



## THE BUFFALO GIRLS OF MECKLENBURG COUNTY, VIRGINIA

By Jim "Slim" Wilberger

### *An introduction to Buffalo Lithia Water*

There are very few bottles as historically rich and varied as those of Buffalo Lithia Springs, later known as Buffalo Mineral Springs. It has been estimated that Buffalo Springs Lithia Water was sold in an estimated 20,000 stores comprising mainly of pharmacies and grocers throughout Europe, Canada, and the United States during its heyday. Even though most bottle collectors have seen dozens of them or even owned several, very little has been written about the Buffalo Girls.

Their rich and intriguing history began at an old southern summer resort reported to have served as a training school for Confederate spies during the American Civil War. This same resort once was a rival of the Greenbrier, as politically connected as a Washington insider, with social pages of all local major newspapers full of the "genteel" people and events at the Buffalo Lithia Springs Hotel. Not mentioned were the cottages reserved for bachelors known as "Rowdy Row" where more than just spring water was rumored to flow from the surrounding woods.

### **Naming the springs**

In 1728, a group of surveyors led by William Byrd II. who recorded in his diary after drinking water from the springs; "what Adam drank in Paradise ... by the help of which we perceived



our appetites to mend, our slumbers to sweeten, the stream of life to run cool and peaceably in our veins, and if ever we dreamt of women, they were kind." The party, having noted many signs of buffalo near the springs, referred to it as Buffalo Springs. The tract of land was first recorded being purchased by Ambrose Gregory in 1798. who later sold it to John Speed in 1817. It was John Speed who sowed the first seeds of development by building a tavern that catered to the local population and travelers by selling meals. The property changed ownership several times, until guided by various visionaries, it had become a small resort by 1839. The local fame of "medicinal benefits" derived from drinking the spring water was starting to spread to the surrounding regions.

### **Colonel Thomas Francis Goode, 1827-1905**

Born in 1827 in Mecklenburg County, son of a local prominent family, he studied law under Judge Edward R. Chambers of Boydton and gained admission to the bar in 1848. Building a successful local law practice, he was elected commonwealth attorney in



1856 and served several terms in the Virginia House of Delegates. In 1861, he organized and was made captain of the Mecklenburg Cavalry Troop, which became Company A of the Third Virginia Cavalry Regiment. By May 1862, he had been promoted to colonel, serving under General J.E.B. Stuart in Yorktown with Stuart reporting, "Colonel Goode's gallant conduct and the bravery of his men deserve the highest praise. He captured the enemy's flag and withdrew, bringing his wounded in a very orderly manner." After the battle of Seven Pines, he was recommended for promotion to brigadier-general. Due to a lifelong condition of "delicate health," he was compelled to resign from active service. He served a portion of 1863-64 in the legislature, but again due to poor health resigned. After the war he returned to his law practice until 1872 when he closed it because of health and bought Buffalo Springs.

### **The Beginning**

His son, Thomas Francis Goode Jr., recalled his earliest memories of the hotel: "The property then [1872] consisted of a few acres of land just across the road from what was later known as "No. 2 Spring," on which was located "Spring No 1," a few cottages and a dining room, and a ballroom. The building then standing consisted of a row of cottages running along the side of the grounds nearest the road, and a row of cottages which begins at what

has since been known as the dining room. These two rows of cottages and the dining room and a one story building known as the ball room about compromised the outfit at that time.”

Col. Goode was later to make the acquaintance of “Aunt Dolly Shelton,” a former slave of William D. Shelton, who



**Aunt Dolly, January 19, 1889**

once owned the land she was living on. “Aunt Dolly” was thought to be about 87 years of age and lived across the road from Buffalo Springs. She shared stories with Goode about water from a spring on the property that cured her rheumatism. He met with her on several occasions to talk and “after some investigation” purchased the acreage containing the spring for about \$750 from a Mr. Averett. Having title to the land, a search was conducted to find “the magic spring.” What they found was a spring filled with stones of various



**The Bottling Operations expanded in 1909**

sizes and sand. It was said that a decision was made to have the water “analyzed” and the results showed promise that the water could be valuable because of the lithia.

### Bottling Starts

As the spring water business was being developed and the water packaged for shipping, Goode secured agreements with a druggist and doctors across the Roanoke River in the nearby town of Scottsburg to give the waters a trial. Because a bottling operation had not yet been developed, the water had to be dipped by hand directly from the spring into demijohns. Then once a week, a wagon was loaded with the demijohns and pulled (much to Mrs. Goode’s chagrin) by her best



Another early version was a cobalt blue slug plate embossed **BUFFALO LITHIA [monogram TFG] SPRINGS WATER**, which can be found in two similar but different designs. Note the blue example reads Springs, not Spring as on the teals.

gray carriage horses some 12 miles to Scottsburg. This “desecration” was resolved as the water sales picked up and demand grew to the point where teams of mules were now required to deliver the bottles.

