A History of Vernors

James Vernor was a junior clerk at Higby and Sterns’ Drug Store in Detroit when he enlisted in the 4th Michigan Cavalry and was called to fight in the Civil War. At the time (according to company lore), he was experimenting with a stomach calming tonic of vanilla, spices and ginger, which he left behind in an oak cask. When Vernor returned four years later, he found that his elixir had transformed into a zesty, sweet, gingery drink complimented by the wood’s aging process. Soon after, Vernor opened his own pharmacy on Woodward Avenue, and its soda fountain became the first – and only! – place in the world to buy Vernor’s ginger ale in 1866.

As demand grew, Vernor began to sell his product to other Detroit soda fountains, but required that vendors purchase special equipment to serve the soda in order to ensure its quality. After gaining enough fame, Vernor was able to sell his soda throughout the Midwest. In 1896, he closed his pharmacy and opened a bottling plant at the foot of Woodward so that Vernors could be mass produced.

James Vernor passed away at the age of 84 in 1927. The company continued to thrive under the leadership of his son, also named James Vernor. A massive sign illuminated with the company logo became a landmark along the Detroit riverfront, where ferries took passengers to Windsor, Bob-lo and Belle Isle. By the 1940s, the Vernors bottling plant took up an entire city block along the river and welcomed thousands of daily visitors to its soda fountain. In 1954, the plant moved to Woodward and Canfield, where visitors could watch soda production as they enjoyed their drinks.

In 1959, the ginger ale’s name lost its apostrophe and became simply “Vernors.” The Vernor family sold the company to an investment group in 1966; it was later owned by American Consumer Products, United Brands, A&W Beverages and Cadbury Schwepps. Today, Vernors is owned by Dr. Pepper Snapple Group.

Celebrate the 150th anniversary of Vernors with a week of events!

June 5-11, 2016

detroithistorical.org

#Vernors150
Detroit is showing its colors for Vernors! Visit detroithistorical.org for a list of downtown buildings to watch for special green and yellow lighting—as well as an anniversary message on the COBO Center marquee.

**Vernors Exhibition**
June 5-11, 2016

All week long, the Detroit Historical Museum will present a display of rarely seen Vernors artifacts! Look for this special exhibition outside of the Louise C. Booth Auditorium on the museum’s lower level. Museum admission is always free.

Vernors Bus Tour and Ginger Beer Crawl
Friday, June 10 • 5:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Join the Detroit Experience Factory for a bus tour to discover Detroit’s best ginger beers, drinks and concoctions. The tour will visit three locations, where you’ll not only try extraordinary ginger creations but also drive by some historic Vernors-related spots and connect with some of the people, places and projects doing great things in Detroit today.

Tickets are $40 for Detroit Historical Society members and $50 for non-members. Register at detroithistorical.org or by calling 313.833.1801.

The tour will depart from the Detroit Historical Museum.

**Vernors 150th Anniversary Party**
Saturday, June 11 • 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Join us for the main event: the Vernors 150th Anniversary Party at the Detroit Historical Museum!

Activities will include:

- A Vernors-themed poker run from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. (details below)
- The Vernors Gnome live and in-person, signing autographs from noon to 5 p.m.
- A Vernors history presentation from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m.
- A book signing for *Vernor’s Ginger Ale* by author Keith Wunderlich at 2 p.m.
- A presentation on James Vernor in MOLLUS (Civil War Legion) from 2:15 to 2:45 p.m.
- A screening of *Detroit Remember When: Made in the Motor City* at 3 p.m. and a chat with filmmaker Bill Kubota at 4 p.m.
- An appearance by James Vernor V and James Vernor VI, great-great-grandson and great-great-great grandson of James Vernor!
- A world record attempt for the most Vernors drinkers at 4:30 p.m.

Vernors floats, cream ales and Boston Coolers will be for sale at the museum from 1 to 4 p.m. Proceeds will go toward the purchase of a historic marker to commemorate the oldest soda pop in America: Vernors!

**Restaurant Specials and Downtown Building Lighting**
June 5-11, 2016

Some of Detroit’s favorite restaurants will join in the celebration with unique menu items made with Detroit’s favorite ginger ale! Look for specials at downtown dining destinations, including:

- Batch Brewing Co.
- Huron Room
- Mudgie’s
- The Block
- Iridescence
- Ottava Via
- Broderick Grille
- La Feria Spanish
- Parks and Rec
- Cass Cafe
- Tapas
- Republic
- Coach Insignia
- Mercury Burger Bar
- Union Street
- Coach Insignia
- Mercury Burger Bar
- Union Street

**Vernors Poker Run**
Saturday, June 11 • 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

During the poker run, you will receive a list of Vernors sites to visit in Detroit. Take a selfie at each site to receive a playing card at the museum. At the end of the run, prizes will be awarded based on the hand of poker you collect, so visiting more sites gives you a better chance to win a prize!

Merging pop culture and the adventure of a scavenger hunt, the poker run is a great way to kick off a full day of Vernors celebration with your friends or family.

$10 entry fee. Advance tickets are available at detroithistorical.org or by calling 313.833.1801.