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Reversals of Fortune in the Tea Industry

Part XXIX: The Teas of Chase & Sanborn

An advertisement for Chase & Sanborn teas, as printed in the Arizona Daily Journal-Miner, December 6, 1901

Chase & Sanborn's
Package Teas



“FIT FOR AN EMPEROR”

The Chinese have drunk tea from time immemorial. Perhaps no other nation in the world understands tea drinking as they do. If a tea is fit for the highest potentate of these tea-drinking people, it should be good enough for any one who ever lived. This is the kind of tea that Chase & Sanborn sell. Every bit of their teas are “fit for an emperor.” They buy the leaves before they are picked, while the crop is still young, and carefully choose and select from them the best. Their experts who cure and pack the crop have learned by years of experience exactly how that should be done.

These package teas come in pound and half-pound, air-tight leaded forms. This prevents the delicious, delicate aroma that should pervade these leaves from escaping by contact with the air. No matter what kind of Chase & Sanborn's tea you buy, you will be satisfied. Some prefer the Koh-i-noor, a stimulating English Breakfast tea. Others the Orloff – a lilac flavored Formosa Oolong that has great life-giving power, while many would rather have the Orange Pekoe, a tea with a rich wine-like body, from Ceylon and India.

One Pound makes over 200 Cups.

Chase & Sanborn was once the largest importing and distributing tea and coffee house in the United States. Founded in Boston in 1878, Chase & Sanborn had branches in Chicago and Montreal by the end of the century.

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Reversals of Fortune in the Tea Industry, Part XXIX

Born in Harwich, Massachusetts on December 11, 1831, Caleb Chase was the son of Job Chase, a well-heeled sea captain. Captain Chase later became a prosperous ship-owner and was claimed to be one of the original stockholders of Yarmouth Bank. Upon his retirement, Captain Chase operated a small general store in Harwich.

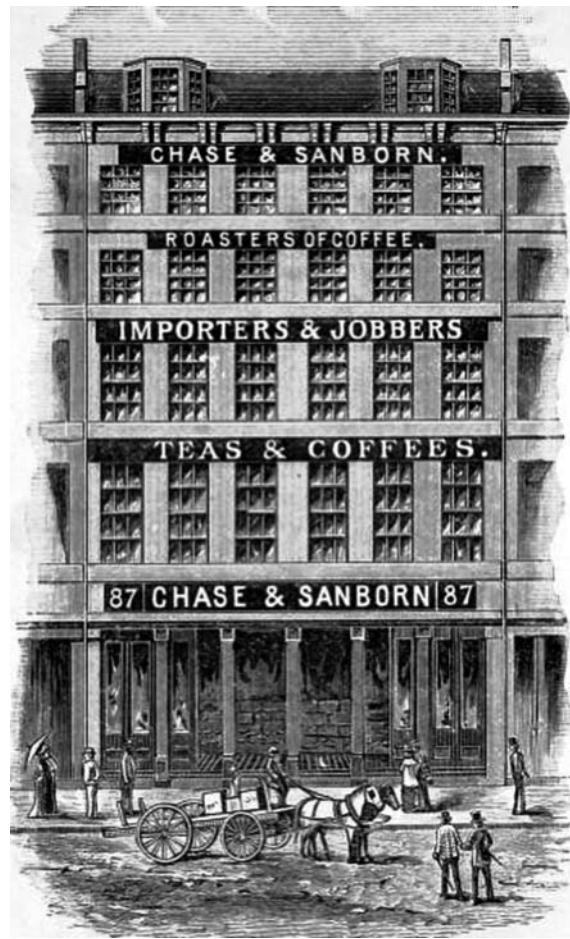
Caleb worked at his father's store until he was twenty-three years old, at which time he moved to Boston and signed on as a salesman for Anderson, Sargent & Co., one of Boston's premier wholesale dry goods houses. In 1859 he moved on to Cloflin, Saville & Co., another wholesale grocery operation.

By 1864 Caleb had learned enough about the wholesale grocery business to try the entrepreneurial route to fortune. His first two ventures, Carr, Chase, & Raymond, followed by Chase, Raymond, & Ayer, were seemingly uneventful. Along the way, however, he acquired a passion for both coffee and tea. During this time, he also developed a close friendship with a particularly talented coffee salesman by the name of James Sanborn.

Sanborn had moved to Boston three years after Chase and was four years his junior. The synergy between Caleb Chase and James Sanborn was obvious. Chase had mastered the procurement process for both coffee and tea as well as the art of coffee roasting, a critical part of the wholesale coffee enterprise. Paired with Sanborn's salesmanship, they would surely be successful.

Chase believed that he could procure tea and coffee of such high quality that anyone could sell it effortlessly. On counterpoint, Sanborn was certain that he could successfully sell coffee of any ordinary quality. The spunky firm of Chase & Sanborn was founded in Boston in 1878. Tea and coffee would be their exclusive focus.

The firm quickly developed a distribution network throughout the United States and



Chase & Sanborn headquarters at the end of the 19th century.
87 Broad Street, Boston, Massachusetts

parts of Canada. Before long, their Boston operation was supplemented by facilities in Chicago and Montreal.

Chase & Sanborn offered their coffees in both whole-bean and ground forms. Key to their success was the introduction of pre-ground coffee in airtight tins. It was a breakthrough that set them apart from their peers. So popular was the brand by the end of the century that Chase & Sanborn coffee was selected as the exclusive coffee of the 1893 Chicago World's Fair.

