

John Mulhern Company

The Beginning of Greatness: A Company History

If it were not for a truly successful and wonderful past, the John Mulhern Company would not be facing the challenging opportunities of the present with such courage and confidence. We would like to share with you the wonderfully rich history of our company.

In 1880 young John Mulhern took his life savings of \$500.00 and purchased the “complete assets” of a soda pop and soda fountain business from Martin Z. Watson. Then the hills of the beautiful city of San Francisco were sparsely settled compared to the crowded skyline of today, and in that year salty-sailed clipper ships were to be seen riding at anchor in the bay.

Although the first tramp steamer had nudged its sooty prow through the Golden Gate in 1874, it was mostly square-rigged sailing vessels with cavernous holds that were bringing cargo of machinery and tools from the east – holds that were filled on the return journey with fish and agriculture products from the Golden State.

In the 1880's, the streets of San Francisco were so dusty or muddy, depending upon the weather, as well as steep, that the people began demanding better transportation. Cable cars were the answer, and in 1853 the first one started running on Clay Street between Kearney and Jones. Today the cable cars are still in use, symbolic of San Francisco's unique past. About this time, only two years before John Mulhern started his business, a new-fangled gadget called the telephone was introduced in San Francisco by the American Speaking Telephone Company with service for eighteen customers. Unfortunately we have no record as to whether John Mulhern was one of the original subscribers. But we do have a letterhead with a 1903 dateline addressed to S. Martinelli Esquire and typewritten purple ribbon (undoubtedly for reproduction by one of those old-fashion letter presses). It shows that John Mulhern sold not only “tin foil, gold foil and labels,” but also “machine and hand-made corks, life-buoys, and life-preservers.”

In those days, one of the popular hardy beverages enjoyed by all two-fisted drinkers was “Dr. Abernathy Ginger Brandy” and John Mulhern continued its manufacture right up until the days of prohibition. During prohibition it appeared as a medicinal beverage. He was one of the first to introduce to California, Coca-Cola Fountain Syrup from Atlanta, along with Claridge flavors from Boston and a complete line of soda fountains. In the early twenties the soda fountain division was discontinued and all efforts were then concentrated on the bottlers' supplies and machinery.

Much of Mr. Mulhern's vitality and hard work rubbed off on his ever-growing company. In 1923, when a reporter from the Pacific Bottler visited him on the occasion of his 75th birthday, the grand old gentleman was busy, jacket off and sleeves rolled up, busy at work filtering ginger ale extract because the chemist was on vacation.

The legalizing of beer in 1933 gave a lift to the bottling business and that year a branch was opened in Los Angeles. The following year another branch was also opened in Seattle. Even though these were among the lowest of the depression years, the John Mulhern Company flourished for years to come.

In the 1970's, the bottling industry endured many major changes. This was the beginning of a new age of corporate consolidations and centralizing of production facilities. There no longer were production plants in almost every large town. The John Mulhern Company also needed to reconfigure with the times. With the aid of modern communication and transportation our main headquarters in So. San Francisco could better serve our customers and friends in business. The Los Angeles and Seattle branches were regrettably closed after 30 plus years. In 1997, the John Mulhern Company moved to a new facility in beautiful Santa Rosa.

The John Mulhern Company has now taken its expertise into other industries. We are a leader in distribution of adhesives, filtration systems/media supplies, food grade/industrial chemicals and laboratory quality control equipment/supplies.

Even though John Mulhern is no longer with us, his enthusiasm still exists in the company after 100 plus years. The John Mulhern Company still strives to service its customers in the best tradition of its founders.



JOHN MULHERN
Founder