Our Times

Volume 5 Issue 2 THE PEOPLE, HISTORY, AND CULTURE OF LOGAN COUNTY, ILLINOIS Summer 2000

Milk and Eggs

Which Came First—the Chicken Or the Egg? Sieb's Hatcheries, Inc.

One April evening in 1930, a passenger on the Lincoln Limited who peered out of the window at Lincoln's Chicago and Alton station would have witnessed quite a scene. Scrambling railroad workers, an overturned express cart, open cardboard boxes—and baby chicks everywhere.

This shipment of several thousand chicks from Sieb's Hatchery wasn't going as smoothly as usual. The train had started up unexpectedly, causing an express cart loaded with chicks to roll into it and overturn on the platform.

Before long, however, the train crew had scooped up the chicks that had fallen under the train, workers had tucked the scattered chicks safely back into their boxes, and another batch of baby chicks was on its way.

In its heyday, Sieb's Hatcheries sold more than one million baby chicks a month and shipped day-old chicks to every state east of the Rockies. Because a baby chick could live for 72 hours on the remnant of yoke left in its body, it was the perfect little traveler, requiring neither food nor water.

All those chicks, riding in the express cars of the passenger trains and wreaking havoc with the railroad's schedule by their sheer numbers, all those catalogs for a mailing list of 700,000 customers—they're the reason Lincoln's post office was classified first class (the class of post offices that brought in the greatest revenue).

Filling orders at Sieb's Hatcheries. George Janet, Sr. is at left front. Courtesy Paul Dumser.

Begun in Albert Sieb's basement in Lincoln in 1914, the hatchery soon expanded to include wooden buildings behind the house, and "kind of like Topsy," says Paul Dumser, "they just grew." Paul's father and mother, Frank and Edna, purchased a half interest in the hatchery in 1924, buying out silent partner Frank Atlass. In 1938, they bought out Albert Sieb.

When Frank Dumser formed a corporation in 1939, employees Paul Dumser, Harold Perry, Estill Crews, Thurston Redfairn, and Carl Heinzel became owners, too. Later, Harold (Buck) Wise owned stock, as well.

Eventually, Sieb's owned almost the entire block surrounding the brick building that still stands on Butler Street. Some incubators were located in the building that had been the first home of Armour Creameries (corner of Pulaski and Hamilton Streets), and the company had hatcheries at McLean, Mt. Pulaski, Mason City, Havana, and Maroa.

Stores in other towns sold feed and baby chicks and served as pickup points for eggs during the season, which was January through August.

(Continued on page 2)

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The People, History, and Culture of Logan County, Illinois

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Publisher's Notes

There was a time when the strata of life were construed from the dairy products consumed. Pigs got skim milk. Children put whole milk on their porridge. Dad sipped buttermilk on a hot Friday night. The boss laced his coffee with half-and-half. The queen, one suspected, drowned her raspberries in Devonshire cream. Of course, farmers defied this simple social stratification; they could avail themselves of all of Bossy's fruits.

Butter may have been the great equalizer. Everybody buttered everything. Thick globs of rich yellow butter filled the pond you pressed into your mashed potatoes with your spoon. Slices from hard sticks of cold butter made a funny face on morning toast. Queasy stomachs were soothed by oily butter spotted with nutmeg and cinnamon swimming in a warm bowl of milk toast. Bread and butter. Bread and jam (butter assumed).

Why does your bread always fall butter-side down? Couldn't you choke the kid who is always buttering up the teacher? Are you shrewd enough to butter your bread on both sides?

My dairy memories are fonder than my poultry memories. In the spring we bought chicks, and one year all of mine died of some weird disease, except for three scrawny Leghorn roosters that finished dead last in their class at the county fair. In good years, most of the chicks survived, except for the little yellow smudges that you removed from the brooder when they got trampled by their brothers and sisters. And the dumb ones that shivered beyond the warmth of the heat lamp.

When chicks survived and came of age, the fun began. Maybe I should be ashamed to admit it, but boys delighted in wringing the necks of those stupid fryers. We chased them around the chicken house, hooked their legs with a looped wire, stuck their heads under a metal fence post, and pulled their feet. We weren't supposed to let them flop around with their bloody, naked necks thrashing about, because the meat could bruise. But once in a while one got away . . . and entertained us.