The water was now being shipped not only throughout America, but to foreign countries was well. Mr. Goode says he has drunk water from No. 2 Spring in Rome and in London while visiting those countries.

For many years, there was no railroad nearer to the springs than Scottsburg 12 miles away. So a large number of the guests came by private conveyance and kept their teams with them during their stay at the resort. Gradually with the erection of additional and more modern cottages and better



At left: As the demand grew, half-gallon bottles replaced the demijohns and while no date for this transition has been established, we do know some of the first half-gallon bottles were embossed **BUFFALO LITHIA** above a monogram of **TFG** with **SPRING WATER VA** beneath the monogram in medium teal color.

transportation facilities, the place increased in patronage as a health resort, and in later years during the summer months, many guests had to be turned away for want of space to accommodate them.

**Début of the Buffalo Girls**

Bottling operations at for Springs 1 and 2 is believed to have been started about 1876 with the introduction of the “Buffalo Girl” in 1878.



Once bottled, the half-gallon bottles were packaged 12 to a wooden case with a retail price of \$5 per case. In 1886, the Virginia Buffalo Lithia Springs Company was operated by Charles H. Royce before becoming insolvent.

The original three springs that made up the Buffalo Lithia Water Company were known simply as Spring No. 1, No. 2 and No. 3. Water from Spring No. 1 was advertised as “A Boon to Suffering Women-Natures Great Specific for Diseases Peculiar to Women.” No.2 was the very successful Lithia Spring for a short while advertised as the Dolly Shelton Spring. It would be to sold the world in earnest as “Natures Great Specific for Dyspepsia and Gout” and for “Uric Acid Diathesis, Gout, Nephritic Colic, Calculi, Bright’s Disease, Rheumatic Gout, Rheumatism, a valuable adjunct to the physician in the treatment of fevers, alaria, typho-malaria, and typical typhoid” and “recommended by physicians”! Water from No. 3 was referred to as “the great chalybeate spring” and was available only at the resort. In 1901, it was announced that a new spring of “Chlorinated lithia water” was available only at the resort.

**The Lithia Years**

A precise year cannot be assigned to when the familiar aqua lithia bottles first made their appearance. However, they can be broken down into stages of appearance due to characteristics associated with design. While the majority of these bottles are not marked, a study of



TRADE-MARK.  
T. F. GOODE.  
Mineral-Water.  
No. 5,878. Registered April 16, 1878.

*Witnesses*  
L. M. Layton  
H. W. Barry

*Proprietor*  
Thomas F. Goode

*Letter*  
JF

UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE.

THOMAS F. GOODE, OF BOYDTON, VIRGINIA.

TRADE-MARK FOR MINERAL WATER.

Statement of Trade-Mark No. 5,878, registered April 16, 1878; application filed April 4, 1878.

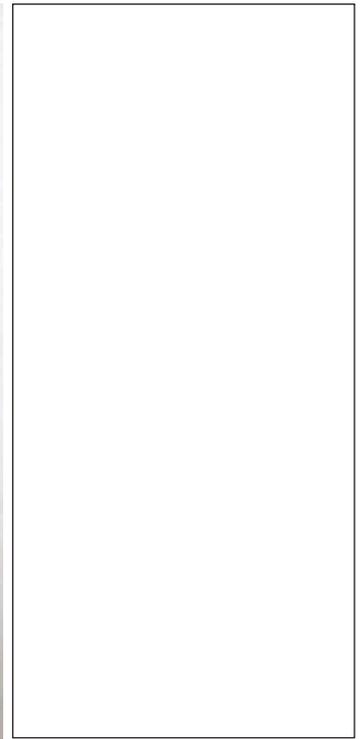
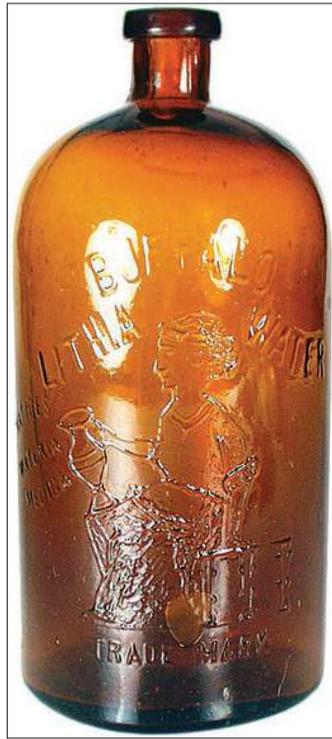
To all whom it may concern:  
Be it known that I, THOS. F. GOODE, domiciled in the United States, and residing at Boydton, Virginia, and doing business at Buffalo Lithia Springs, in the county of Mecklenburg and State of Virginia, have adopted for my use a Trade-Mark for Mineral Water known as the “Buffalo Lithia Waters,” of which the following specification is a full, clear, and exact description.  
My trade-mark consists of the letters and words “Buffalo Lithia Water, Nature’s Materia Medica.” These have been arranged, as shown in the annexed fac-simile, above and in front of a figure of a woman in a sitting posture holding in her hand a pitcher, upon which

