

BRIGHTON AREA FARMERS: FROM BEEF TO DAIRY c. 1900

The establishment of the Borden's Condensed Milk Factory in Howell just before the turn of the century marked the beginning of a new era in Livingston County.

Shorthorn beef had become a major source of income. The railroad enabled the farmer to ship his product cheaply and easily. In addition to the beef cattle a farmer often had a herd of Jerseys, because of the high butter fat content of the milk. After separating out the cream the skim milk was often fed to calves and pigs. The cream was churned into butter and traded in town for groceries or sold. Now with a handy, ready market for milk the cattle one saw in the fields changed from beef to the black and white Holstein milk producer.

Enterprising men traveled to Holland, in the old country, and brought back thoroughbred, registered Holstein cattle with a reputation as milk producers. The bulls were cross bred with local cattle and in a few years the county became known as the foremost market for Holstein cattle. Buyers from all over the U.S. came to buy cows and bulls at the sales arena in Howell.

The farmer now had a nearby market for surplus cows. Several neighbors combined their saleable stock and drove them to the market; five or six men herding them along the way and out of other farmers' fields.

The Registered Holstein Breeders Association held regular auctions. Out of state buyers made their selections from approximately 100 head, paying up to \$1200/\$1500 each; averaging \$400/\$500. A very good price in those days. Bill Pless' Uncle Freeman Fishbeck was known as a pedigree expert of Holstein and Shorthorn cattle. Buyers often requested his aid in locating and selecting good buys.

To convert to dairy farming involved many changes. Farmers found that besides the different breed of animals they also needed to convert their farms; the method of farming; their equipment. The very manner in which they had been conducting their enterprise was altered. In addition, the procedure in connection with the cooling and storing of milk and the manner of shipment of the product called for changes.

Whole milk, a bulky product, presented a problem: how to get the milk from the farm, 8-10 miles out in the country, to the factory in Howell? Milk routes stretching in every direction from the factory were established and a new business came into existence. (Compiled by Marieanna Bair from Bill Pless' "Michigan Memorabilia". to be continued.)

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