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The Canada Dry Bottling Plant in Silver Spring

By Robin D. Ziek

Since 1946, the Canada Dry Bottling Plant has been a familiar landmark in Silver Spring. Today, as The JGB Companies incorporate it into a new residential development called "Silverton Condominium," the two-story curving portion of the Art Moderne industrial building can still be seen at the corner of Blair Mill Road and East West Highway. With the eponymous Silver Spring commemorated across the street in Acorn Park, and the B&O Railroad Station across the tracks, this corner illustrates Montgomery County history in a nutshell. Water, transportation, and industry were all important elements in the growth of Montgomery County, and, specifically, of Silver Spring. Transportation was key, whether it be horse, trolley, or railroad. In the second quarter of the 20th Century new growth opportunities developed with increased sales of private automobiles, and with trucks for deliveries.

By the 1930s, Silver Spring was firmly established as the premier suburban center of Montgomery County. As a new city, Silver Spring offered new homes, schools and shops. Community infra-structure included the local post office, the railroad station, fire and rescue services and a central meeting hall at the second (1927) Silver Spring Armory. National industries viewed this new suburban center as a growth opportunity, and the Canada Dry Bottling Plant illustrates a part of the story.



Newly constructed Canada Dry Bottling Plant, Silver Spring, Maryland, ca. 1946. Construction was begun in 1945, and completed in 1946 for warehouse distribution. Bottling production started in 1947.

Photo courtesy Silver Spring Historical Society.

The Silver Spring Canada Dry Bottling Plant was built during a company expansion program that began in 1936 and was completed in 1949. Its architect, Walter Monroe Cory, was a well-known industrial designer from New York City. His design was conceived as an important part of the Canada Dry Company's marketing program, to illustrate that they used scientific standards to assure the highest quality of their beverages. The design was used as a prototype at fourteen different locations in Canada, the United States and Cuba. Modern building materials, such as concrete and steel, were manipulated by the architect to project the desired company image while also assuring a sanitary and fire-proof manufacturing plant. Today, eleven of these fourteen buildings have been identified. In some cases, the entire factory building remains, while in others, only portions of the original building are extant. Only in Havana, Cuba is the plant still used for bottling.

CANADA DRY SODA

Beers, ales, and mineral waters have been common beverages throughout history. The rise of the modern soda industry began with attempts in the late eighteenth century in Europe and the United States to create artificial mineral water. Problems with the industry at this time included the lack of mass production of bottles, as well as the lack of a system of closure that could be applied mechanically. Cork closures for bottling was done on a small scale compared to the predominance of soda fountain dispensing.¹

Throughout the nineteenth century, local soda fountains offered an abundance of different flavors. There were even publications of soda fountain recipes.² The proprietary products, many of which are still available today, appeared during the last two decades of the 19th century.³ Familiar flavors include Hires Root Beer (1876), Coca-Cola (1886), Moxie (1885), Dr. Pepper (1885), and Pepsi-Cola (1898).⁴ The development of machinery for the production of bottles, as well as the invention of the automated crown cap closure, patented in 1889, made industrial expansion of the production of individual soda bottles possible.⁵



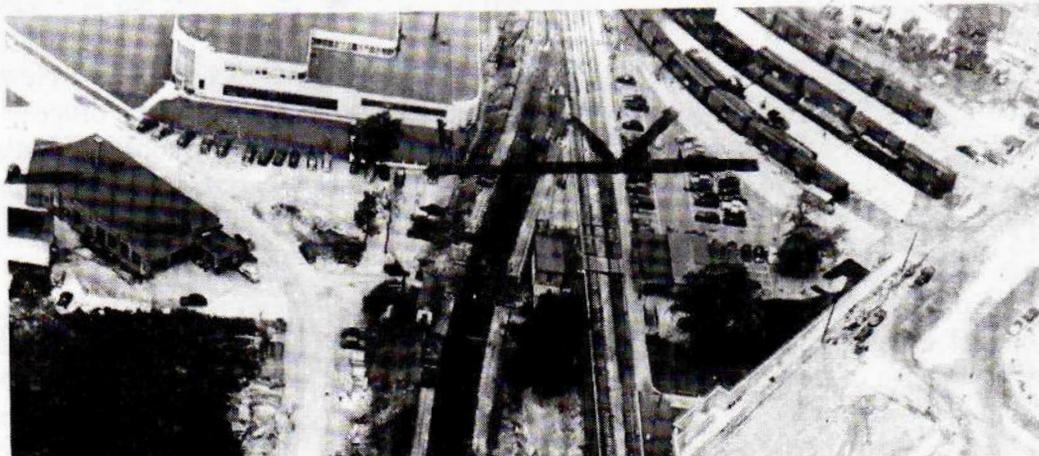
Canada Dry produced a wide variety of beverages.

