

Bottling the Past

*Dedicated to the dairy families, employees, cattlemen and women,
farmers and businesspeople who together produced a remarkable chapter in the
history of Ventura County*

Research Team

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Bottling the Past

by
Beth Miller

There was a time when the gentle sound of glass bottles clinking might have awakened you early in the morning. Fresh milk! Delivered right to your door or even placed in the ice box or refrigerator. Fresh milk with cream on top! The cream would be saved for that first cup of coffee and the rest mixed into cereal. Fresh milk delivered from a nearby dairy.

Dairies, from the early to the mid twentieth century, were an important part of everyday life. Though not all in business at the same time, there were once 80 plus dairies throughout Ventura County. Without refrigerated trucks, the dairies located close to their customers. At the most they were about one to two hours away. The bottles of milk were packed in ice or wrapped in wet burlap. Children ran to the parked truck to grab a piece of the chipped ice and let it slide between their fingers.

The delivery person was most often a man who was a trusted friend of the family. Often times the milkman had house keys so he could place the milk right into the refrigerator. Everyone seems to have a special memory of their milkman. There are stories of the milkman stopping to make breakfast for hungry children whose mother was sick in bed. Then he went on his way to continue delivering the milk.

Dairies were helpful in many ways. They provided jobs in a variety of skill levels. Teenagers could easily find their first job washing milk bottles. The dairies were spirited supporters of community and sporting events with donations of milk, ice cream and other treats. They were innovators, and leaders who were always quick to give a helping hand.

Dairies in California have a long history. There wasn't dairy stock in the new world. Early Spanish explorers saw little need to develop dairy stock. Missionaries quickly realized that dairy cows were the key to survival.

“Milk from the cows and vegetables from the garden have been our chief subsistence,” wrote Padre Junipero Serra in 1772.

Father Francisco Paulo wrote in 1774, “For eight months, milk was manna...meals consisted of gruel made of garbanzo beans or beans ground to flour with which milk was mixed.” By 1776, women at the missions were making butter and cheese.

In 1775 Juan Bautista de Anza brought 1,000 head of cattle from Mexico. That was the beginning of the large rancho herds. Dairying was rare. The stock was more suitable for meat, tallow and hides. That led to the lucrative trade which in turn led to the development of the shipping communities of San Diego, Santa Barbara and Monterey.

With the arrival of Americans to California, dairying expanded. Settlers brought with them their taste for milk, cheese and butter and the family cow to provide for those needs. Trails were very rough. A settler could fill a butter churn with fresh cream in the morning and as the wagon bounced along, it churned up a lump butter for the evening meal.

In the mining towns, while the men searched for gold, the few wives that made the journey, found another source of wealth. They managed the livestock and sold fresh milk and butter. Food prices soared during the Gold Rush. In Placerville the cost of a slice of bread was \$1.00. If you wanted it buttered, the price jumped to \$2.00.

The first exports of dairy happened north at the Russian settlement of Fort Ross. They shipped butter and cheese to Alaska. After the Russians left California in 1841, John Sutter of Sacramento, acquired the materials at the fort including a small dairy herd. Large herds emerged close to the populated areas. The primary dairy regions were in the San Francisco Bay Area and the Sacramento Valley. Those areas had natural pastures and good rainfall.

In 1850, only 705 lbs. of butter and 150 lbs. of cheese were produced. By 1880, it increased to 16 million lbs. of butter and 3.7 million lbs. of cheese. As the California population exploded, so did the demand for dairy products. Several technologies helped the dairy industry such as the following: mechanical cream

separator, pasteurization (1882 first commercial pasteurization), reliable method of butterfat measurement and the glass milk bottle.

Early dairies lacked sanitary conditions. As dairies increased so did the practice of high standards for purity, cleanliness and quality. Before milk was available in glass bottles, it was delivered by the milkman who ladled milk from a 40 quart dip can into the customer's own pitcher. Each time the can was opened, the milk was exposed to dirt, horsehair and even flies!

Several inventors worked on the problem. Dr. Hervey Thatcher of Potsdam, New York is credited with patenting a sanitary way of milking called the "milk protector" and in 1886 with an easy-to-fill and clean quart milk bottle. By 1903 glass milk bottles were commonly used in Los Angeles.

