

7 Up, Lithium, and Depression

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To the Editor:

I enjoyed John Plater's article in the most recent issue of the *Bulletin* (2010, 35(1), 40-45) on serendipity. Though, in his discussion of the use of lithium salts to treat mania, he mentioned several mineral waters, such as Perrier and Vichy, which naturally contain small concentrations of lithium ion, he failed to mention one of the more famous commercial soft drinks that tried to cash in on the original lithium craze - 7 Up. First created by Charles Leiper Grigg of St. Louis in 1929 under the name of "Bib-Label Lithiated Lemon-Lime Soda," it was originally formulated with lithium citrate as one of its active ingredients. Since Grigg was a professional designer of soda flavors rather than a pharmacist, it is unclear from the accounts I have read just what the original motive was for adding the lithium salt, nor is it obvious whether the current soda still contains any lithium citrate, since apparently the brand has been sold and resold several times to various companies and has also been reformulated in the process. But of greater interest is the name "7 Up" which rapidly displaced Grigg's original tongue twister. I have never come across an explanation of its origins but have always wondered whether "Up" was a reference to the idea that lithium could act as a pick-me-up and that 7 was a reference to the atomic weight of Li. Perhaps this explanation is too cleverly chemical to be true. Nevertheless, I would be interested in knowing whether the readers of the *Bulletin* might have some insights into this question.

2010 Update

Immediately after the publication of the above letter, I received the following information from Bill Brock of the University of Leicester:

"I've just seen your remarks about 7 Up in the latest *Bulletin*. I have a useful book by Adrian Room, *Diction-*



An early advertisement for 7 Up emphasizing the lithium connection and possible health benefits. Note the claim that it takes the "ouch" out of "grouch."

ary of *Trade Name Origins* (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, Boston, etc., 1982). At page 157 there is an entry for 7 Up which I quote:

7 Up (soft drink by Cadbury Schweppes). In the village of Price's Branch, Missouri, a Mr C. L. Grigg invented a popular orange drink in 1920 called Howdy. Aiming to improve on it, Grigg marketed another drink as Bib-label Lithiated Lemon-Lime Soda. The drink was tasty but the sales were bad (with that name, hardly surprising), so he tried to think of a better name. The story goes that after six tries he came up with "7 Up," and this was the name that made the drink the bestseller it is today. No doubt the association with the card game seven-up helps; in the game the trump card is a turned up card and there is a fixed total of seven points to win.

Internet sites do not seem to refer to the card game as an origin. I well recall drinking 7 Up as a teenager, but not playing the card game (details of which can be found on the internet). I'm not clear who currently owns the drink now that Cadbury's has sold out to Kraft."