Ginger ale was initially developed in Ireland around 1850 as a substitute for brewed ginger beer.⁶ John J. McLaughlin, a Toronto pharmacist, developed his own non-alcohol carbonated ginger drink in the late 1890s. Ginger and lemon were popular flavors for bottling because other fruit flavors were susceptible to spoiling.⁷ In 1904, McLaughlin began to bottle Canada Dry Pale Dry Ginger Ale. Fifteen years later, the product was shipped to New York City. The first Canada Dry bottling plant in the United States opened in 1921 on 38th Street in Manhattan. Today, Canada Dry is part of the Cadbury Schweppes, plc of London group of products.⁸

THE SITE

A new sales strategy of "direct to dealer delivery markets" was announced in the company's *1935 Annual Report* and then publicized as part of the world-wide expansion program in its *1936 Annual Report*.⁹ The strategy called for opening plants in population centers to avoid the expense of long freight hauls. The expansion included new company plants as well as contracts with independent bottlers to produce their product.

As part of this expansion, Canada Dry Ginger Ale, Inc. purchased a property in Silver Spring's industrial zone along the recently developed East West Highway that also backed up to the B&O Railroad track. Both means of transportation were used to serve the Silver Spring Bottling Plant. The local newspaper noted in 1946 that the plant was under construction, and was "owned by William C. Barnes, and that the Canada Dry concern will be known under the name of Silver Spring Ginger Ale Company, Inc."¹⁰



Aerial view of Canada Dry Bottling Plant, looking northwest, ca. 1950. Note original footprint of building and railroad siding before the building was truncated by Metro expansion in the 1970s. Photo courtesy Silver Spring Historical Society

The building was placed at the back (north) end of its gently sloping site. A manicured lawn, in keeping with the surrounding suburban community, was installed along the extensive road frontage on East West Highway.¹¹ At the time of its construction in 1946, the railroad tracks were on grade with the new bottling plant. A railroad siding provided direct service to

rear loading docks.¹² On the west side of the building, an extensive parking area was provided for trucks, and a delivery dock for the delivery of raw materials was built on the south (front) elevation. The building was designed to utilize all modern means of transportation and was even designed to allow trucks to drive into the building to load the finished product under roof at night.

Bottling plants, in general, were located close to population centers to minimize shipping costs.¹³ Bottling involved a relatively simple and compact manufacturing process. The raw materials such as water and sugar, however, were heavy. Dispersing factory locations to major population centers was a factor in price competition. The company's expansion program (1936-1949) was designed to "enable us to increase our production capacity, reduce freight costs, and intensify our local distribution."¹⁴ The service area for the new Silver Spring plant included Washington, D. C. and its Maryland suburbs. Before the new building was constructed, these areas were served by the Philadelphia plant that was 150 miles away. In fact, when there was added demand in the District and Maryland, Canada Dry shipped from a plant in Hudson, New York, at an even greater distance.