In 1911 the California Dairy Board reported a list of fines imposed for unsanitary conditions. A checklist for inspections included everything from barns to the cleanliness of the milker's clothing. The Dairyman's Cooperative Creamery Association was formed in 1911 and soon began marketing their butter under the name "Challenge Butter." The association developed the first lab in California to test and ensure butter equality. It was the first branded butter in the West. Also in 1911, Challenge introduced its slogan on a lighted sign in Los Angeles: "Better Buy, Better Butter." Today Challenge Butter is still produced by a cooperative association represented by more than 600 dairy farm families.

Besides the famous California butter there is also a famous cheese. It was a type of cheese that was brought from Spain by the Franciscans in the 1700s and was known as "queso blanco." Several people made and sold cheese loosely based on that recipe, but a businessman named David Jack popularized the large scale sale of cheese. He came from Scotland during the Gold Rush and acquired land in Monterey. Eventually he owned 60,000 acres of prime dairy land. He partnered with other regional dairies and mass marketed "Jack's Cheese" or better known as "Monterey Jack" cheese.

Alfalfa played a major role in the success of dairying in California. It came to California in 1851 from Chile and was called "Chilean Clover." Dairy farmers found the crop adapted to California's climate and soil. It kept the cows healthy.

In an 1878 alfalfa report “cows were weak and thin, alfalfa kept the cows in good condition.” Dairy men fed their stocks a variety of feeds and grains, grasses, cabbages, turnips and beets. Unlike these feeds, alfalfa produced a pleasant tasting milk. Today dairy farmers are helping to increase the honeybee population by reseeding pastures with alfalfa, clover and other plants appealing to bees and livestock.

Why had Ventura County been so attractive to our dairy families? What was it about this area that gave them a sense of hope and a reason to believe they would succeed?

Land prices were reasonable. The farm land was rich and the water source was good. The climate was pleasant. Just like us, cows like nice weather with temperatures ranging from 60-80 degrees.

Our dairy families were truly families working together. They were husbands, wives, daughters, fathers, sons and brothers. They were award winning cattlemen and women, farmers, business people, community leaders, innovators and supporters of the community athletic team and organizations.

Here are some highlights of just a few of the many Ventura County dairies. The items for the exhibit were on loan from several of our local dairy families.



Camarillo Ranch Dairy

Near Village 22, Leisure Village

Present day Leisure Village in Camarillo is the location of the Camarillo Ranch Dairy that was first established in 1901 by Adolfo Camarillo and Joseph Lewis. According to news reports, the plant was run by “a six-horsepower steam engine and has a capacity of separating the cream from 1,000 lbs. of milk every hour.” By 1907 the partnership dissolved and Adolfo built a new dairy. It was considered a model dairy and produced, with its mechanical cream separator, approximately 2,300 lbs. of butter per month. The milk was not bottled. It was fed to calves and hogs. Alfalfa was grown on the Camarillo Ranch. A news account from 1907, reported that Adolfo’s “new dairy on his ranch in east Camarillo will be the largest dairy in the county. The plant will have an ideal situation, being in the center of the ranch and will no doubt become one of the industrial enterprises of importance in the county.” The annual roundup, rodeo and barbecue took place at the dairy.

A 1909 newspaper reported that Joseph Lewis had a “model dairy” and “output of butter is about 800 pounds per month.” The **Camarillo State Hospital** would later operate a dairy on former Lewis Ranch land.



Camarillo Ranch Dairy Milk Can

In 1960 a farm agent, while walking about in the old Camarillo Ranch Dairy, found the last of the milk cans. He gave it to Adolfo's granddaughter, Paquita Parker. She painted it gold and for many years used it to hold her buggy whips. The Parker family donated the milk can to the Agriculture Museum of the Museum of Ventura County. The museum loaned it to the Camarillo Ranch for the 2014 dairy exhibit.



Camarillo Ranch dairy exhibit 2014

Adohr Farms

Pleasant Valley and Pancho Road, Camarillo

Adohr Stock Farms was one of the major dairies of Southern California. It was founded in 1916 by Merritt Adamson and his wife Rhoda Rindge Adamson. The dairy was named by spelling Rhoda's name backward: Adohr. In 1942, Adohr moved to Camarillo on former Camarillo Ranch land. The creamery remained in Los Angeles.

The "Home of Champions," Adohr had the world's largest purebred Guernsey herd. Like all dairies, Adohr insisted on consistent care of the cows. At Adohr the same man milked the same cow, at the same time everyday, at the same stanchion with the same cows nearby. Show cows were taken by train to state fairs around

the country. Their handlers stayed in the cattle car with them. While traveling, the cows were hand milked. A large statue of the milkmaid and her cow greeted visitors to the dairy. Whenever customers had a new baby, Adohr supplied the family with products and an “Adohr-able baby” sign.



