

Tuesday, March 4, 2003

As a history buff of long standing, I am flattered by your continued interest in my contributions to your study of the history of dairy operations on the Island, and am happy to make any contributions which may be significant to it.

Regarding your first question in your letter of February 28, I don't think my father regarded his venture as "starting a dairy business". It is more likely that when our poor old first cow began to give less and less milk for the family, he found a young heifer who had been bred, and acquired her as a means of supplying our family,a simple matter of survival. When she freshened, and her female offspring was bred and had a calf, there was probably a small surplus of milk, to be peddled randomly to anyone who might want it, because I do recall people coming to our door for their milk, These were frequently occasions for bartering, (there was mighty little cash in circulation in those days,) and a quart of milk for sick kids was often traded for a half bushel of apples, a used tire that might fit the farm truck, etc., and not infrequently, there was nothing forthcoming at the time, but an acknowledged obligation for something later. I am going to suppose that on weekly trips to Hatch's Market on Cottage Street, there were some inquiries as to the availability of milk, and the market may have been an outlet at one time, and then the idea of direct delivery, to eliminate the middleman at the market, occurred to my father.. Demand for dairy milk went up and down with the seasons: more people had a bit of extra income when the (relatively) wealthy "summer residents" arrived at their cottages, and I am sure that your historical research has revealed that these people were the mainstay of the Islands economy, even though they felt the depression, and drove fewer cars, sailed fewer and smaller boats, and entertained on a smaller scale. Those residents who had permanent jobs on their estates were the privileged class among the locals in those days. And no, I don't think the governments urging that children should drink a quart of milk a day had much to do with fostering the dairy business. Even into the mid-thirties, we had customers with children who made do with **one quart** every second or third day. I do recall that when it became necessary to raise the price of a quart of milk from six to seven cents, my father took the time to write personal notes to every customer, (probably twenty five or thirty), explaining increases in the cost of grain, and other factors affecting **his** costs.

Now, about agricultural publications about the dairy business. I do not recall any, and that may be because I was eleven or twelve years old at the time, and anything except personal letters in the mail, the Saturday Evening Post, and the Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward catalogs didn't stir a lot of my interest. Our primary resource, once we started offering milk for sale, was the County Extension Agent, and the man who tested cows milk for state. Remember that regulation of small business was a far more elementary function of government than it is today.

The location of Mount Desert Island Dairy was on Main Street in Bar Harbor, not far from where Geraldine and John Sweet used to live, and perhaps still do. The last time I noticed the building three or four years ago, it bore the sign of "Cadillac Motel" I recall it as being perhaps forty feet by eighty feet, with an office and a sales room at the front, and the rest of it being occupied by bottling equipment, cleaning arrangements, and refrigeration, with a loading platform enclosed at the rear..I think it had a large open second floor, which was occasionally used as a meeting room, lecture hall, or dance hall

Now, for someone who frequently goes into a room, and then wonders what it was he came for, you have certainly given my memory capabilities a work-out, but I have enjoyed it, and hope this information will serve some purpose for your project.

Marcus Sweet

Cordially
Marcus Sweet