Silver Spring's industrial zone along East-West Highway included many industries besides the Canada Dry Bottling Plant. By 1953, other businesses in this corridor between Georgia Avenue and 16th Street included Auto Sales and Service, C & P Telephone Company, Emertron Research Laboratory, Coca Cola Bottling Plant, and the Dry Cleaning Institute.¹⁵ All of these businesses took advantage of low transportation costs afforded by both the railroad and by East West Highway.¹⁶

THE ARCHITECT

The Canada Dry Bottling Plant was designed by Walter Monroe Cory. He was a New York architect and engineer. His career began in 1909 when he started to work in the office of his brother, Russell Gherdes Cory. Both brothers attended Cooper Union night school, and both received electrical engineering degrees. By 1924, the younger brother was a full partner in an architecture firm that specialized in industrial buildings.

Russell G. Cory is credited with developing the "vertical street" type industrial structure, which used a central utilities core with elevators that carried trucks to each floor. Russell received patents on aspects of this idea in 1929 and 1933, and also included railroad tracks and freight delivery directly through the building at elevated levels. Major commissions in Manhattan included the American News Company Building (1923-24), the New York Dock Trades Facilities building (1928-29), and the Starrett-Lehigh building (1931). This last design marked a big change as the Corys shifted to the Modern architectural style.¹⁷ Russell publicized his idea that "factories can be beautiful. ... Discarding all preconceived ideas of a factory, a building [the Cashman Laundry Company, 1932] has been produced which is far removed from the most advanced conception of what constitutes even an ultra modern factory."¹⁸

When Russell retired from practice in 1942 and dissolved the firm of Cory and Cory, his brother Walter established his own firm at 1775 Broadway in Manhattan.¹⁹ Walter specialized in

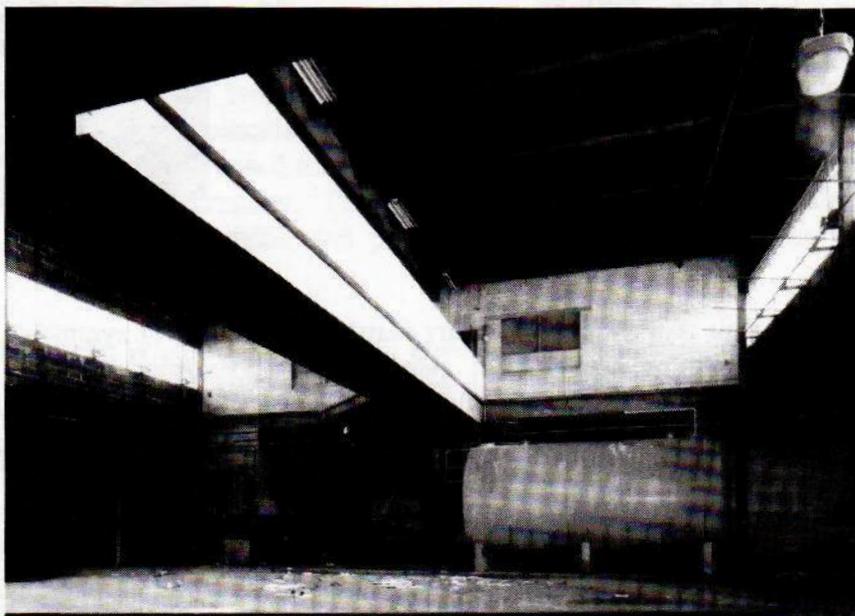
industrial plant design for large companies, particularly for the beverage industry. His clients included both Canada Dry Ginger Ale, Inc. and the Coca-Cola Bottling Company.

With a strong engineering background, the Corys developed a reputation in industrial design. After 1931, their industrial production sheds were in the Modern style, with steel frames sheathed with masonry and glass curtain walls. Functional and dramatic light monitors were used to bring daylight down to the production floor, as well as express the volume of the structure.²⁰ The Corys publicized the elements of their work that they felt were the most important: the thin (8") outside walls, cantilevered floor construction that permitted uninterrupted expanses of metal window sash, and practically no ornamentation.²¹

THE BOTTLING PLANT IN SILVER SPRING:

The Canada Dry Bottling Plant was a dynamic combination of long horizontal lines and curving corners, typical of the Streamline Moderne style. It was designed to be new and modern, fire-proof and sanitary. Production, warehouse, and delivery space were provided on the ground floor, with administrative and sales offices and staff support areas (locker rooms, toilet facilities, lunchroom) on the second floor.