Camarillo Ranch Dairy exhibit 2014

D. McGrath Estate Dairy Oxnard

Most often associated with farming, the McGrath name is not usually linked to dairying. Dominick McGrath was a pioneer, rancher and farmer who played a key role in developing Ventura County into one of the most productive counties in the state. At his death in 1908, an estate of several thousand acres was left to his ten children. The heirs kept the estate intact and incorporated under the name D. McGrath Estate.

The D. McGrath Estate Dairy was an award-winning dairy not only in Ventura County, but throughout California. In 1932, it had grown into the third largest dairy

in the state. Only Adohr and Jessup, both located in Los Angeles, were larger. Adohr had not yet moved to Ventura County. The D. McGrath Dairy had 739 cows and was located in Oxnard.



Camarillo Ranch Dairy Exhibit 2014

Chase Brothers Dairy

Wolff Road and Fifth Street, Oxnard

Begun during the Great Depression by brothers Glywn and Warren, Chase Bros. Dairy started with just a few cows. The brothers quickly realized the secret to success was breeding better cows. They raised all their heifer calves and built a herd of more than 1,200 high-producing Holsteins.

Because few people had refrigerators in the early days, Chase made as many as three deliveries per day to homes. Gas rationing during World War II changed the delivery schedules to every other day. In addition to home delivery routes, Chase Bros. opened a cash-and-carry store at East Fifth Street and Rice Road in 1959.

Chase also operated an egg business. The dairy and poultry farm was located between the Oxnard Air force Base (present day Camarillo Airport) and Point Mugu. Slowly Chase Bros. acquired other local dairies. Chase made certain that the outgoing dairies would end their last days by helping them to fulfill orders under their own names and not that of Chase. The last of the county dairies, Chase Bros. Dairy closed its operation in the 1990s.



This ornate pattern was painted throughout the creamery ceiling at Billiwhack

Billiwhack Stock Farm

Aliso Canyon, Santa Paula

Billiwhack was established in 1923 by August Rubel, who made his fortune in the Baldwin Hills oil wells and gold mines of Randsberg. He later sold the dairy and purchased Rancho Camulos. Under the Fratkin Brothers, Ben and Sam, Billiwhack became the show place where students, from the University of California at Davis, came to observe the efficient dairy operations and families spent the day at the popular tourist spot.

Among other things they saw pampered cows, tiled stalls and decoratively painted ceilings. In the 1920s Billiwhack's motto was "Your Milk Twice a Day on Ice All the Way."

Valentine Dairy on Ventura Avenue was owned by the Fratkin family who had also owned Billiwhack during its heyday. Valentine Dairy had a popular malt shop. The name honors a family member whose birthday was on Valentine's Day.

Also related to Billiwhack is **Golden Top Dairy** which is named for the rich, golden cream at the top of the milk bottle. Billiwhack's business manager, William Schwindt, started Golden Top with his brothers. Golden Top put Ventura County in international news on April 21, 1969 when the Golden Quads were born. They were three heifers and one cantankerous little bull. All four survived. Golden Top cows grazed on Vanoni Ranch land. That area would become a golf course in Saticoy. Nearby dairy neighbors were Poinsettia and Giacomuzzi Dairy.

Innovation was important in dairying. Golden Top was the first to have a propane cooling system in their trucks. As a way of thanking markets and customers for their support, every Saturday, William Schwindt's wife and daughter, Jean, shopped at every market that carried Golden Top products. Jean, dated Adolfo Camarillo's grandson, Gerald FitzGerald.



Camarillo Ranch Dairy Exhibit 2014

Billiwhack Stock Farm and Golden Top Farm are featured on the third and fourth shelves



Camarillo Ranch Dairy Exhibit 2014

Giacopuzzi Dairy

Vineyard Road, El Rio

Antonio Giacopuzzi along with his sons, Mario and Guido, came from Italy with a dream of farming. They established the family dairy in Canoga Park in 1924 with ten acres that expanded to 300. They grew the alfalfa for their herd. All the milking was done by hand. Urbanization caused the family to relocate the dairy. Mario built the dairy and creamery on Vineyard Avenue in 1961. His wife designed the bottle logo. The popular Giacopuzzi “Cash and Carry” and “Drive Thru-Dairy Store” made purchasing of dairy products fast and easy when home delivery service was phasing out.

Growing up on a dairy farm influenced two members of the Giacopuzzi family to become large animal veterinarians. They cared for the Adohr herd and the Camarillo White Horses.

