

Story of Wallacetown Cheese Factory Told in Paper by Mrs. Ermyn Lucas

At the April meeting of Wallacetown Women's Institute, the following interesting history of Wallacetown and particularly a cheese factory there was given by Mrs. Ermyn Lucas.

In the year 1813 a man arrived who saw possibilities in even this forbidding looking forest land and decided to make it his home. In that year, 50 acres, the front part of Lot 11, Con. 8, part of what is now Stewart Pearce's farm, was sold by Colonel Talbot to Charles Benedict. He remained 10 or 12 years and made the first clearance on the primeval forest on the present site of the village.

In 1847 the first shoemaker, Donald McTavish, opened shop, later adding a few groceries. In the early days the village was known as Frogtown; it probably was quite appropriate as there were so many pools and swamps around. This name did not meet with the approval of residents and they decided to choose a more dignified name. Mr. McTavish, who set up the first shop, decided on Oakville and had a sign painted and placed above his shop door, signifying that he was doing business. Previous to this in 1833, Donald Currie, a native of Argyleshire, Scotland, bought several lots on the north side of Talbot Street and also purchased 50 acres on the south side of the street.

There were several Scottish residents who wished to name the town for their national hero, Sir William Wallace. The matter was referred to Mr. Currie, who was highly respected and influential in the community and his decision was in favor of the name, "Wallacetown." Incidentally, this same Mr. Currie was the man after whom Currie Road, the road between Wallacetown and Dutton, was named.

In 1871, the following account was taken from a dairy magazine: Wallacetown, a village in the township of Dunwich, County of Elgin, 18 miles from St. Thomas, mail daily, population about 400.

There were three hotels, several stores, a druggist, a baker, seven shoemakers, seven wagonmakers, seven carpenters, a photographer, three coopers, two tailors, two doctors, a dentist, one livery stable, a joiner, an auctioneer, a fruit agent and a cheese factory run by John S. Pearce.

This is where my story begins, but I would like to add to the above. Later there were tinshops, cabinet makers, weaving shops, harness shops, woolen mills, and even a millinery shop owned and run by a dear elderly lady by the name of Miss McCrank in a shop next door to the present post office.

Cheese Factory Built

The first cheese factory was built on the farm of John Pearce, one of the early Talbot settlers, about half way between John S. Pearce's farm and that of John E. Pearce, in the year 1865. The son of John Pearce managed the factory. My father (Alvro Keillor) was born and raised in Tyrconnell and at the age of nine years went to work in this

factory in the summers, and continued to do so until he grew up to be a young man.

A number of years later, the equipment from this factory was moved to Wallacetown, as it was more central. It was located in a large building directly on the corner of Pearce St. and Talbot St., which had originally been a lodge hall. This was a very large two-storey building where the making of cheese was carried out on the lower floor, and upper rooms used as living quarters for the cheesemaker. The days were very long and it was necessary to be there at all times.

The upper rooms were partially finished off. On the south end were one room for a kitchen, with two smaller ones on each side for bedrooms. One other room with a smaller room off was on the north end of the building and in between was a huge barn-like structure with large beams overhead, that later had heavy rope thrown over for a grand swing for neighborhood children to play. There were no windows in this barracks; just a huge sky-light in the roof.

Father continued to make cheese for Mr. Pearce for a few years until he sold the factory to Robert McMillan, Dutton, and Mr. Pearce moved to London where he bought a seed and grain store. In 1880, my father married my mother and she helped dad in the factory for a number of years, until the boys got some size and could help. I remember seeing my mother with a small baby that she would lay on a quilt in an empty vat while she helped dad "dip the curd" as we called it. It was the time when curd was ripe and had to be dipped with scoops from vats into a huge sink to let the whey run off. A very hot job it was. I can see the perspiration running off their faces at the hot noon hour.

Keillors Buy Factory

A few years later, dad bought the factory from Mr. McMillan and had the building moved from the corner to the boundary line on the east, next to the Catholic Church property, but at that time there was a nice orchard there and a small house with lilacs surrounding it. It was the home of the "Gilleys", one of the early families in Wallacetown.

Moving the building made it much more convenient for patrons to drive in off Talbot St. to the weigh stand and have their milk weighed and continue on around the curve to the whey stand for their whey and out the gate to Pearce St. Dad put a good picket fence around the property with two large gates that we had to be particular about keeping shut in the evenings, as the townspeople usually owned a cow, or cows, and they were allowed to roam the streets after the evening milking. So, woe to those that left a gate open — no garden in the morning.

At this time, dad also made a change in the upper rooms where we lived. That was the home of the Keillor family until we each went to homes of our own.