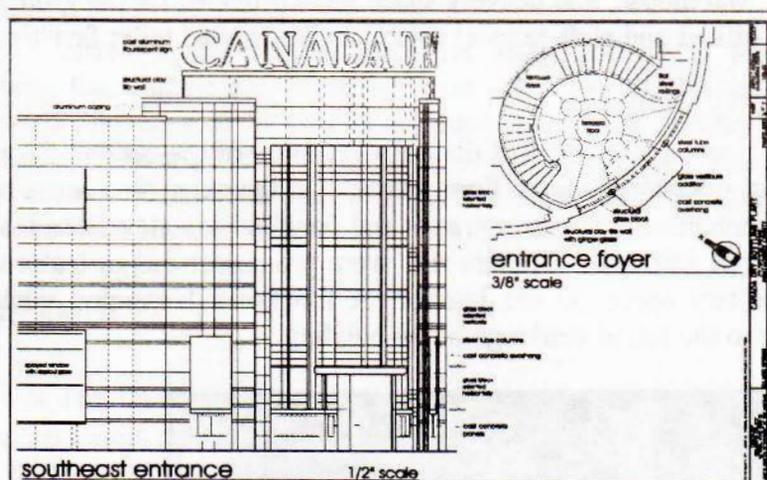
A catwalk through the clerestory area connected the different parts of the second floor, and also provided a view of the plant operations on the floor below. On the exterior, a sense of symmetry was established with the monumental corner entrance and flanking side elevations that were essentially the same, although not identical. Corners that were prominent design features on the exterior were used for ancillary space on the interior. A functional hierarchy, while implied in the design, was secondary to the actual workings of the building.



Catwalk. Photo by Jet Lowe, HAER photographer.

With a steel and concrete frame, structural clay tile of varying size, metal strip windows, thin exterior walls, little ornamentation, and flat roof, the architect manipulated the building materials to achieve his design intentions. The building gives a sense of being functionally divided into two distinct parts, with a one-story factory shed and the two-story administrative wing. In fact, these operations overlapped on the interior. The bottling lines and the sugar room were both located on the ground floor of the two-story wing, and large windows were used to provide both light for, and a public view of, the manufacturing tasks. Throughout the building, where used, the structural clay tile was ginger-colored.

In the monumental entrance lobby, the architect matched up structural tile with glass block.²² He designed the entrance lobby floor and steps in terrazzo, with an Art Deco circular floor pattern evocative of soda bubbles. The eccentric curve of the lobby is not apparent as one walks through the front door, across the circular floor pattern, and through the entrance to the production floor under a mid-stair landing. The decorative, open, flat iron railing provides a strong visual sweep up the cantilevered curving stairway along the interior wall.



Documentation drawing of entrance, interior plan and exterior elevation. Christopher Marston, HAER architect.



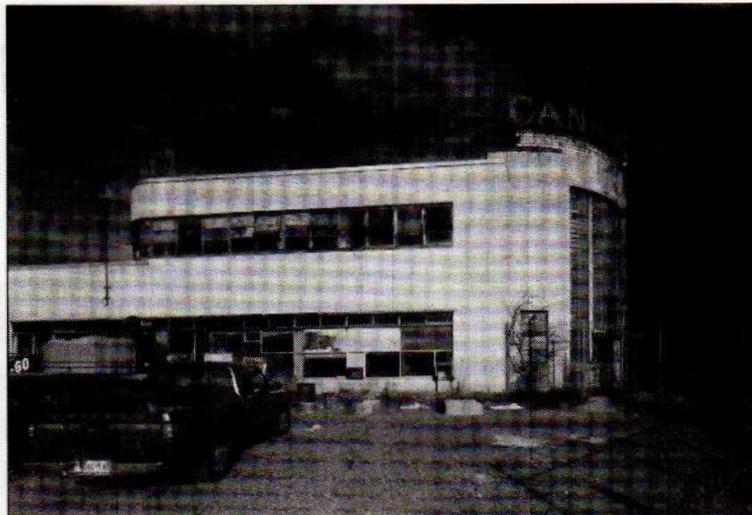
Lobby stairs.
Tet Lowe, HAER Photographer