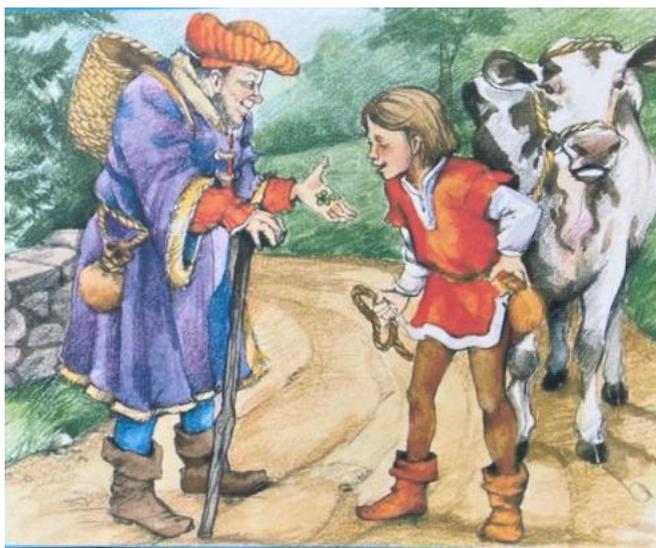
The Family Cow

Some dairies, such as Sanitary Dairy in Fillmore, began with very small herds. They bought backyard cows to assure they would have customers.

Much like the famous children's tale, "Jack and the Beanstalk," some family dairies remained independent. For Jack and his mother, owning a cow offered a way to supplement their farm income. The milk gave them a source of protein. Extra milk and butter could be sold. Many farmers had a family cow.

Humorist Will Rogers reflected on this common practice. When Rogers learned that his friend and co-star, Joel McCrea had purchased a ranch in the Santa Rosa Valley, Rogers said "I won't worry about you now. If you don't make it in the movin' picture business, I know at least you'll always eat. You can buy a cow and grow some vegetables if you have to. Joel McCrea, the famous film star and rancher did have a cow which supplied milk for the ranch needs. He also had a garden.

Dairy history is really the tale of families and their cows. The early morning clinking of milk bottles is now a distant memory. The empty milk bottles are silent reminders of that once remarkable time in Ventura County.



Jack and the Bean Stalk



David Burrows and Money

Money's Sleepover at Chase Bros. Dairy
by
Barbara Burrows

I will start with Money, the horse.

Dave always loved animals. We had a backyard full of them at one time or another. He raised chickens and rabbits. One day I mentioned this to my doctor and told him I was a city girl and would not eat the eggs, let alone the chicken and rabbit. He told me, "if I was not going to eat them, to bring him some eggs, they are fresher then the ones you get in stores."

Back to Money. We had a man who worked for us and told Dave about this horse that needed a home. She was boarded off of Channel Islands and Ventura

Boulevard. So one afternoon around 4:00 he decided to go take a look at her. Then he decided to ride her home. Bareback! He got to Five Points and 101 Highway at the business hour and stopped traffic until he could get Money across the highway. He got as far as the Chase Brothers small store on Fifth and Rice Roads. He knew Hal Lewis, Manager of Chase Dairy, and asked him if he could leave Money at the dairy for the night and he could make arrangements for a horse trailer.

I cannot repeat the lecture that Hal gave Dave. Hal was a real horse fan. I think Hal had a horse trailer and we brought Money to her new home. Dave had already built the barn and fenced off the top level of our property so Money was in seven heaven at her new home.

This was our second horse back there, plus 2 pigs and a lamb. Not all at the same time. Just the pigs and lamb. Our son Phil and his two friends had a project. One morning as I was doing my dishes I looked out of the window and there was Money watching me through the window. I called Dave and told him (nicely) he best get home before Money was in the front yard. She was a good, calm and gentle horse. The kids and Dave had loads of fun with her. Later she gave birth to a cute pinto colt.

Money never had another sleepover at Chase Bros. Dairy!



David Burrows and Money

The Joe Lee Schrader Milk Bottle Collection
at
The Camarillo Ranch

After visiting our Ventura County dairy exhibit, the Joe Lee Schrader Family donated an assortment of rare and unique Ventura County milk bottles to the Camarillo Ranch in 2014. Joe Lee Schrader had collected milk bottles for over 40 years.

Three generations of the Schrader family worked at Chase Bros. Dairy.



Gary, Joe Lee and George Schrader

Do you have a dairy story that you'd like to share? Please contact Karin Farrin!
Thank you!

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