The women had the nasty job—immersing the dead birds in boiling water, plucking the feathers, and singeing the pinfeathers. What a sick odor! In sixth grade I threw away every egg salad sandwich my mother packed in my lunch box because every time I pealed back the bread I was reminded of the gross smell of plucked, singed chickens. Sorry, Mom.

Now for a happy memory. We had a black rooster that ruled the yard—not the barnyard, but the yard. He strutted around the house, attacking anything under four feet in height. My little brother was 3 foot 6 inches. Happy memory. **SR**

(Continued from page 1)

Eggs from 26 different breeds and varieties of chickens—everything from Buff Orpingtons to Leghorns—arrived at Sieb's from Frank Dumser's farm and the hatchery's 1,200 flock owners.

Nadine and Marshall Coffey were flock owners. They bought three or four hundred chicks in the early spring, feeding them mash and keeping them warm under lights, being careful so they wouldn't pile up and smother.

In the fall, they moved the chickens from the brooder house. "We'd carry them at night by their feet to the big hen house, hanging upside down, and they'd be squawking," says Nadine. "My daughter [Donna Coffey Cross]—she'd be laughing because she thought that was so funny."

Also in the fall, men from Sieb's would cull the flock: checking the hens to see which were large enough to be layers, taking blood samples from every bird to check for pullorum, and removing all but the best roosters.

Birds that didn't come up to the specifications in the *Standard of Perfection,* says Paul Dumser, would be put into coops and taken off the farm. If the farmer had bought straight-run chicks (both male and female), the extra roosters would be taken to Armour's poultry processing plant to be sold.

Often Carl Heinzel would do the culling of flocks; his wife, Geraldine Hopp Heinzel, recalls that "he liked chickens, and he didn't treat them roughly."

Farmers relied on Carl to diagnose their chickens' health problems and prescribe a course of treatment.

While the little chicks were growing, Nadine Coffey was gathering eggs from the older hens and storing them in the basement. On Friday nights, the Coffeys took the clean and graded eggs in wooden crates to Sieb's, where they were paid a premium above the market price, before going to Lucas and Farmer to buy groceries.

The hatchery provided a tin template with a hole in it. Eggs had to be too large to pass through that hole to be acceptable; smaller eggs, the Coffeys

Sieb's Printing

Sieb's used to have their mailings printed by Kable Brothers Company in Mount Morris, Illinois, but on those occasions when the hatchery overproduced, it was necessary to get advertising material out quickly. So Frank Dumser decided Sieb's needed its own press.

Local printer Tom Seggelke says that Sieb's did an outstanding job of both letterpress and offset printing. The printing operation was sold to Bob Wade.

scrambled or sold to people who lived in town.

Farmers who were not flock owners for Sieb's also sold their eggs to the hatchery. Florence Hubbard weighed her eggs on a little scale; those that were too small for Sieb's, she sold to Krotz's grocery store on North Kickapoo Street.

Once they arrived at the hatchery, the eggs were placed by hand in 132-egg trays. The trays were put in the incubators, where they were turned twice a day to exercise the embryos and keep them from sticking to the shells.

The chicks hatched twice a week, and those days were filled with activity: taking chicks from the incubators, sexing them, placing them in cartons, tying the cartons and placing stamps on them, dumping and cleaning the incubators. At peak times, 80 people worked at the hatchery.

"When those chicks came out of those incubators, you had to have a box to put them in," remembers Paul Dumser, so making boxes was another big job. Between hatches, employees unloaded freight cars containing everything from rock salt to hard coal to Purina feed.

During the war years, the hatchery business was good. "Meat was reserved for the armed forces, and you had to know a senator to buy a steak," says Paul. As a result, "everybody and his brother raised chickens."

Wartime did bring a few complications. When Frank Dumser wanted to build a new building, everyone told him, "You can't get lumber, Dumser."

But he did. He bought the whole lot of 2 x 12s from a lumberyard at Beason, shipped in lumber from California, and set to work.

The contractors had the framing up and were putting the sheathing on the roof—Frank was throwing down the sheathing and not letting them "rest a minute," according to Paul—when somebody said, "Who's that guy think he is, working in a business suit!" "That was Dad," says Paul. He often worked in a suit—even fished in one.

Getting local people to accept the Japanese-Americans who came in 1944 to do the sexing of the chicks was a problem. They were replacing hatchery employees who had been drafted, but Frank Dumser got phone calls threatening to burn his home and business, anyway.

When a Japanese-American named Bill Satow showed up at the Maple Club restaurant, he was hit in the face and knocked through a glass door.