(Continued next week)

Operating Wallacetown Cheese Factory Was Family Affair for Keillors

Following is the second installment of a paper given at a meeting of Wallacetown Women's Institute on the cheese factory which was built at Wallacetown in 1865. The paper was prepared by Mrs. Ermyn Lucas, whose father, Alvro Keillor, operated the factory for several years.

Running a cheese factory was a family affair; everybody had a job to do. Dad bought a dozen cows that we kept in a small barn in the winter but took them to pasture on the Gunn farm at the edge of Wallacetown, where the public school now stands. In those days the farmers did not keep many cows. Dad tried to encourage them to get more to increase their income as well as his own. It was at this time a great deal was being said about silos to increase milk flow. That year, John L. Pearce and dad each built a silo, the first ones in the township. Mr. Pearce built his circular as was recommended, but father made a high, square one, double boarded and painted inside with tar. The neighbors weren't too happy about it as it shut off their view.

We did not keep the cows very long as it bothered the neighbors, but father felt it did help to show farmers what could be done. The silo was turned into an ice house as it was necessary to keep ice in the curing room in the summer to keep the cheese cool while in the curing stage.

A few years later, he again changed the silo. This time, into a horse stable, and we kept horses with light wagons, which had low platforms to bring milk to the factory, when my two older brothers were big enough to run a route. Up at 5 a.m., dad had the horses hitched and ready with return cans of whey for the farmers, to be left at their milk stand and pick up their cans of milk and home again, had their breakfast and off to high school, and walked at that. No bicycles then.

Early Start

The days started very early in this business. Every morning exactly at 5:30, Malcolm Blue (Clarence's father) and his brother, Dan Blue, would drive in with their can of milk and deposit at the weighstand and get their whey and be back home for breakfast. One could set the clock by these early risers. Then there were the Pearces (three families), the Dockers, the Gows, the McKillops and many, many others that brought their milk direct from farm to factory. Others from a distance were brought in by men hired for the purpose. Tremum Shipley (Earl's grandfather) brought milk from Eagle way, Billie Patterson from Hogg Street West, Peter Cameron, a grand old gentleman, brought neighbors' milk from Clay Street West; Thomas Woodbridge brought a big load from Shackleton Street West; Jack Galbraith from Shackleton Street East; Jonah Page from Lake Road West; Charles Bradt (Harry's grandfather) from Lake Road East, and last but not least, James Small (Clarence's father) brought twelve or fifteen cans with a team of horses from Concessions 9 and 10 and Back Street (now Highway 3). It was usually 9:30 before the milk was all in and operations began inside the factory.

Making cheese wasn't all sunshine; we had our troubles, too. One thing, I remember quite well, was, human nature being what it

is, some people could not resist the temptation to water their milk. You know what I mean, pour a pail of water into the can of milk to make it add up. Well, everyone knows you can't make cheese out of water; it looks pretty blue, and dad accused one patron of doing that, and, oh my! They were so offended. Dad had no way of proving it at that time and the accused party went to court over it.

All that was over in a few years when the Babcock tester came in. Every day each can of milk had to have a sample taken out and kept in a pint sealer with a preservative in it. At the end of the month a sample was again taken from the pint sealer and put in a machine with an acid and whirled around in the machine for several minutes and the fat would come to the top of the vial and measured with a small instrument and patrons were paid for their milk according to fat registered.

Dealing Out Whey

Another problem we had was the dealing out of whey which drains from the curd during process. And farmers did like to have this whey to feed their pigs. Whey was run off into a large tank with a platform over top and a pump inserted into the tank. Patrons would drive to the tank and pump up their share according to the quantity of milk they brought. But a number of patrons would bring in ¼ can of milk and pump up a full can of whey. Therefore, those at the last would have no whey left for them, and it annoyed them very much, and they complained about it. So my dad figured out by scale how many inches of whey they should have for their quantity of milk, and I was given that chore (how I hated it).

I was still going to public school and many mornings I would be late and have to stand in the corner, but father spoke to the teacher and all was well. So I took my rule (special one) and my sheets of paper that had previous day's weight of milk on. I had to climb up on the vehicle and measure the whey as it was pumped in a can and raise my hand for them to stop when they had their share. You guess at how many stopped when I raised my hand. They even laughed at me and kept pumping. I never forgot those people. But, I will say, some were very, very nice about it.

(Continued next week)

Wallacetown Creamery Becomes Extinct When Sold to New Dutton Operator

This is the third and final instalment of a history of Wallacetown Creamery and cheese factory presented in a paper delivered by Mrs. Irmyn Lucas at a meeting of Wallacetown Women's Institute.

The cheese making did not last the year 'round. The season was over early in November and did not open until spring. Dad spent the winter cutting wood for the furnace which ate up many, many cords for summer work. He always held an annual meeting with his patrons in the old town hall.

