CHEESE AND THE DEPOT

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Thelma Palmiter
Victor Cornelius

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Baker's Bridge Association
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HISTORY

THELMA PALMITER

In the 1840's every farmer in the town of Alfred who had cows made his own butter and cheese. The surplus was sold to neighbors or traded at the local grocery where it found its way to other markets. A few farmers hauled cheese to markets in Buffalo and Rochester. By 1845, 204,600 pounds of cheese were being made annually in the town of Alfred.

Realizing the need for an established outlet for dairy products, Judge Clark Crandall, of Alfred Centre, succeeded in finding markets in Pennsylvania. He was the cheese dealer who started the cheese shipping industry in the area. Cheese was hauled to market going over the mountains by team and wagon, a very tedious trip. Then in 1851 the Erie Railroad was completed through Baker's Bridge to Dunkirk, providing much easier transportation.

Soon little cheese making factories sprang up every few miles. One was in Tinkertown, perhaps the first in the town of Alfred, built by Daniel T. Burdick about 1865. It was located roughly one mile from Baker's Bridge on the road to Alfred Centre. By September 1869 it had made for the year, 1,255 cheeses, weighing nearly ninety pounds each, of which 666 had been sold at an average price of fifteen cents per pound. D. R. Stillman, Esq. of Alfred was the agent. In 1891 this factory was sold to Elias P. Fenner who operated it as a cheese and butter factory. At this time it was known as Home Cheese Factory and Creamery. In 1895 the factory used the milk of two hundred cows and made 50,000 pounds of cheese yearly. Boxes for the cheese were made in a shop located at the foot of Palmiter Road. This shop was moved in 1907.

Elias P. Fenner, or E. P., as he was known, was very involved in cheese making. Before operating the Home Cheese Factory, he ran the one at Five Corners. In 1895 he was operating the Home, Five Corners, Pleasant Valley and McHenry Valley cheese factories. His sons, having learned cheese making from their father, established cheese factories in the outlying area or managed ones that Elias owned.

The Pleasant Valley Cheese Factory was near the Goosepasture Schoolhouse. It was built in 1866 by Harrison W. Green. He operated it for eight years during which time he did not allow cheese to be made on Saturday because of his Seventh Day Baptist beliefs. Finding this unsatisfactory to his customers, he sold the business. In 1874 Horace G. Edwards operated the cheese factory. In 1893 he sold it to E. P. Fenner. Olin S. Fenner, son of E. P., managed it at that time. In 1895 the milk of two hundred fifty cows was used and 65,000 pounds of cheese made annually. A new gang press was installed in 1896; that same year eighteen small cheeses per day were made. In 1897 H. E. Fenner was listed as cheese maker at the factory when 64,787 pounds of cheese were made. The cheese sold for nine cents a pound in 1899. It truly was a poor man's food. In 1901 W. E. Allen was cheese maker at Pleasant Valley factory. In 1902, at an annual cheese meeting for farmer patrons, W. H. Langworthy was elected salesman for the ensuing year. That year, seven to nine cheeses were made per day with W. E. Allen still cheese maker and E. P. Fenner the owner.

While these are but two of the many factories, they perhaps best exemplify the history of local cheese factories. Other area factories not previously mentioned were at Hartsville, East Valley and Tip Top. In Allegany County there were about thirty cheese factories operating in 1871.

In general the cheese factories operated from April until November, remaining idle during winter months when milk production was low. They were noted for making some of the best cheese in western New York, as is Cuba Cheese Co., which continues this fame today.

Meanwhile, Judge Clark Crandall continued as a cheese dealer. William C. Burdick, of Alfred Centre, who had come to work for him, eventually took over the business. In 1851 William C. Burdick, Ira B. Crandall and Ezra P. Crandall organized the Allegany Cheese Company. Eventually Mr. Burdick purchased the interests of his partners and enlarged the business. It ultimately became the firm of William C. Burdick and Company, a partnership of Calvin D. Reynolds, William C. Burdick and William C. Dunham. Reynolds, who lived with Burdick, joined the

business about 1866. Dunham became a partner in 1886.

At first the business was conducted at Alfred Centre with shipping of cheese from the Erie depot at Baker's Bridge. At one time the grocery store on Main Street in Alfred Centre (The John Jacox Grocery) was a cheese warehouse with offices on the first floor and storage of cheese on the second and third floors.

