

The dairy industry had its beginning in this community when the first settlers made their way up through the wilderness, leading a cow behind the cart. At first everyone kept a few sheep and three or four cows. The butter and occasionally the cheese were made up at home. A great deal of room was required for setting the milk so when the first houses were built they added long ells for milk rooms. A few people built cheese houses.

As more land was cleared larger dairies were the rule. In 1849 a man by the name of Snow, living somewhere near the Ray Jones farm, had a herd of fifty cows. Most of the butter made at this time was shipped down the Erie Canal and around the Horn to California. All of this butter had to be heavily salted to insure its keeping.

The industry showed a distinct increase up through the years until 1849 - the year of the bad frost. It occurred on June 18th and was the worst June frost ever known. Before sundown the grass was frozen stiff. Ben Ross, living at the time on the Glarum farm, plowed under a small piece of sweet corn and that was the only piece of corn for miles around that survived the frost. Many people planted corn a second time but the grasshoppers devoured most of this. Farmers faced the winter with very little hay and grain. A man started out one morning to buy hay. He went to North East, Ripley, Westfield, and Mayville and found only 500 lb.. He brought it home and put it in the front of his barn and the next day company came. They drove their team up to the hay, and when they went home that night, his five hundred pounds of hay was nearly gone.

The Hollanders were particularly resourceful that year. They picked and dried elderberry blossoms and shrubs of all kinds for feed. Some people drove their herds into Ohio to winter them but there was very little feed there and most of them died on the way home. Before grass started the following spring, dairymen faced an acute problem. Some

solved it by cutting down trees and driving the cattle to the woods to browse.

Of course the industry boomed during the civil war years. Herds of fifty or more were not uncommon. The peak war time price of butter was a dollar. The butter was sold in ferkins weighing from 116-120 lbs. or in tubs which contained half that amount. The cooper industry was at that time one of the most flourishing in the village.

Most people churned 50 lbs. of butter at a time. Occasionally these churns were turned by a sweep and in that case a sheep was used. A dash churn was operated by dog power and was the more common method. In those days there were some very intelligent dogs. Their owners often declared that they knew the days of the week. Whether they did or not is problematical but they did often run away on churning day. In case the dog could not be found the children had to take turns at the job.

In the sixties there were two butter days in Sherman, Wednesday and Saturday, but Wednesday was the better day. On other days of the week the butter buyers went to Findley Lake, Clymer, and Panama. At one time there were fourteen buyers. Some of these were Arthur Hawley, Albert Sheldon, Charles Durham, William Green, Frank Thayer, Edgar and Orson Keith. Each buyer used a butter tester which was a half of a hollow metal cylinder. This he stuck into the tub, gave it a turn and removed a long cylinder of butter. In this way they determined if the tub was of uniform quality throughout.

On butter day Main street was lined with teams from one end to the other. Merchants did a thriving business. Transactions were cash on the barrel head and charge accounts were practically unknown. The farmers left their butter and went home with a little chewing tobacco, tea, coffee, white sugar, calico at 50¢ a yard and occasionally bonnets for the womenfolks. One woman wanted a new bonnet but was unable to go to town on butter day.

So her husband took her picture along and showed it to the milliner and she selected a bonnet that she thought would be becoming. It was a good day too for the tin-type shop, most of those old pictures of great grandmother in her frilled cap were taken on butter day.

It was visiting day too since Sunday visiting was frowned upon. It was a day for families to get together. Sometimes a housewife looked out and saw a family of ten or twelve drive into the yard. In that case she simply fried a little more pork; mixed another batch of soda biscuit, cut another cake of honey and everyone enjoyed themselves immensely.

Sometime in the late sixties, John Spencer, later known to every rural school child as Uncle John, gave a talk on scientific methods in butter making. Probably there was need for such instruction as sanitary conditions were not all that could have been desired. One woman sold a tub of butter that contained a flat iron, another one with a piece of codfish in it and hairpins were not uncommon in the butter.

During the depression that followed the Civil war the price of butter went down to a shilling and gradually people stopped making it up at home. Coon Bros. from Philadelphia built a creamery on Mud Street in the early seventies which handled most of the milk in this vicinity. A little later cheese factories were established. Fred Edmonds at one time operated sixteen of them.

Gradually, too, scientific methods of milk production replaced the old. Up to 1880 the herds were mostly Durhams, gave milk only six months of the year and lived to a ripe old age. In the eighties they began to be replaced by Holsteines. A pioneer in the production of blooded stock was Mark Plato. <sup>z/though very early</sup> William Phelps had a herd of belted Holsteines.

With the increased production of milk came new methods of handling it. The cheese factories were replaced by skimming stations and in 1908 a

Condensed milk factory was built at Sherman. This operated for several years, and was later bought by the Dairymen's League.

At the present time, practically all of the output is sold as bulk milk and is handled by either the Dairymen's League or the Toddy plant at Mayville.

While the modern dairy cow is not quite so pampered as Elsie, the Borden they are scientifically housed and scientifically fed. Barns are white-washed and inspected regularly and the milk is cooled and pasteurized; and carried to the cities in glass lined trucks.

Written by Mary Kidder

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