

DR. THATCHER'S MILK BOTTLE A LIFE SAVER

One hot summer day in 1883, two trudging black horses pulled a small white hearse down a quiet street in an upstate New York town. It contained a tiny victim of cholera infantum. That dreary trip brought about the invention of the glass milk bottle that has since saved the lives of untold thousands of people and changed the course of one of America's greatest industries.

It took the inventive mind of physician, druggist and inventor, Hervey D. Thatcher, however, to connect the unsanitary delivery of milk in those days with the little white hearse. The hearse practically followed the milk dispensing wagons from house to house in those days.

Dr. Thatcher saw the hearse that day in 1883 and conceived that contaminated milk was the cause of the high juvenile death rate from "slow" or "quick" consumption, as it was called. Dr. Thatcher did something about it. In 1884 he invented and patented the world's first milk bottle. He made it from glass because as a doctor and druggist, he knew glass could be sterilized and kept free from contamination when properly sealed. He also knew that glass would not affect the flavor, quality or purity of milk.

As a physician, Dr. Thatcher had been troubled for many years about the delivery of milk. In those days, the milkman's horse plodded patiently up and down dusty streets, stopping at nearly every house so the milkman's bell could toll his arrival.

The housekeeper came running out, pitcher in hand, and waited while the milkman dipped a measured ladle into his 40 quart can and poured the germ-laden fluid into his customer's container. During warm weather, passing carriages and wagons kicked up clouds of dust, while the horse's swishing tail effectively blew the dirt into the open can.

Dr. Thatcher's inventive mind went into action. He went to work with a small lathe and turned out a wooden mould which was later used as the pattern for the world's first hand-blown glass milk bottle.

He soon discovered he had more problems. To manufacture this new bottle would cost about 50 cents each in small quantities, but if he ordered enough, the price could be reduced to 10 cents each. As a matter of fact, Dr. Thatcher was first told that the bottles couldn't be made, but he persisted and won.

The late William C. Wilcox, a dairyman of Ogdensburg, N.Y. was the first to use the glass milk bottle – but not until 1886. At first, the new ideas were difficult. Milk spilled out of the loose-fitting glass caps. Dr. Thatcher came to the rescue again and soon the customers were as pleased as Mr. Wilcox with the new style delivery of milk and cream, kept free from harmful bacteria from dust and dirt of streets.

There have been many improvements in the glass milk bottle since Dr. Thatcher's first. Latest development is the T-square milk bottle now being used by many modern dairies. The new T-square quart bottle is of a square shape, measures 8 5/8 inches in height, 3 5/16 inches in width, and weighs only 17 3/4 ounces, as compared with the original 30 oz weight of Dr. Thatcher's bottle. Because of its square shape, the T-square saves considerable space, compared with the round style, in home refrigerators as well as dairies, trucks, and stores. It also is easier to handle because of the flat sides and pours easier.

Manufacturing plants of Thatcher manufacturing company are located in Elmira, N.Y., Olean, N.Y. and Streator, Illinois.

But Dr. Thatcher, like many another genius, died a poor man. Some of his old friends recall seeing him, an old man, his head still full of dreams, walking absent-mindedly along the street. His slight figure was an indication that he was not taking the best of care of himself.

Fred J. Hayes of Potsdam, for the past 35 years an inspector of food and dairy products for the State Health Department, was one of Dr. Thatcher's closest friends. He is anticipating having a commemorative stamp issued in honor of Dr. Thatcher and his wonderful contribution to the public health.



Footnote: This article was written many years ago and has been passed around by bottle collectors and printed in numerous newsletter articles by bottle clubs and bottle magazines. A person who worked in the 1950's for the Thatcher Glass Manufacturing Company Inc. of Elmira, N.Y, probably wrote it. The Thatcher T-Square bottle was put into production in 1959.

