

# **Michigan Every Day**

## **By Patrick Sullivan and Carole Eberly**

*Oct. 29, 1927*  
*Death of James Vernor*

Perhaps more than automobiles or the Motown sound, nothing is so uniquely Detroit as that strange and imposing fizzle that accompanies a gulp of Vernor's Ginger Ale. James Vernor invented what would become known as "Detroit's Drink" At a pharmacy in downtown Detroit just after the Civil War. Vernor had worked in the pharmacy at 235 Woodward Avenue before the war and took it over in 1865 upon his return from service in the 4<sup>th</sup> Michigan Calvary. Accounts vary on how Vernor came up with his fiery ginger ale. He may have simply stumbled upon a blend of ingredients while experimenting after his return from the war. A more interesting version of the story has it that Vernor experimented with concoctions for a beverage flavored with ginger root before he left to become a soldier at age 19. Upon his return four years later, he discovered that his ginger ale formula was perfected as it aged in wooden casks.

Either way, the strange tasting beverage was a hit. Vernor eventually closed his drug store so he could focus his energies on the soft drink. He opened a bottling plant a few blocks away. In the company's heyday, a huge illuminated Vernor died in 1927 at age 84. Asked when the elder Vernor retired from the business, his family is said to have responded: "a few hours before he died." In the 1950s, when part of the company went public after the death of James Vernor II, the beverage's name changed from Vernor's to Vernors. Many Michiganders remember being given Vernors as children as a tonic for various childhood ailments.