While iced tea had been documented before this time, it was the success of an iced tea and lemonade concession at this same world's fair that firmly established iced tea as a popular American beverage.



Chase & Sanborn promotional piece from the 1893 Chicago World's Fair

Chase & Sanborn promoted their teas as creatively as they promoted their coffee. For their coffees they claimed that “millionaires and kings cannot buy better.” As depicted on the cover of our newsletter, their teas were said to be “fit for an emperor.” But even more creatively, their three premium teas were named after the three most famous diamonds of the era, the Orloff diamond, the Nassac diamond, and the Koh-i-Noor diamond.

For their *Formosa Oolong Tea*, Chase & Sanborn advertised:

The ORLOFF DIAMOND is the largest known to man. It belongs to Russia, and is the pride of that great empire. It was stolen from India and bought by the Empress Catherine, she paying for it \$100,000, a pension of \$4,000 per year, and a patent of nobility. It is shaped like a tea-



cup inverted. Perhaps it is this peculiarity that gave its name to the most famous Formosa Oolong Tea in the world; for it is called the ORLOFF, and is classed as one of the Three

Royal Gems, by the great Importing Tea and Coffee House of CHASE & SANBORN.

The Russians are noted the world over as tea-drinkers. Tea is the national beverage. They are excellent judges of fine grades. This ORLOFF Formosa Oolong has the high quality, the strength, the flavor, the stimulating energy which they desire and approve. There is a remarkable life-giving power in it. It warms the blood of the drinker like old wine. It pervades the body with a genial glow. It quickens the mental faculties. Harmless and unintoxicating, it is nevertheless highly stimulative and nutritious...

For their *Old Fashioned Green Tea*, Chase & Sanborn stated:

The brilliant NASSAC is a wonderful triangular-shaped diamond of great brilliancy. It was captured by Warren Hastings in one of his Indian Wars and sold into England. It is now owned by the Duke of Westminster, the richest nobleman



in England. But even if the Duke owns the Nassac stone, and is the richest of British nobles, he cannot buy for his table a finer cup of tea than you have on yours if you drink the NASSAC TEA, which is one of the three Royal Gems of the Kingdom of Tea, controlled by the Tea and Coffee Importing House of Chase & Sanborn.

Nature has given to healthy and normal man the perfect beverage, —water; but when by accident or the necessities of labor he becomes faint, weak, exhausted, and all his natural powers are at their lowest ebb, then he needs something to meet the exigency of the condition. It seems to be the peculiar mission of the FAMOUS NASSAC TEA to meet this need of man. It is, in fact, a VITAL drink, full of that strange force which some herbs possess to RE-INVIGORATE the human system when exhausted. There is a life, a sparkle, and a STIMULATING ENERGY in this wonderful tea, which justifies its world-wide fame.

Do not forget that the NASSAC ROYAL GEM TEA cannot be obtained by the rich or poor, except through the great Tea and Coffee Importers, CHASE & SANBORN.

And finally, for their *English Breakfast Tea*:

ONE OF THE ROYAL GEMS of the world is the KOH-I-NOOR diamond. Poetry calls it the "Mountain of Light." Its history is both pathetic and suggestive. In the beginning it belonged to Heaven. Kuschnu, the Indian God, owned it. From him it was stolen. Since then a fate has followed it. Armies have fought for it. Thieves have stolen it. Chiefs have died for it. Its glorious splendor in fact lighted the road of thousands to dusky death. What the KOH-I-NOOR diamond is to the eye, the KOH-I-NOOR tea is to the taste. What Victoria's finest jewel is to the crowns of the world, the famous KOH-I-NOOR English Breakfast Tea is to the Russia tables of the country. Its color is royal in the cup. It has a



body like rich wine when pressed from the grape. Its aroma when steeped pervades the house like incense. Its flavor lingers in the mouth when drunk like a pleasant memory in the wind.

One of the three Royal Gems of the Kingdom of Home is the English Breakfast Tea known to the world as KOH-I-NOOR, and controlled exclusively by the Importing Tea and Coffee House of CHASE & SANBORN, Boston, Mass. Your grocer will secure it for you if you insist upon having it.

Such was the advertising of the era, and Chase & Sanborn advertised more aggressively than their competition. But they also paid attention to important quality details. To preserve the freshness of their teas, Chase & Sanborn packed them in airtight lead foil lined boxes, a concept that was introduced in Britain by John Horniman a half century earlier (c.f. Part XXVIII of *Reversals of Fortune in the Tea Industry*.)

As tea consumption declined in the U.S., most of the companies that served both coffee and tea abandoned tea in order to focus on the larger coffee segment of their business. Chase & Sanborn was no exception.

Mergers and acquisitions blurred the differences between competing brands by the end of the 20th century. Hills Bros. Coffee of San Francisco bought Chase & Sanborn in 1984, and continued the Chase & Sanborn coffee label. Interestingly, Chase & Sanborn was founded the same year as Hills Bros.

One year after the Chase & Sanborn acquisition by Hills Bros., Nestlé acquired the two brands, only to sell them to Sara Lee in 1999. Six years later, they were acquired by the privately held Massimo Zanetti Beverage Group.

Besides Hills Brothers and Chase & Sanborn, Massimo Zanetti owns Chock Full o'Nuts, MJB, and Segafredo. They roast 120,000 tons of coffee per year at 11 roasting plants, distributing to 100 countries.



Caleb Chase

Our series on *Reversals of Fortune in the Tea Industry* will continue this topic in the next issue of the *Upton Tea Quarterly*.