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The Holland Farms Story by Jon Landers

Herman H. Piersma was born in the Netherlands and came to the United States as a young man. For a few years Herman lived in Chicago, where he worked for the railroad. Around 1900, Herman came to Oneida County and worked on a farm in Marcy where he met and married his wife, Minnie DeJong Siedsma; also a Dutch immigrant.

On February 28, 1911 Herman, Minnie and Jacob Piersma bought a 112 acre dairy farm on Cider Street in Oriskany. The property had an abundance of green hilly pastures and ample woodlands. The farm had a large white house, big dairy barn and other buildings. The house was built in 1830. Herman and Minnie farmed and raised eight children: 5 boys, Pierre, John, Sidney, Jacob and Herman; three girls, Nettie, Dora and Elsie. The crops were corn and hay for the livestock and vegetables for the family.



Holland Farms dairy barn



Herman (Pete) Piersma on his farm

In 1928, Herman's son John bought a milk route and a 1927 Dodge G-boy truck for \$960 and began delivering milk and ice to boats traveling the Erie Canal between Amsterdam and Sylvan Beach. His first milk bottles were round quarts, embossed JOHN PIERNSMA/HILL CREST DAIRY/ WHITESBORO, N.Y. His brother Pierre bought a milk route in New Hartford from a Mr Roman and delivered milk. Pierre had bottles made that were embossed, PIERRE PIERNSMA/REGISTERED/NEW HARTFORD, N.Y. Pierre at one time worked for Dairylea in Utica.

With hard work and John's entrepreneurial spirit, his milk route was a financial success. Later, the same year, John decided to build a processing plant to pasteurize and bottle their milk. This required a sizeable financial investment and when John's father went to the bank to cosign for a \$1000 loan, he exclaimed, "My son, my son, what are you doing?"

Building the large processing plant on the Piersma Farm proved to be a good decision, and with the help of his hard working family, the business flourished. Because John was proud of his Dutch ancestry, he decided to name his dairy, "Holland Farms." In 1930, they started using round bottles that were embossed, PIERSMA BROS./HOLLAND FARMS/ORISKANY, N.Y. By 1933, John and his wife Evlyn, each had their own truck and delivery routes which served downtown Utica and the surrounding area .

After the death of Herman H. Piersma, his son, also Herman H. Piersma, but better known as "Pete" to most people in Oriskany, was willed the farm. A stipulation in the will stated that John could bottle his milk on the farm, but had to buy the milk from his brother Pete.

By 1950, Holland Farms had four people delivering milk six days a week to residences, businesses and hospitals. A few years later a retail dairy store was opened in Oriskany and still later, one in Clinton. In 1956, John Piersma and his wife opened Holland Farms Dairy Bar and Bakery "on the triangle" in Yorkville; one of the first retail outlets for dairy products. When construction started on the Commercial Drive overpass in 1966, Holland Farms relocated to its current location on Oriskany Boulevard in Yorkville.

In 1955, Pete bought 50 acres of land on the other side of Cider Street and expanded the farm. This move provided more acreage for corn and hay sorely needed for the growing Holland herds.



**Front of tall round
pyro quart bottle
c1942
Peter Bleiberg
collection**



**Back view of tall
round pyro bottle
c1942
Peter Bleiberg
collection**

About 1974, Pete sold his cows when he lost his brother Sidney who was his helper. Following the sale, Pete and his nephew Richard Piersma bought the bottling plant from John and they continued bottling milk for Holland Farms under the "Holland Farms" label. Pete and Richard also bottled milk under their "Holland Dairy" label.

In 1980, John Piersma decided to semi-retire and his two daughters, Marolyn and Suzanne took over the business. However, John never fully retired, but enjoyed his work at Holland Farms and Kiwanis, flying his plane off 4 th Lake in the Adirondack's and helping anyone who needed his expertise.

In 1995, John Piersma the founder and owner of Holland Farms Dairy died, but his successful enterprise continued under the stewardship of his two daughters.

With the growth of supermarkets, less and less people used home delivery for their milk and many small milk processors went out of business. Most farmers started selling their milk to large corporate processors like Dairy Lea. A few dairies opened small retail milk stores which sold bread and other assorted groceries which enabled them to stay in business; but, many stopped processing and bottling their own milk.

When Pete and Richard stopped bottling milk in 1996, Holland Farms had already been in the retail milk and bakery business for many years. Holland Farms had established a high-quality reputation for their baked goods which gave them an advantage over smaller milk stores. Adding a fresh deli, coffee and other items helped even more and the business evolved into one of the most successful retail operations in the area. Presently, Holland Farms employs about 60 people.

Today, the farm is still on Cider Street in Oriskany where Herman (Pete) Piersma lives and at 91 years old, enjoys relatively good health. On a sunny day, you might see Pete standing in his yard, watching a herd of young Holsteins grazing on the sloping green pastures that are surrounded by stands of large beautiful maple trees; much like they were a hundred years ago.

Pete is retired now, and rents out his farm. The barns and other buildings are all freshly painted and in good repair. The cattle, hay, and chores are well taken care of and even though, at times, Pete may long for the days when he did a lot of the farm chores himself; he claims he doesn't miss milking all those cows by hand.



Holland Farms square quart pyro bottle c1968



John Piersma's first embossed quart milk bottle c1928



Logo from a 1/2 gallon Holland Dairy bottle. Holland Dairy was the name Pete Piersma and Richard Piersma used to bottle milk c1983



John Piersma's second quart milk bottle c1930. This embossing was also used on pint and 1/2 pint bottles
Richard Pugh collection