

Apollo Shines in Smithville

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Still standing atop the Chester M. Evans' home in Smithville, Mo., is the symbol of the "Apollo Lithia Bottling Works," a business operated here for forty years.

Two men met one day at a Smithville Laundromat. One of the men commented as he started to leave that he guessed he would go see the new car on display, but he reckoned it wouldn't look much like the first one he had ever seen. The other man replied, "Nor the first one I ever saw, either. You know, the first one I ever saw was at my father's garage north of Gashland. It was owned by C.M. Evans and was driven by just a boy." Chester M. Evan's reply to Roy Taylor was, "I was that boy."

Chester Evans recalls that his father's International truck was the first one in Clay County. On one trip to Liberty in 1905 to unload his "pop" at Marvin Hayss' lunch counter on the square, he returned to his truck to find the street packed full of people looking at the truck. The truck was used in the business of C.M. Evans' Apollo Lithia Bottling Works, which was started in 1902.

The business was named by Mrs. C.M. (Alice)Evans for the Greek god of healing after she had used the Lithia water from a well in Smithville. In the early [eighteen] nineties Mrs. Evans had undergone an operation was advised by Dr. Griffin of Kansas City to "go home and drink beer or lithia water to avoid further operations." She ordered Lithia water sent to her regularly by rail to relieve her kidney trouble, until one day C.M. Evans said to her, "Let's try that water in Smith's well. It tastes the same as you've been buying." They tasted and tested the water and found it to be lithia water of excellent quality. Evans bought the property from Erastus Smith and started manufacturing soda pop and bottling lithia water. It has been said that Dr. Woods of Smithville, placed three gall stones on display in a glass of lithia water from the well and in three days all were dissolved. He displayed them in his office window on Main street.

A 14-room house was built by the well. The home was completed in the fall of 1904 and the Evans family then visited the World's Fair at St. Louis. It was there, in the building that housed the statues of the world that they saw the statue, similar to one of the best known statues in the history of art. Mr. Evans bought the statue for \$125, had it shipped home and placed it atop the cupola of his new home.

Chester Evans remembers mixing pop from extracts, sugar and the lithia water. He says one time Jim Porter (father of Riley Porter, Route 2) watched him bottling his pop and asked him how fast he could bottle it. He timed Chester and found that it only took him 57 seconds to bottle a case of 24 bottles. Mr. Porter then wandered on down to the bank and told the fellows in there that Evans was up there making 60 cents (the price of a case then) every 57 seconds.

The lithia water was sold in ten-gallon bottles. It is interesting to note that Evans doesn't have either type of bottle he had used. At "Open House" at the Smithville Grade School recently, the only "pop" bottle with the name of the bottling works in glass was displayed by Miss Valerie Kindred, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. C.F. Kindred. Valerie had written a description of the bottle explaining how "Soda Pop" got its name from these Hutchinson cork stoppers that "popped" when the stopper was pushed down.

A rival of Mr. Evans at one time went around saying, "I sell pop – Evans sells slop," but 'it weren't necessarily so'. Many of us have enjoyed Mr. Evans' pop at the local ball games.

Evans hasn't sold any pop since 1942, but he still drinks lithia water from his well, and, although he has lost his wife and son, he still keeps house in the home his parents built by the well. Two years ago when the house was redecorated by Harry Swaney and Gerald Thompson, Apollo received his new coat of bronze paint. The Evans' home stands next to the Smithville Methodist Church and both the home and Apollo appear as lovely in recent photographs as they were in the ones Evans has that were taken in 1905.