One Friday night, a customer who had brought in eggs demanded to know whether it was true that the Japanese were working at Sieb's. Told that they were, he said, "I ain't ever bringing any more eggs in here!" He tore up his egg check and stalked out, leaving his 30 dozen eggs behind.

Finally, an official with the War Relocation Authority called a meeting to explain that sexers were almost impossible to find. The Japanese were American citizens who were helping provide much-needed food. After that, things quieted down.

And the Japanese-Americans *were* skillful. Wearing magnifying glasses, Paul Dumser could sex about seven or eight hundred chicks an hour; the Japanese-Americans could do about a thousand.

(Incidentally, the best male chicks were used for breeding; the rest were sold at a reduced price to be used as food.)

The end of the war brought its own challenges. In 1946, a railroad strike forced Sieb's to advertise the sale of 900,000 chicks ($90,000 worth) at sacrifice prices of $3, $4, and $5 per hundred.

As the universities encouraged farmers to "farm under the barn if you can get the tractor under it," says Paul, the hatchery business declined. Sieb's had filled orders as large as 47,000 chicks at a time; as business fell off, Paul used some of the incubator sections to build homes.

Sieb's Hatchery closed in 1972. ■

Traying eggs for the incubators at Sieb's Hatcheries. Courtesy Paul Dumser.

Don't Count Your Chickens . . .

Faye Perry Klemm laughs. "My sister taught me how to bake angel food cakes, so I went to [our] hatchery to get some eggs," she remembers. Seeing some, she picked up twelve, brought them into the house, and baked her cake.

Sometime later, her husband, Myrlin, walked into the house and asked, "Who took those eggs in that box out there?"

"I did. I baked a cake," Faye answered, innocently. "Why?"

"Those were pedigreed eggs that we were supposed to mail," laughs Faye. "I forget how much an egg they were. I had baked a cake with [them]."

Well, after all, Faye hadn't grown up on a farm. She learned about chickens and eggs after she married Myrlin, a farm boy who had lived and worked at O. F. Mittendorf's hatchery on Seventeenth Street. When Myrlin's father lost his sight in an accident, the young man returned home to run the farm, starting his own hatchery with Mr. Mittendorf's guidance and buying him out in 1921-22. Myrlin's brother Harold joined him in the business several years later.

Mr. Mittendorf's poultry farm dated to 1908, so Klemm Brothers Mapleside Poultry Farm and Hatchery had the second-oldest pedigreed line in the U.S.A.

At first, Myrlin had set up his incubators in the basement, candling the eggs with a flashlight to see whether they were fertile and throwing away those that didn't hatch. After three weeks, the hatch " came off," and the Klemms sold their Barred Rock chickens by the hundreds, both male and female, to farmers, who replaced their flocks every year.

When only Faye and Myrlin ran the farm, raising pedigreed chickens was pretty confining. The trapnests had to be run seven days a week, every hour on the hour from 7:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. Every hen wore an identifying band on her leg. When she walked into a trapnest, the nest dropped, trapping her there until one of the Klemms could check for an egg. If they found one, they would mark the time and date under the chicken's number on a chart.

At the end of the year, the charts showed which hens and roosters had produced the most eggs. By the time Mapleside Poultry Farm won the 1939-40 Illinois Egg-Laying Contest with a pen of pullets that averaged 230 eggs per bird in 51 weeks, breeders were concentrating more on progeny tests (family averages), as opposed to the records of individual birds. Still, individual records were kept, and the Klemms had the top producing bird in the contest—she had laid 304 eggs.

Faye hated checking the trapnests; she finally had to carry a stick, because the chickens would "take their claws and hit you . . . on the legs, and we wore silk stockings." Once in a while, when nobody was around, she wore a pair of Myrlin's old pants.

As breeders, the Klemms sold their fertilized eggs to other hatcheries that bought pedigreed eggs. In 1929, a setting of Barred Rock eggs even traveled across the Atlantic to a customer in Suffolk, England.

"Well, it was fun when we built our hatchery," says Faye. Over the big picture window in the office, where customers could watch workers taking baby chicks out of the incubators, Faye and Myrlin's son, Merton, had put up a sign that read "Maternity Ward."

When the Klemms began raising Leghorn chickens, the chicks needed to be sorted by sex. On hatching day, four Japanese-Americans would come down from Chicago to do the job. Faye would buy doughnuts and put the coffee on—ready to start processing the four to five thousand chicks.