Town Hall

In case some of you won't know about the hall, it was situated directly across from the old school which stood for so many years. This is now the property and lovely home of the Martelles. It was on this ground called "The Commons" where bands of gypsies arrived in the spring to camp for a few days. It was a great day for the school youngsters. They would sit on the fence and watch the proceedings.

The hall was used also for business meetings, patent medicine concerts, literary society and debates. It was also the place to cast votes at election time and for dances. It also had a lock-up with its barred window and was used occasionally. It was later moved to the fair grounds to be used as a lunch hall.

Annual Report Presented

At this annual meeting in the hall, father gave his yearly report—how many pounds of cheese were made during the summer, and price of cheese sold. At that time it was 8, 8½, 9c a pound, the price paid to patrons, but retailed at the store for 15 cents.

At one of these meetings, the subject was brought up about cream separators that were just coming in, and the farmers thought there would be more money in cows if they made butter, and the matter was voted on. The patrons won out. Dad was always anxious to please his patrons, so he went to Strathroy Dairy School that winter and took a course in butter-making, and that spring bought a churn and other necessities to make butter. The milk vats could still be used to hold cream, so instead of a cheese factory, the old building was now a creamery.

It did away with so many people drawing cream to the factory, as the cream had to be tested and weighed at the farm, and everybody's cream dumped into one large

can. Cream was collected less often than milk, once a week in the winter, more often in summer. The family did the gathering and also bought farmers' eggs at the same time. Dad used a light democrat with a single horse to gather. Later, he bought a Ford car, which the boys called "Buttermilk Special."

Dutton Creamery Built

It was about 1914 that Mr. Downham from Strathroy built a new creamery in Dutton. Dad was a little worried because he felt there was not room enough for two creameries in the township and we were so close to the lake. The new owner wanted dad to split the territory at Clay Street and they would take Hogg Street. So it ended up that dad sold the Wallacetown Creamery to the newcomer. The next year dad built a hen house and went into chickens on a small scale and liked it. I think it was the following year that one of the brothers obtained his B.S.A. at Guelph and came home, set up an incubator and equipment in the old factory rooms, and the "Keillor Hatchery" was born. Dad carried on for a few years with the hens, but was getting very tired, and at the age of 80 years passed on to his reward.

Later on, the hatchery closed down as there were so many hatcheries popping up in surrounding places, and the old cheese factory stood silent for a number of years. Now, a new industry has been set up. I wish it every success. As Sir Arthur Ford says in his articles, "So the world wags on."

I would like to add, there is a poem in one of the old public school readers that begins: "Among the beautiful pictures that hang on memory's wall, is one of the dim old forest, that seemeth best of all," but to me the memories of the old cheese factory and the family there that grew up together, worked together, played together, dreamed dreams together "seemeth best of all." I remember, too, the wonderfully kind neighbors and the little white Methodist Church where we all went to Sunday School and church together.

WALLACETOWN CHEESE FACTORY ABOUT YEAR 1900

MR. ALVARO KEILLOR
OWNER AND OPERATOR
with part of family
The driver of team
at the weigh stand
was Mr. James Small
who for years
gathered milk from
neighboring farms
and delivered
to this factory



ALVARO KEILLOR
AND
ADA GREEN in
their wedding finery
in November 17 - 1880

The first cheese factory in this district was built by MR. J. S. PEARCE on PEARCE FARM in 1865. Later MR. PEARCE started making cheese in WALLACETOWN. About 1883 ALVARO KEILLOR bought factory which was then situated on corner of above lot and he had it moved over to present place to provide more space. MR. KEILLOR continued to make cheese for many years until advent of cream separators and his patrons asked for a change. He took a short course at Strathroy and shortly after changed his cheese equipment to that of making butter. In 1915 he sold the business to R. E. FRASER, of Dutton Creamery. MR. KEILLOR with his son Stanley went into poultry raising and converted building into Chick Hatchery. MR. KEILLOR married ADA GREEN in 1880 and made their home and raised their family in rooms above factory.



ANNIE McINTYRE
NELLIE CLAY [OPERATORS]

It was here also that WALLACETOWN AND LAKE SHORE TELEPHONE Co. set up first switch board in WALLACETOWN in 1905 operated by KEILLOR family; until year 1911 when new switchboard was set up in DR. CRANE'S office, north of PRESBYTERIAN Church and still continues there in Company's name.

The third annual meeting of the Wallace Town and Lake Shore Telephone Company was held in the council chamber of the town hall. All the officers were unanimously elected for 1908 as follows: Thos. Lunn, president; Jas. Watkins, vice-president; Dr. J. W. Crane, secretary - treasurer; directors, Geo. Braddon and John Steele.

WALLACETOWN CHEESE FACTORY

ABOUT YEAR 1900