The architect's skill is illustrated in many features. A sense of symmetry pervades the design although the building is actually not symmetrical.²³ Exterior building materials are imaginatively used to provide variety and subtle texture to the walls. In addition, the materials were manipulated to support the manufacturing operations. For example, an apparent variation in opacity in the lobby glass block wall was produced by flipping the orientation of the striations in the individual glass blocks from vertical in the central area to horizontal above and below.²⁴ This was used at more than one bottling plant, and may have served to control the amount of light/heat on the interior. Applied ornament was only used at the front entrance, with fluted cast stone foundation panels and the cast stone entry portico with its molded profile.²⁵ The Canada Dry name was placed like a crown above the monumental corner entrance.

With a few exceptions, the building has steel industrial strip windows. The windows varied by location in the type of glass, size, design and method of operation. Most notable is the tall strip of windows on the ground floor, which were set at an angle to admit more light.²⁶ For these windows, translucent rippled glass²⁷ was used. In other windows, operating as awning or hoppers, stippled textured glass with embedded metal "chicken" wire²⁸ was used.



Angled window on first floor. R. Ziek photographer



South elevation, with splayed windows on first floor and awning and hopper windows on second floor. Jet Lowe, HAER Photographer

THE GROUP OF RELATED BOTTLING PLANTS

Industrialization helped reduce labor costs, and the soda bottling industry expanded rapidly in the first part of the twentieth century. Unfortunately the timing of Canada Dry's expansion into local markets coincided with World War II. Associated shortages on necessary items such as cork, paperboard (used for 6-pack cartons), sugar, as well as for building materials caused some delays for the company. Throughout the war, Canada Dry continued to plan for their future expansion by identifying and purchasing sites for new plants in Canada and the United States.

It is likely that Walter Monroe Cory developed his scheme for the new bottling plant between the years of 1936 and 1943, based on the Art Moderne design and the fact that wartime restrictions affected construction schedules. The general design for the Silver Spring Bottling Plant first appeared as an illustration in the *1944 Annual Report*: "This architect's drawing of the new Montreal building, which is nearly completed, is typical of the new type of beverage plants to be constructed after the war in key markets of the United States and Canada."²⁹ The Montreal illustration differs in some detail from the Silver Spring plant, but it is Cory's design.

In the *1945 Annual Report*, the company states, "The handsome architectural design of Canada Dry's new Montreal factory will be followed in all new plants. The ultra-sanitary bottling procedure is open to the public through continuous glass windows."³⁰ Eleven sites had

been selected during the war, five of which were under construction in 1945 (Silver Spring, Maryland; Orange, New Jersey; Detroit, Michigan; Seattle, Washington; and San Diego, California). Plans for additional plants included Minneapolis, Portland, Denver, Cleveland, Memphis, and Harrisburg. New plants were also planned in Canada, at sites already acquired in Vancouver and Hamilton. In addition, the *1945 Annual Report* noted the prior acquisition of a bottling plant in Havana in 1943, with a new "larger, more modern plant" under construction.

A drawing of the Silver Spring plant was announced in the *1947 Annual Report*: "One of Canada Dry's newest, this fine plant near Washington, D.C., is designed for the most efficient, sanitary production and handling of carbonated beverages."