In 1884 it was decided that William C. Burdick and Co., would build the warehouse near the depot. It was used primarily for storing cheese which came from factories throughout the county as well as from the local factories. There the cheese was cured, graded and stored until sold and shipped out by rail, which proved to be very successful. In winter months the three floors of the warehouse would be filled with cheese. At one time in 1898 the company shipped three carloads of cheese a day. One Sunday in December, 1900 in the railroad yard, there were nine cars containing nearly 2000 boxes of cheese waiting to be stored.

Not only cheese was sold from this warehouse, but also feed, wheat, corn, bran middlings, lime and coal. The coal bins were adjacent to the warehouse. Under the management of William C. Burdick the cheese-dealing business prospered for over fifty years.

After Wm. C. Burdick died in 1902 Calvin D. Reynolds continued the business very much as Mr. Burdick had. Throughout the county both men were known for their honest dealings and both were prominent community leaders.

Under the management of Calvin D. Reynolds the business was known as C. D. Reynolds Cheese Co. Mr. Reynolds died in 1905 but the business was continued by his two sons, Fred C. and Ramon F. In 1906 the company bought a storehouse near the depot, owned by Loren Gridley. It was remodeled and enlarged to accommodate their large cheese shipping business. in May, 1908 the business office was moved from Alfred into the new building which was then known as the "Cold Storage." A Miss Fisher from Hornell was employed in the office.

In the early 1920's Fred Reynolds left the business. Ramon, known as Ray, continued managing the operation. In 1930 the company merged with the Kraft Foods Company. Mr. Reynolds was affiliated with Kraft Co. until his retirement in 1948. It is interesting to note that in 1936 Mr. Reynolds established the R. F. Reynolds Company at Woodhull which he owned and operated until his death.

1978 REMINISCENCES

VICTOR CORNELIUS

When I sat down and started reminiscing with Lillian (my wife) over the years regarding the cheese business here in Alfred Station, I am sure I have several things down that may not be of interest to anyone, but it was the only way we could recollect or remember the events over the past several years.

The Borden Company received and shipped milk out of the Old Burdick Building (Wm. C. Burdick and Co. warehouse) here in Alfred Station until about 1920. This building Forrest and Emily Henry bought from Kraft Foods Co. just a few years ago. About 1920 the C. D. Reynolds Co. took over this milk plant and installed cheese making equipment. A man by the name of Ackley was hired as the cheese maker. I started working in the plant the summer of 1923, helping Mr. Ackley with the cheese making. I also worked the summer of 1924 while I was still in school. In 1925 I went to work steady in the cheese factory. In 1926-27 I was relief cheese maker for the various cheese factories who were making cheese for C. D. Reynolds Co., who later affiliated with the Kraft Foods Company.

The latter part of 1927 I went over to the main cold storage plant where I worked in the Department of Manufacturing Grated Cheese. This was on the top floor over the new addition built on over the offices. (This addition was on the top of the Loren Gridley building.) This department had been transferred from Connecticut. A Mr. Chalmers Holbrook, who was an ordained minister came here from Connecticut with two other men, George Tyler and Mike Blowett, to get the department going. There were seven

men plus three girls: (Vesta Palmer, Vera McHenry and Vera Millard) working steady in this department, plus students part-time from Alfred University.

I worked up in the manufacturing department and down in the plant, receiving and grading cheese and in 1930 was promoted to plant foreman also in charge of the grading of the cheese for quality, etc. In 1932 I was promoted to Plant Superintendent. We were receiving cheese from forty-eight factories. We received all of the cheese from Cuba Cheese Co. until 1945 when one Mr. Van Schwanburg came over from Germany with more money than he knew what to do with, so he bought into the Cuba Cheese Co. as their new President and started a building program and handling and selling their cheese. I also traveled around the state grading cheese for the Kraft Foods Co.

In 1931 the two top floors in the Old Burdick Building were turned into a curing department. Shelves were installed by Roy "Pappy" Crandall and his crew. A refrigeration unit had to be installed for maintaining a room temperature of not over 50 degrees. Cheeses were turned out every day and this kept two men busy. This cheese shelf cured for special orders and was very costly. The boxes were stored in the large barn by the building. There were four truck stalls attached to the barn. Later on, the barn, truck stalls and the old ice house were all torn down.

