

## HISTORY FROM OHA

## Got Milk?

## The story of the Onondaga County Milk Association

■ BY KAREN Y. COONEY

Milk and milk products — how they are processed and delivered — have undergone many changes since the late 19th century. Up until 1871, most consumers received their milk through home deliveries made by milk peddlers who traveled dozens of delivery routes. At that time, anyone could become a milk peddler. The job simply required a dip can, a horse and wagon, and a steady supply of milk.

Milk was picked up from the dairy farm in 40-quart cans. Upon arrival at the customer's location, the peddler would fill his 8-quart dip can from the larger can and dispense the milk into the customer's own containers. Payment was just left on the doorstep.

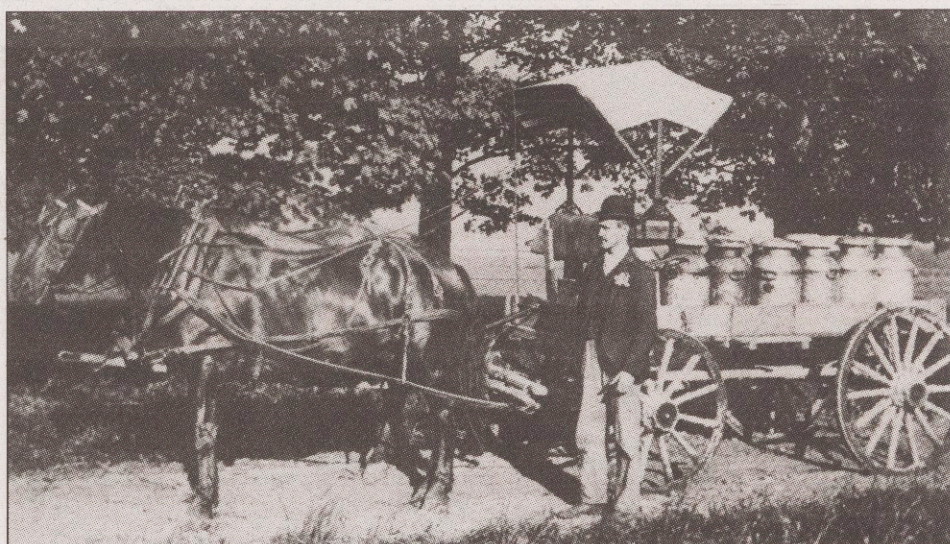
During the latter part of the 1800s, the daily milk supply of between 6,000 and 8,000 quarts for the city of Syracuse was furnished by 1,200 cows owned by 40 different dairy farms. Each of the numerous routes required 40 separate horse and wagon teams at an annual cost of \$1,200 to \$1,500 per route. In 1872, a group of local dairy farmers gathered to form an association called the Onondaga County Milk Association (OCMA). The premise of the organization was to bring together the producer and the consumer, eliminating the extra expenses associated with a middleman — the milk peddler. The dairy farmer had the option of buying stock in the new association or just selling his milk outright to OCMA. The association determined that it

could be more efficient with fewer teams, thus passing the cost savings on to the consumer. Despite some obstacles, OCMA eventually became the best run association of its kind in the country.

OCMA purchased the Park Hotel site, located at 322 E. Fayette St. in Syracuse, for use as its main headquarters. The stable and yard with barns and a blacksmith shop were located behind the hotel and were large enough to accommodate the horses, delivery wagons, and sleighs. The business offices were located on the first floor along with a space that was leased to a barbershop. The upper floors served as a boarding house for nine employee families.

The basement area had sufficient space to contain the ice-water tanks for milk-cooling purposes. It also was used to house a 6 horsepower engine and boiler that generated enough steam to properly wash and sterilize milk cans and power the churns to turn any leftover milk into ice cream, butter (400 pounds a day), and cheese products (800 pounds a day). Immense freezers with large vats of ice were installed to keep those products fresh for sale on the premises or sent into neighboring towns for fairs and parties.

The ice came from the association's private ice house located along the Erie Canal. Every effort was made to ensure that all the products were properly processed and maintained to avoid contamination. In 1875, an additional building was erected at the cost of \$17,000 to handle the increasing business. The association



## ONONDAGA COUNTY MILK ASS'N

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opened an ice cream parlor and "lunch parlor" to serve the general public in 1889. On warm days to quench their thirst, patrons could purchase two large glasses of buttermilk for the huge sum of 5 cents.

At the height of the business in 1891, more than 5 million quarts of milk were handled annually. OCMA employed 43 people, and owned

40 horses and 25 wagons. In 1912, however, after 40 years of business, the association was forced to close its doors due to bankruptcy. ■

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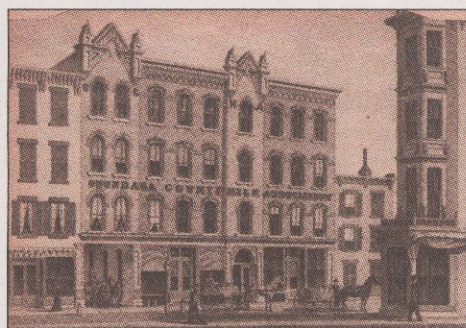
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