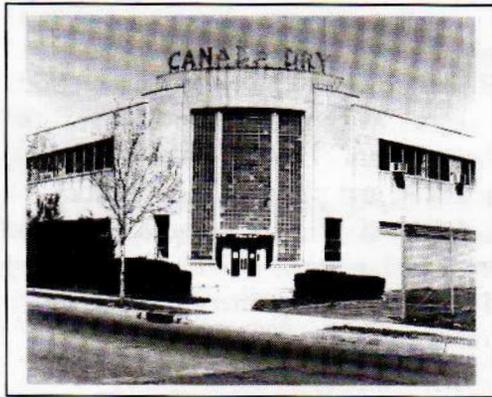
Photograph of the Silver Spring Bottling Plant, under construction. 1947.

The expansive windows to either side of the front entrance provided light for the operations and make the factory workings highly visible to the public. The same building design was shown in the *1948 Annual Report*, with the caption: "One of Canada Dry's newest, this large plant at Minneapolis, Minnesota, carries on the company's tradition of providing the utmost in facilities for the preparation and bottling of carbonated beverages."³¹ The *1949 Annual Report* noted the operation of twenty-nine plants in the United States, two in Cuba, and six in Canada--all directly operated by Canada Dry.

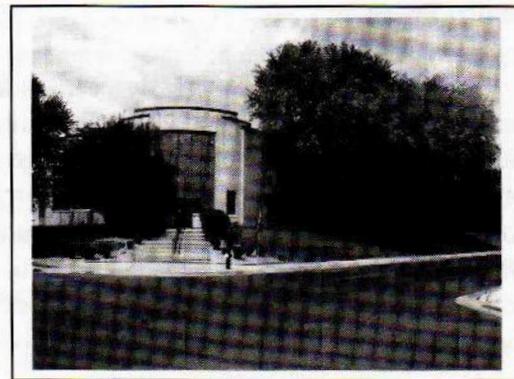
A look at the various bottling plants shows that the Cory plant design was modified on both the exterior and interior to suit the specific locale.³² For example, a one-story version was built in San Diego (1949), where the height of the central rotunda was simply reduced to maintain the overall proportions. Other internal variations included the deletion of the second floor catwalk at the 1945 Portland plant, with a barrier installed across the doorway for safety.³³

Cory's design was adapted for each particular site and market. Other architects and builders were also involved, perhaps to satisfy local permitting requirements. In 1948, when Canada Dry built a one-story version of the Cory plant in Philadelphia, W. J. Barney of 101 Park Avenue in New York City was credited with the design and construction of the plant.³⁴

By using the Cory design repeatedly, the company expressed its belief that his modern design projected the desired plant image and was effective as a marketing tool.³⁵ In the same way that product identification could be conveyed through bottle shape and standardized labels, the bottling plant itself became part of the company's iconography. The large building size, use of modern materials (steel, glass, aluminum trim), an emphasis on "ultra-sanitary" conditions, public view of production through use of expansive windows at ground level, and the crowning name for advertising all proclaimed the company ideology to use "All major media . . . to put across the idea that Canada Dry is a must on the dinner table and a refreshing beverage all the time."³⁶



East Orange, New Jersey

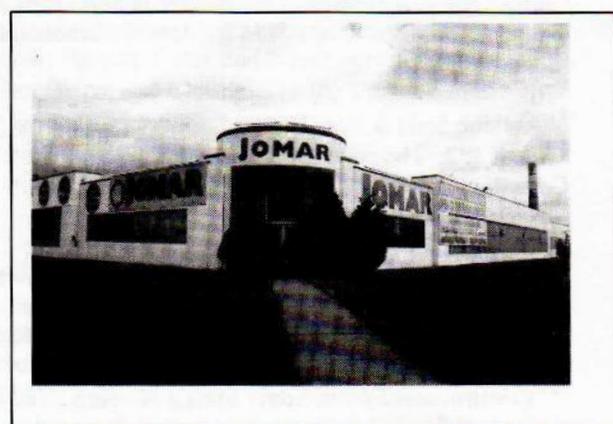


Minneapolis, Minnesota

By 1949, Canada Dry had completed the long-term expansion program. At that time, the company operated thirty-seven plants (twenty-nine in the United States, two in Cuba, six in Canada). No new plants and few new licensees were proposed in the immediate future as they worked to strengthen the existing operations and promote their product through extensive advertising, including their sponsorship of a network television show, "Super Circus," as part of a marketing campaign to attract children.



