

by Katheryn F. Fuller, Deputy Historian

When I was a small child, my grandfather, Fred Freeman, had a small milk route in Edwards village, and supplied bottled milk to Frandy Dulack, who had a meat market where the diner is now. I rode with Grandpa on the milk wagon one day when he delivered the milk on Island Steet before climbing Eastman Hill. There may have been other customers, but those few houses are the only ones I remember. He had a wooden box in the front of the milk wagon with an assortment of milk pails, one or two quart in size, made of gray enamel, or blue and white enamel. The customers had matching sets of these which were on a telephone pole at one house, to be replaced with a full pail, or at the next place it was a box on a post which held the pail, and so on for the other customers. He knew each one's pail; it was a very personal service, but he didn't have to disembark from the wagon; he simply pulled up to the waiting empty pail. He sold tickets that said "One quart - F. B. Freeman". They were stamp size of light blue cardboard so that customers didn't have to leave change. The bottled milk was delivered in orange crates with newspapers between the bottles. Grandma filled the bottles with a pitcher and slipped the caps on by hand.

In the mid-twenties, my father, Oswald Freeman, bought a milk route from George Soper. At first it was a very small operation; our dairy supplied the milk, Mother washed the bottles at the kitchen sink, boiled them in the washboiler on the kitchen stove, fished them out of the boiling water with an S-shaped heavy copper wire, filled them with a pitcher, and capped them by hand. Trixie, our gray horse, pulled the milk wagon in summer and the sleigh in winter for delivery. My mother told of their great disappointment on the first day of business when they had 100 quarts of milk packed in orange crates, and sold only 50 bottles.

Gradually the business grew to include the mines- there were families "on the hill" and "by the creek", as well as beyond the cave-in. The Inn was still operating in the twenties, and the company houses for management were all full. In the summer there was a route to Trout lake, supplying fresh vegetables, fruit, and eggs as well as milk and cream. Wanakena Ranger School phoned in their orders, and picked them up once or twice each week.

By that time there was a bottler of sorts set up on the back porch. It was a square vat with four little openings on the front side. Four levers opened the taps, and I placed four bottles under the taps, pulled down the levers until the bottles were full, capped them and set up four more bottles. It worked fairly well on quarts, but the pints had to be lined up precisely. It was a rather crude arrangement, but an improvement over the two-quart pitcher. The drawback was that the back porch was frigid in winter, in spite of the heavy canvas covering the open sides.

Soon our '24 Chevy touring car was converted to a small delivery truck, and then bigger changes were demanded. The state mandated a steam boiler for proper sterilization. Obviously, the kitchen and back porch were outdated, and, about 1926-27, my father contracted with Elmer Payne to build a new milkhouse, grander than any other milkhouse in Edwards. The ground floor had a boiler room, and a bottling room with a walk-in cooler and cream separator. The new bottler had angle iron guides for the milk crates, and a crate full of empties was filled with three operations. A hand-operated capper meant that we no longer touched the caps by hand. It was a big improvement, but it was still a cold job on a winter morning. The second floor of the building had room for a truck, car, and other storage. The milk was upgraded to Grade A. By that time we were buying milk from other farmers to supply the extended route. High school boys worked part time washing bottles and doing other chores. Two of them remembered were Wells Patterson and Carlton Burnett.

In 1929 my father became ill. His uncle, Arthur Freeman, filled in for several months, and after struggling for more than a year to keep the business, my father sold both farm and business to E. J. Williams in November 1930.

In 1940 Williams was ready to sell it back. His wife had died, his boys were in the service or moved away, and help was hard to get. While he was there, the village water line had been extended to the farm so the well and the big spring in the meadow were no longer vital. In 1937 the state had demanded pasteurization, and the pasteurizer was added to the equipment. There was some grumbling among the customers who didn't like the taste of pasteurized milk, but except for the ones who bought milk directly from farmers, they all soon became accustomed to the change.

And so, in 1940, the Freemans were back at Sunnyside. The next few years were a time of expansion as routes were added. In 1941 the Hermon route was purchased from Leonard Ells, and later DeGrasse and Russell were added, purchased from a man named Backus. Then Star Lake, Fine, Oswegatchie, and Wanakena were added from Guy Wood. Still later, the Hockey route in Gouverneur was acquired. Sometime along the line, Balmat was added. Improvements were made in the plant also. In 1941 a new walk-in cooler was built. In 1942 a new automatic bottle washer was installed, and in 1943, a dump station, can washer, and cottage cheese vat were installed on the second floor.



The ca.1926 milk plant being refurbished in 1948

During these war years help was scarce, and for a time a conscientious objector from Illinois worked in the plant. My younger brother, Lellan, worked before and after school - and missed school on numerous occasions. By the end of the war, my father was unable to take care of the business and farm, and after selling the cattle and farm machinery, sold the business to Randall and Boni. They used the same buildings and equipment for a year or so, before building the dairy processing plant on Trout Lake Street, beyond the schoolhouse.

Some of the farmers who supplied milk were Charlie Cooper, Harrison Lumley, Bob McFerran, Ralph Perry, Willis Soper, Ralph Ingraham, Wally Poole, Bill Patterson, and Tom Brayton (who lived in the brick house).

Some of the people (not already mentioned), who worked in the plant, were Harrison Lumley, Mohan Porter, Pierce Evans, Keith Hickok, Wayne Fuller, and Earl Noble.