In the early forties the government came through with orders that all milk had to be pasteurized before processing. The equipment was so expensive that this put the small factories out of business.

We received cheese from factories in Wisconsin, along with eight larger plants. We also received cheese from Canada, weighing 80 pounds each. We could store 1½ million pounds; we were receiving and shipping constantly. Saturday was a terrible day for us, as we had many truck loads of cheese coming in; we also shipped one to three carloads out on Saturday. Our employment was 37-40 people. We relied on students during the summer for extra help with the excess amount of cheese manufacturing in the summer time. In 1950 Kraft closed the plant here, mainly due to shipping charges by rail and trucking charges.

Lillian and I were to be transferred to Lowville, N.Y., where Kraft had a tremendous plant. They had storage for well over a million pounds. They wanted Lillian in the office there and I was to be their cheese inspector and grader for the western part of the state of Vermont. We had six months to make the transfer and at the end of the six months we decided not to go,

for family and health reasons. We lost a lot of sleep making this decision as Kraft is and was a big outfit and they were just wonderful to us. We used to go to Lowville for meetings and get stuck in the winter. Up there, the snow would be higher on both sides of the road than our car was. Sometimes we would drive to Geneva and take the train from there.

About 1947 the company has a new water tank put up for the sprinkler system. After the tank people had removed the old leaking original tank, and had the new one up, they wanted to hire someone to go up there and paint the thing. Keith Palmiter took the job and what a dangerous undertaking this was, and I doubt if he could even go up there now, let alone paint it. This tank is way up from the roof of the building.

Until about 1920 ice was used for cooling. Ice came over on the Erie from Andover Pond. A refrigeration system was installed at this time with three inch coils on the walls in the four cold storage rooms. This was operated by a large gas engine which was terribly noisy and people in Alfred Station, living not too far from the plant, complained strongly. This was changed over to electric in 1927. This pleased everyone, especially Harry Austin as he lived right next to the noise. September 1, 1949 Lillian and I were called to the Lowville office for the Kraft Foods Co. service awards. I received my 25-year award and Lillian received her 20-year award.

Lillian started work in the office September 1929 to replace Helena Crandall McHenry. She not only took care of most of our office work but did all the figuring of milk checks for the following cheese factories: Five Corners, White Creek, South Cuba, West Almond, Jasper and Woodhull. What a girl she was and still is!

I have most of the names of the people who worked at the plant from the time I started. When I started Jim Evans was in the office as bookkeeper in the early 1900's, Frank Brown (my uncle) was plant engineer, Lee Martin was the plant foreman and Milton Green made cheese boxes in the storage building used by Leonard Claire for sorting and loading potatoes at one time. Other people who worked there were: Harold Moland, Paul Conderman, Clyde Marvel, Lee Marvel, Claude Shaw, Lynn and Stan Shaw, Russell Clark, Wayland Cornelius, Lynn Palmiter, Gerald Greene, Frank Cook, the four Norton brothers, Clyde Saunders, Dighton Burdick, Jim Nolan, Grant Nolan, Russell Nolan, Lester Palmiter, Max and Gifford Cook, Grant Crandall, Garland Crandall, Randall and Keith Palmiter, Walter Claire, Lynn Langworthy, Milford Brogue, Leighton Austin and Ira Pierce. Fellows who just worked during the summer while school was out: Eugene Van Horn, Elmer Willard, Monte Cottrell and Jim Cottrell. Art

Burdick worked in the cold storage plant several years before going into farming. Bruce and Max Davis worked in the cold storage for several years. Harold Allen worked in the cheese factory for several years starting in 1926. Louise Austin and Mary Raynor worked in the laboratory up on the top floor.

It may be of some interest to you just what the judging and grading of whole milk cheddar cheese involves;

1- Tests for texture defects:
fish eyes, yeast holes, pin holes, gassy, swiss, sweet curd holes and open mechanical holes.

2- Body defects:
corky, dry, crumbly, curdy, rubbery, flaky, grainy, gritty, greast, mealy, salvy, pasty, smeary, sticky, spongy, weak and soft.