Havana, Cuba



Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The Company proudly promoted the “handsome architectural design” of the Cory plants to show how up-to-date they were. The plants, however, reflect the high style buildings of an earlier day.³⁷ The Streamline Moderne design reflects ideas of the late 1930s, when buildings with a mission were designed to represent the new industrialized society.³⁸

Cory was a young architect in New York when architectural meaning was debated and illustrated with the Modern style. The fact that the 1946 Silver Spring Canada Dry Bottling Plant reflects these ideas from the 1930s may, therefore, be due to a combination of factors. This includes the delays caused by the war restrictions, and the company’s choice of an architect whose career developed in the exciting era between the wars, and who continued to work in a familiar idiom.

Silver Spring was clearly seen as a valuable market for the Canada Dry products. Soda was produced at the Canada Dry Bottling Plant for forty years. With production changes, the plant was used for warehouse and storage space for a number of years. Finally, in the late 1990s, Canada Dry sold the property. After much community discussion and planning, a portion of the Bottling Plant was listed in the County’s Locational Atlas of Historic Places, and the condominium project could go forward. Today, the preserved portion of the Canada Dry Bottling Plant serves to illustrate a part of our history, and provides Montgomery County with a good example of mid-20th century Art Moderne industrial architecture.

Robin D. Ziek is a Historic Preservation Planner living in Montgomery County. Thanks go to the two other team managers, Corri Jimenez and Christopher Marston, both with the National Park Service, as well as to the Silver Spring Historical Society and our splendid team of local volunteers. The project was deposited with the Library of Congress - American Memory Historical Collections in 2004.

NOTES

¹ John J Riley. *A History of the American Soft Drink Industry, Bottled Carbonated Beverages, 1807 – 1957*. (Washington, D. C.: American Bottlers of Carbonated Beverages, 1958) 103.

² Riley, 113-114.

³ Riley, 117.

⁴ “Antique Soda & Beer Bottles.” <www.worldlynx.net/sodasandbeers/sodahist.htm> May 23, 2003.

⁵ Riley, 102. The patent was issued to William Painter, Secretary and General Manager of the Crown Cork and Seal Company.

⁶ By Dr. Cantrell, Riley, 115.

⁷ Riley, 112.

⁸ Acquired in 1986; “Canada Dry History.” <http://www.dpsu.com/canada_dry.html> December 27, 2002.

⁹ Canada Dry Ginger Ale Inc., *Annual Report*, 1936. The 1944 *Annual Report* notes there were only 9 Canada Dry Bottling Plants in operation in 1935; and, 59 in operation in 1944, with 19 awaiting construction, and with 130 franchise plants selling Canada Dry Spur.

¹⁰ “Construction Jobs in Silver Spring Nearing Final Stages,” *Silver Spring Standard*, July 30, 1946.

¹¹ The building is oriented to the street rather than the cardinal directions. For the purposes of this study, grid north was established as the railroad tracks, and the elevations are identified accordingly.

¹² See 1955 aerial photograph in Appendix B.

¹³ Canada Dry Ginger Ale Inc. undertook a large business expansion in 1936, to compete in "direct to dealer delivery markets." In the 1936 *Annual Report*, the President of the corporation wrote: "From each plant and warehouse our own salesmen and delivery trucks operate to serve retailers in surrounding territories." The expansion would focus on acquiring and building additional bottling plants, company-owned trucks and salesmen, as well as licensing foreign and domestic local bottlers to sell the company products.

¹⁴ Canada Dry Ginger Ale Inc., *Annual Report*, 1945.

¹⁵ Sanborn map, amended 1953.

¹⁶ This predated the Beltway, built in 1956-1958.

