later worked in soft drink plants. They lived in Wittenberg for a time, and then in 1927, Albert Nelson (now deceased) and two of the older boys, Arthur (now of Pine City, Minn.) and Vern (now of Minneapolis) bought the Pine City Bottling Works in Minnesota, bottling flavored soft drinks at first, and then, in the early 1930s, purchasing the Coca-Cola and 7-Up franchises.

Another older brother, Edmund (now living in Washburn), operated an Ashland plant.

Earl and Harold, both single then.

See NELSONS, Page 3



Earl, Harold, Jack "Pause for Refreshment"



Mark Wilson, Harold Nelson, Art Nelson, Joe Faber (Viking Coca-Cola), Earl Nelson.

Harold, Jack & Earl Nelson



# Nelsons . . .

Continued from Page 1

had plenty of background experience in the bottling business at the time the family corporation purchased the Cameron Coca-Cola Bottling Company on Feb. 1, 1938.

Both men were married, to gals from St. Paul and Pine City, respectively, when, in July of 1941 the family business was moved to a new plant in the brick building at 326 S. Main St., Rice Lake. Albert Nelson and all five brothers were stockholders.

"The business has grown manyfold since those days," reflected Earl Nelson, looking back. Their brand-new Rice Lake plant was processing about 18-20 bottles of "Coke" a minute, Harold agreed, pulling his estimate from the mists of nearly half a century. Now, said Earl, the production speed is about 120 bottles a minute.

When they opened Coca-Cola Bottling Co. of Rice Lake, Inc., the men employed about eight or 10 people ("We did a lot of work ourselves in those days," observed Earl.) Now there are 26 employees, for while the market has grown tremendously and production capacity had to be steadily increased, employment cutbacks as the result of technological development were offset by growth and new employee needs in fields of merchandising, advertising, quality control, cooler repair and sales force, the businessmen explained.

The firm had three vehicles in Cameron, and the count was still three when they first moved their operations to Rice Lake. Now there are a total of 16, including 12 delivery-service vans and four sales cars. "And the vans are at least three times larger," contributed Earl.

They made two additions to the plant over the years, 80 by 65 feet and 100 by 120 feet, in the 1960s and again in 1974, to accommodate general business growth.

They also operated Coca-Cola Bottling Co. of Wausau and 7-Up Bottling Co. of Eau Claire until about 10 years ago, they related. At the Rice Lake plant, they bottled and distributed not only Coke and 7-Up, but also Dr. Pepper, Sunkist Orange and their own Rice Lake trademarked product, Ol' Smoothie Root Beer.

In addition, they held the distributorship for Schwebbe's Co. products, including ginger ale, charged water and tonic.

But the biggest changes in the business, the brothers agreed, is in the many more package sizes of their major products, Coca-Cola and 7-Up.

Originally, Coca-Cola came in only one size: the six and a half ounce bottle, handled in 24-bottle cases all of the same size.

Today, it comes in 6½-, 10-, 16- and 32-oz. bottles, 2-liter bottles and 12-ounce cans.

Packed in their own 24-unit cases are six- eight- and 12-packs, and additionally, the bottlers dispense five-gallon lots of premixed Coca-Cola in stainless steel containers, for fountains, food services and bars.

And don't forget the "classic" Coke and the "new" Coke departure: Both are handled on today's production lines.

Through those years and years of Coca-Cola processing, the Nelson brothers and their families enjoyed the nation's No. 1 drink themselves—at work, at home, when entertaining.

Now, disassociating themselves from that busy era, the Nelson brothers may for the first time have the opportunity to enjoy the full meaning of Coca-Cola's original slogan, "The Bause That Refreshes."

*Lives well lived & a business well run.*



*A local history project by:*  
**Pine City Area History Association**

*Preserve & Share Pine City Area History*

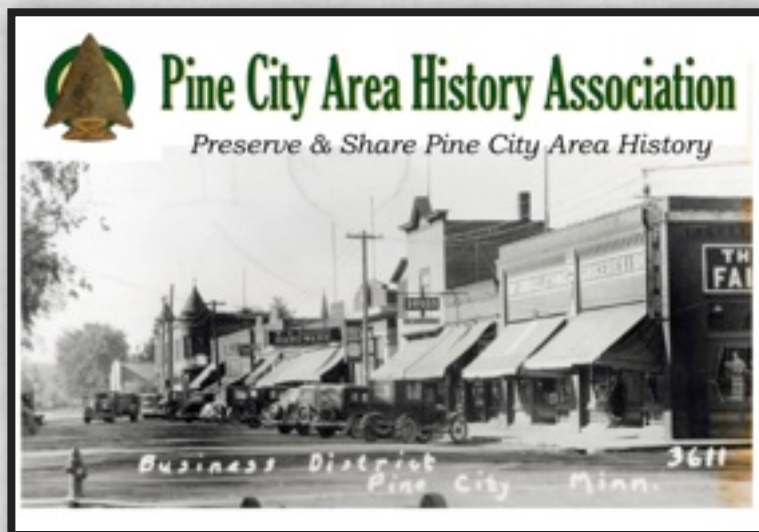
The Pine City Area History Association is grateful to the Nelson Family for sharing their memorabilia, photos and memories. It is opportunities like this that make it possible for us to achieve our mission of preserving and sharing Pine City area history.

To learn more about the Pine City Area History Association, visit us on Facebook at: [facebook.com/PineCityHistory](https://www.facebook.com/PineCityHistory)

or

visit our Website at:  
[pinecityhistory.com](http://www.pinecityhistory.com)

Copies of this book can be ordered at:  
<http://www.pinecityhistory.com/people>



315 Main Street South, Suite 170  
Pine City, MN 55063  
320 - 322 - 9208  
Email: [pcahistory.com](mailto:pcahistory.com)

A History of the Albert Nelson Family  
& their Coca-Cola roots in  
Pine City, Minnesota.



Edmund, Vern, Harold, Art & Earl Nelson