3- Flavor defects:
acid, high acid, sour, sour-whey, whey taint, green, barny, cowy, unclean, bitter chemical, foreign, disinfectant and fishy, fly spray, gasoline, kerosene oil, paint, feed, fermented fruity, musty, rancid, utensil, week, garlic, leeks, onions and yeasty.

4- And of course the finish and appearance of the cheese is very important. If the cheese hasn't been dipped in very hot paraffin it will scale off and the surface will mold. You have to check for cracked rinds and also you will find cheese that the curd wasn't pressed hard enough in the press to make the cheese solid and this makes the cheese an undergrade. Cracked rinds can occur when the bandage is torn or loose on the cheese while the cheese is being held on the shelves drying out before the sealing with hot paraffin.

Cheese of inferior quality or finish, having a pronounced inferior or objectionable flavor or taste, cheese that was corky, crumbly, short, mealy, acid, weak, pasty, gassy or otherwise seriously defective, and cheese uneven in color, mottled or too highly colored and faulty in shape, finish and appearance, with surfaces which were defective were considered undergrade.

Undergrades could be judged as No. 2 grade or strictly undergrades for processing only. Each vat had to have the correct date the cheese was manufactured, and the vat No. stamped on the cheese. We had a few cheese makers that for some reason or another would get the dates mixed

up, and of course they always had an alibi and excuse for this. But too often, you would have to plug and test each cheese in the shipment to sort out the undergrades.

In 1925 the company had a cheese specialist come to the Alfred Station plant. He was from Wisconsin and at that time Wisconsin was noted for the finest cheddar cheese made. This man was to instruct in the making of a type of Wisconsin cheese, also the grading of cheese and this is how I got started in the very ticklish, delicate and precarious profession. You know, this man came here driving a brand new Olsmobile and he let me drive the darn thing and I am sure that was the incentive that drove me into the cheese business.

In the judging and grading of cheese one had to be extremely cautious and thorough as you were the protector of the interest of your company, also you had to be able and ready to prove anything wrong with the cheese to the cheese makers and this made it very interesting at times. Fact is, there were several times when I wasn't sure if I would be just beaten up or shot. Professor Erle Myers would bring his dairy class down to the plant for me to demonstrate the judging and grading of cheese to them and I enjoyed this very much as it gave me the opportunity to get acquainted with a lot of good boys.

This may be of interest to you:

Cheese price per pound - Cuba Market where the price was set every Mon. A.M.

5/10/28	22 ½ low	6/9/32	10 ¼ low
9/6/28	25 ½ high	8/18/32	12 ½ high
12/26/29	20 ½ low	4/6/33	9 ¾ low
9/5/29	24 high	7/20/33	13 ¾ high
		12/21/33	8 ½¢ bid-no sales made
7/10/30	16 low		
8/28/30	19 ½ high	1/11/34	10 ¼ low
		3/8/34	14 ¼ high
5/14/31	11 ½ low		
1/13/31	16 high		

It takes 10½ pounds of milk for one pound of cheese. As you know the price of cheese today in the stores is around $2.00 a pound. The cheese

makers were paid $2.50 per hundred weight for making the cheese.

At the time when the C. D. Reynolds Co. affiliated with Kraft Foods Co., Ramon F. Reynolds stayed on as general manager. It was his responsibility to keep the various factories selling their cheese to us. He also was a member of the Cuba cheese board. This committee met every Monday morning in Cuba, N.Y., establishing the price that would be paid to the factories for their cheese during that week, this was for the western part of N.Y. state. The price of cheese paid for in the eastern part of N.Y. state was established by another price fixing board in Lowville, N.Y.

In 1950 when Kraft closed the plant, Lillian went to work for the former Alfred Mutual Savings and Loan Association. I found myself back in the storage business for the next ten years as the Morton Cold Storage Company bought the plant from Kraft and also leased the old large Hornell City Cold Storage warehouse. They hired me as the manager of the two warehouses and we kept them filled full of government surplus cheese and powdered milk until the government stopped buying and storing the surplus foods. Therefore, when the plant was empty - cleaned out, it was given and deeded to the Alfred State College Alumni Association Foundation and it is now used for storing ceramic material.

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