

THE EVOLUTION OF THE DAIRY INDUSTRY

By Ken Crane

In early years families usually had their own horse and cow, and in small towns you can still notice small barns behind the house which since may have been converted to a garage.

If you did not own a cow, often a farmer would come by each morning and dip milk out of a large container on his wagon and into your pan or pitcher. As the cream would rise to the top of the pan, by the next day Dad would have cream for his coffee and the children drank low fat milk.

The more prosperous families would have their milk delivered in a metal pail with a handle. The pails came in different sizes, from two to twelve quarts.

After awhile the farmers started using glass bottles. These were clear glass with the farmer's name embossed on them. They would have a plug cap.

The farmer would have a small building separate from the barn to house his bottle filling equipment. And, in the days before electricity, he would also have a water tank to chill the evening's milk, cooling the water in the tank with ice.

The ice would be cut from his farm pond on zero degree winter days, and cut by hand into 100 pound blocks. These would be loaded onto a sleigh and brought to the ice-house, which was a separate building about 20' X 20' and quite tall. The ice would be packed in sawdust, in layers, up to the top of the icehouse. You can tell an ice-house by the front opening all the way up, with several small doors.

Next, came the electric milk coolers. These held from two to twelve 40 quart cans, and cooled the milk to 44 degrees. These were a major improvement, but not enough to satisfy the Health Department, which required the milk to be pasteurized.....by being heated in a stainless steel tank to 143 degrees and held for thirty minutes. The milk was then chilled and bottled.

This process represented a sizable investment, so most farmers quit selling and delivering milk, and brought on the need for milk dealers. Usually the dealers had a sophisticated plant with pasteurizing and homogenizing equipment, but no cows. They purchased their milk from farmers and paid them a premium for high butterfat milk. The dealers then hired routemen who would deliver the milk to the home, usually before 7:30 a.m. In 1940, with a U.S. unemployment rate of 25 percent, men were eager to work six days a week for \$22 as routemen. They left the bottled milk in an insulated milkbox on your porch.....or often right in your refrigerator.

On cold days the milk would freeze and the cream would be solid for two inches above the top.

In the beginning, many dealers had a special milk wagon and a well trained horse. It was not unusual to see a horse going around the block alone to meet the driver on the next block. The horses wore rubber calks on their shoes in the summer, and steel calks in the winter.

Usually, delivery was seven days a week, but later Sunday delivery was eliminated.

When World War II came, delivery was reduced to every other day. At that time the government also banned pint milk bottles, as a way to save labor for the war effort. Many small dealers quit delivery and took wartime jobs.

With empty bottles costing 30 cents each, the remaining dealers started a bottle exchange to return empty bottles to their owners. A dealer would bring in any bottles that were not his and receive 1 cent each for them. He would then take his own back for 3 cents. The local bottle exchange was located on Grey Ave., Utica, and later on Seymour Ave.

After the war, many dealers used DIVCO trucks for delivery. They had a low floor so they could be driven standing up. The clutch and brake were on one pedal. Ease of getting in and out was very important when you were averaging 135 stops a day!

In early years the State issued a very limited number of milk licenses so that the quality of the milk could be supervised. Later, as the quality of all milk improved, the State expanded the licenses allowing dealers to deliver almost anywhere. This, along with the Pure Pak paper containers that came out after the war, had the effect of eliminating home delivery, and the local milk dealers.

Now, most milk is pasteurized by short-time equipment which takes four seconds, and is shipped in from the larger cities and even from out-of-state.