is inscribed the word “Water. The essential feature of the trade mark is the symbol of the woman, as shown, used in connection with the words “Buffalo Lithia Water.”  
This trade-mark I have never used in my business, except as accompanying my advertisements since the 1st of January, 1878.  
The class of goods to which the trade-mark is designed to be applied is mineral water known as “Buffalo Lithia Water,” and my purpose is to have this trade-mark blown in the bottles in which these waters are put up.  
THOMAS F. GOODE.

Witnesses:  
L. M. LAYTON,  
H. W. BARRY.

comparison based on similarities to design, common traits, glass and color make a convincing case of these unmarked bottles as to the most likely glass house. The astute collector can also notice gradual changes leading from bottle to bottle to give some insight as to likely appearance, enabling a sense of a time line. We know by referencing the trade mark paper what the design was meant to be. The next generation appears to be a few very short lived





run of unsigned aqua examples, the manufacturer possibly being the Dominec O. Cunningham Glass Co. of Pittsburgh, Pa. Compare the skirt on the example to the right to the signed D.O.C. example below.

#### D.O.C (Circa 1882-1931) Lithia bottles

Dominec O. Cunningham Glass Company used a known heel-signed example as a base for comparison. Note the similarities of stool legs, flat skirt and shoulder. These features are repeated on several unmarked examples with slight variations of the shoulder, but the color remains close. This generation offers an unknown variety of head designs; as a whole, they could be referred to as "flat skirts." There is a plentiful supply offering a nice large variety of designs usually found in aquas and shades close to a pale green.



#### E.H.E.CO (Circa 1880-1904) Lithia bottles

The mark of the Edward H. Everett Glass Company of Newark, Ohio, these always appear to be signed on the heel and are found in the same shade of pale green. Our Buffalo



girl has totally changed while the stool remains almost identical. The commonality here is the color and again the skirt; however, the rest of her changes dramatically from bottle to bottle like those before them. There are an unknown number of variations, but 10 have been accounted for.

#### O.B.CO (Circa 1905-1905) Lithia bottles

This mark of the Ohio Bottle Company (another Everett firm) is found on the same bottles as the Everett mark previously mentioned.

#### The Transition to Mineral Years

Col. Thomas F. Goode passed away in 1905, leaving his wife, Rosa C. Goode, to operate the business. In 1906, the passage of the Pure Food and Drugs Act was supporting the application of discoveries and new medical knowledge concerning the causes and treatments of disease and illness. The American Medical Association was of the opinion that the Buffalo Lithia Springs Water was falsely named as a "Lithia Spring" when the water flow did not contain lithium, based on a study by the government in 1907. Interestingly, a new trademark for the water was filed on Dec. 28, 1907 and several years would pass before federal officials could be persuaded to declare the water misbranded. On December 21, 1910, the United States Attorney for the District of Columbia filed in the Supreme Court of Washington D.C., *U.S. v. 7 Cases of*

Ser. No. 31,956. (CLASS 45. BEVERAGES, NON-ALCOHOLIC.) BUFFALO LITHIA SPRINGS WATER CO., Buffalo Lithia Springs, Va. Filed Dec. 28, 1907. Used ten years.



Particular description of goods.—Natural Mineral Water.

Buffalo Water charging misbranding in violation of the Food and Drugs Act, the following products; “Buffalo Lithia Water – Springs No. 2, Buffalo Lithia Springs Water – Natures Materia Medica, Buffalo Lithia Springs Water Company, Buffalo Lithia Springs, Va.”

On March 6, 1911, Rosa C. Goode and her investors demurred the libel, denying the label represented the contents of the bottle as a lithia water. The owners of Buffalo Lithia Springs countered they were simply selling water using the official company name. The label they pointed out stated the contents of the bottle to be “particular natural mineral water known both as Buffalo Lithia Water and Buffalo Lithia Springs Water, and was taken from the Buffalo Lithia Springs No. 2.” The demur was sustained on April 6, 1911. The question that the court had to decide was what quantity of lithia in the water constituted the right to be called a lithia water. There were microscopic amounts and no precedence to refer to as guidance. This was the underlying issue which kept the case in legal limbo. While the case was being heard, the bottled water displayed on the label the 1906 act guaranteeing its purity and claim. During testimony of 1912, a Dr. Collins testified that “for a person to obtain a therapeutic dose of lithium by drinking Buffalo Lithia Water, he would have to drink from 150,000 to 225,000 gallons of water per day.” During this period, at least three different examples of the Lithia Springs bottle were produced. The legal wrangling between the two opposing parties lasted



until September, 1917, when a judgment of condemnation and forfeiture was entered and the court declared Buffalo Lithia Water is “Lithia” water no longer; it is now “Buffalo Mineral Springs Water.”