¹⁷ This 1931 building was designed by the firm of Cory and Cory (with associate, Yasuo Matsui). It adheres to the aesthetics of the International Style, as defined by Hitchcock and Johnson in their 1932 exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art.

¹⁸ R.G. and W.M. Cory, "Planning for Laundry Efficiency," *The Architectural Record* 72, October 1932, 253.

¹⁹ As noted on the Portland plant permit set dated 1945. The drawings are preserved on microfiche in Portland. See Historic Resource Inventory City of Portland Oregon, #6-370-04370. The Silver Spring Historical Society has a copy of these microfiche.

²⁰ Bradley, 252-53.

²¹ R.G. and W.M. Cory, 253.

²² This is something that Hitchcock and Johnson recommend in their description of the International Style, p.54.

²³ The two-story portion of the building is actually longer on the south side than the east. The flanking lobby windows are part of the apparent exterior symmetry, but only the east window illuminates the lobby. The west side window illuminates a closet for an office. The closet is the vestigial space in the transition from the curving lobby wall to the rectangular shaped office.

²⁴ This treatment appears in the Montreal plant, where the curving corner area was used for the chemistry lab and related workspace. While the entry was shifted to this central corner in Silver Spring (and to subsequent plants), the use of the same glass block treatment may reflect the fact that this plant was amongst the first five new plants constructed after the Montreal building was completed. In extant plants identified in Portland and in Havana, the glass block was laid up in only one direction.

²⁵ The exterior chrome trim at the splayed windows also has a molded profile.

²⁶ See Bradley, 168. She notes that splayed windows were used as early as 1840.

²⁷ This does not seem to correspond with descriptions in the company reports, that the public will have a good view of the workings of the factory, as the rippled glass distorts the view.

²⁸ See Bradley, 164. This type of glass was developed as a "fireproof" window, because the wire would hold shattered glass in place and reduce the amount of air infiltration during a fire.

²⁹ Canada Dry Ginger Ale Inc., *Annual Report*, 1944.

³⁰ Canada Dry Ginger Ale Inc., *Annual Report*, 1945. Sites purchased or selected for additional company-owned plants as of October 31, 1945 are Seattle, Portland, San Diego, Denver, Washington, Cleveland, Harrisburg, Orange, Detroit, Hamilton (Canada).

³¹ Canada Dry Ginger Ale Inc., *Annual Report*, 1948.

³² As abstracted from the company's *Annual Reports*, Cory-designed plants were built at the following locations between 1945 and 1949: Montreal, Truro, and Vancouver, Canada; Havana, Cuba; and Silver Spring, Orange (New Jersey), Detroit, Portland, Seattle, Minneapolis, Philadelphia, San Diego, and Cleveland in the United States.

³³ 1945 Permit set for the construction of the Canada Dry plant in Portland.

³⁴ *National Bottlers' Gazette*, May 1948. This building appears to have been demolished in 1994.

³⁵ Canada Dry Ginger Ale Inc., *Annual Report*, 1945: "These buildings will be the latest word in modern, airy design..."

³⁶ *National Bottlers' Gazette* October 1946, 76.

³⁷ The Montreal plant was under construction in 1944, indicating that the design was prepared well before then. It also shows that the company had been able to do some limited construction during the war years.

³⁸ Elements of the International Style include the exposed steel structure, curtain wall construction, reduced building ornament, and strip windows. Elements of the Art Deco and Streamline Moderne style include the cast stone panels at the entrance, glazed curving corners, extensive use of glass block, a dynamic form, and the manipulation of building materials for decoration. New York Art Deco was at its height in New York from 1928 to 1931, according to Cervin Robinson and Rosemarie Haag Bletter in *Skyscraper Style, Art Deco New York* (New York, Oxford University Press: 1975), 43. Streamline Moderne design peaked in 1939, according to David Gebhard, in *The National Trust Guide to Art Deco in America* (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Washington, D.C.: 1996), 13.

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Diane D. Broadhurst, Editor

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