In 1918, the Goodes sold their interest in the Buffalo Springs property, but continued for years to espouse the virtues of its water. It was during these turbulent times that the bottles started transitioning from Lithia to Mineral water, ushering in a whole new design of Buffalo girls as the golden years had come to an end. Compare to the new trademark to the following bottle design. Major design features to note: the skirt, legs of the stool. Interesting is how the almost Victorian lady in this design transformed to the sexy lady showing off the familiar bare leg. However, even this was done with caution as every transition example the author has seen the bare leg is textured and not smooth as on the mineral water examples that would follow.

#### F.G.W. (Circa 1898-1920)

Fairmount Glass Works, Fairmount, Indiana.

#### F.G.W. (Circa 1906-1968)

Fairmount Glass Works, Indianapolis, Indiana

This signature is found on the bottom of Buffalo Mineral Water bottles. The Fairmount girls are the transition bottle from Lithia to Mineral, of which at least three different designs have been noted. The Fairmount girls when signed as many are, the signature is found in the center of the base FGW and appears to be the first Buffaloes totally machine finished. When they first appeared, the color as seen is the familiar aqua and the figure continued to change, but less dramatically. There are several variations of the skirt and as we’ve watched the stool legs have completed their transformation. However, no run of the girls since their beginning had a greater variety of extreme colors as did the Fairmount girls. Old ones can be found in several shades of aqua, light amber, green, yellow amber, topaz, ginger ale, emerald green and clear.





The end for the Buffalo Girls came in the form of a clear screw top bottle with a simple paper label in the early 1950s. The Corps of Engineers took possession of the property, built Kerr Dam, rebuilt the original spring house and flooded the remainder of the grounds creating Kerr Lake. For a while they kept the bottling works, soliciting for someone to reopen the water business, but failed. The bottled water business was a dinosaur whose time had passed.

### The Return of the Buffalo Girls

Niccolo Machiavelli once said, "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery." Obviously, he was not a collector of old bottles! As collectors, we know reproductions follow supply and demand for popular pieces in every category. I always believed my "Buffalo Girls" were safe, as it's hard to almost impossible not to find several for sale any given day of the week at very moderate prices. The same half-gallon size and condition varies as much as the girls, from poor to attic mint, from crude drawing to racy. The most common color found is various shades aquamarine and clear with the occasional shade of pale green to keep things interesting.



Still, the girls were reproduced and by all accounts I have read came from Italy during the 1970s and were sold as accents for home decorations. Today, they are causing confusion among both novice and experienced collectors as to how to tell the difference between the new and old with the price guides that list Buffaloes equally confusing. The reproduced examples I have personally seen have been limited to three different colors carrying the exact same embossed design and "Buffalo Mineral Springs Water / Natures Materia Medica/ Trade Mark." This is the same design embossment used by the Fairmount Glass Works. In order to understand how to tell the differences between the old and new, let's first consider the colors of known reproductions being pink, turquoise and light amber. Of these, pink and turquoise were never made. They simply are not original colors, but I have seen pink offered as a "Depression Glass" bottle and the turquoise as teal. The reproduction turquoise is a dark color and measures approximately 10½ inches tall like its counterparts. The original teal designs have not been reproduced. Unlike the other colors, one was actually made close to it so a side by side comparison is helpful to discern the differences.



The bottle on the left is original, the one on the right is the reproduction. Both have machined finished cork tops and about the same in size. The first major difference is with the embossing between the two, the old is crisp and very well defined while on the reproduction it's weak and lacks definition. Compare the difference in embossing. We are so used to seeing Buffaloes with poor embossing, we assume this is normal. Another major distinction is with color, the old is richer and more orange when compared to the lighter, more yellow, and dull washed out counterpart. The color of the new amber bottle on the right is dull and lacks the brilliance of the old. Another major difference I have noted between the two is with the molding. Overall, the design appears to be



slightly out of focus, but nowhere is this more obvious than the head which lacks the detail that is found on originals. The following letters are also very weak in these words: the "I" in SPRINGS, the first and third parts of "N" in NATURES,

the "Es" in METERIA, "I" and part of the "A". Interesting to note is the proximity of all of these letters to one another, helping to create an old look. The clear example is the one seen most often with weak molding and poor details, not uncommon in aquamarine either. There is a subtle difference in the feel of the glass. The new version is smoother.



Have we seen the last of the Buffalo Girls? Maybe not. This trade mark was registered in 1990.



## The Little Rhody Bottle Club

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K of C Hall  
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