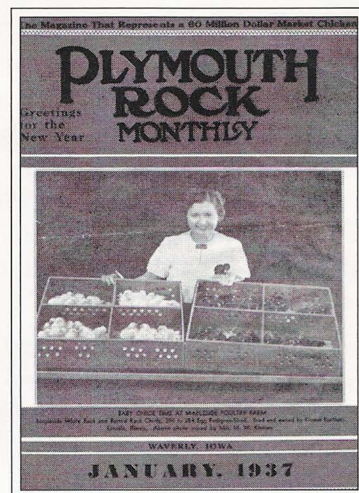
Once, when a group of little girls were watching the men examine the chickens, they asked, "What are they looking for, Mrs. Klemm?" Faye said, "They're looking to see whether they are a boy or a girl. They're looking to see whether they have a blue ribbon or a pink one."

Leghorns are very high strung, so Faye and three neighbor ladies debeaked the chickens so they wouldn't peck one another and dewinged them so they wouldn't fly into a corner and smother each other.

Combs were taken off birds that were going further north, and some birds were vaccinated before being put into trucks and sent on their way.

Low chicken prices finally drove farmers in this area, with their "expensive dirt," to stop raising chickens, Faye says.

In 1972, the remodeled hatchery became the sanctuary of the Second (later Jefferson Street) Christian Church. The incubators had been sold to a farm in Guatemala. ■



Faye Klemm. Courtesy F. Klemm.

Here Comes the Milkman!

Milk —among the most nutritious of foods—once carried a real risk of disease and even death.

So much so that in 1923, the Logan County Board hired a veterinarian to test cattle for tuberculosis. The state and federal governments paid two-thirds the value of any cow that had to be slaughtered.

Later that year, the Lincoln City Council passed an ordinance requiring that milk sold in the city be designated "raw," "certified" by the state, or "pasteurized." Persons selling raw milk had to show that their cows had been tested for TB.

No wonder Leslie Fullerton advertised in 1924 that his dairy's milk came from TB-tested cows. His brother Ray printed a copy of his dairy's state certificate in the *Lincoln Evening Courier* in 1927 and pronounced pasteurized milk "the only safe milk."

Herd testing and pasteurization pretty well wiped out both TB and brucellosis. The next hurdle was getting farmers on Grade A milk.

With Grade B milk, explains retired dairyman Ralph Hegele, farmers milked by hand, placing the milk can in a tank of cold water to cool it. So much of the milk soured.

Grade A milk, on the other hand, went directly from the milkers on the cows to the refrigerated coolers.

Ralph and Paul Hegele in 1942. Courtesy Ralph Hegele.

Changing over farms in the fifties "was a big process" says Warren Gallagher, former manager of the Leslie Fullerton Dairy, that required mechanical refrigeration and a separate building for milking. Eventually, the state required that Grade B milk be used only in manufacturing; it went to cheese plants.

Refrigerated milk on the farm at least meant dairies didn't have to pick up and process milk on Sundays. Still, maintaining his state license for Grade A kept Ralph Hegele busy testing his milk and dairy products. These chores were interspersed with visits from state inspectors.

Fortunately, Ralph says, he bought milk from "a good bunch of farmers." If, on a rainy day, he was making ice cream, "I'd give them a little ice cream, and that would make them happy," he remembers.

Today, Ralph's collection of milk bottles reflects the many dairies that once operated in Logan County: in Atlanta, Willow Farms; in Lincoln, Hopp Brothers, Quality, Patterson, Leslie Fullerton, Ray Fullerton, Lincoln Dairy Products, Rigg's, Minder's, Woodlawn, Producers', and Hegele Brothers.

The first two Hegele brothers were Paul and Arnold, who bought a dairy from W. S. Brady in 1928. As their younger brother, Ralph used to deliver milk for them from a wagon pulled by a blind horse named Bill. Ralph would get off the truck at Decatur Street with the basket of milk, cut across the yard, and walk over to Wyatt Avenue—where the horse would be waiting for him.

After Ralph bought half the business in 1936, Hegele Brothers Dairy referred to Paul and Ralph. (Arnold had started a dairy in Canton.) Paul died in 1956; Ralph continued in the dairy business until 1979. Located at 623 Pulaski, Hegele's was the last remaining dairy in Logan County when Ralph sold out to Prairie Farms and began delivering their milk.

The small ice cream parlor in the front of Hegele's stayed open until 1:00 a.m. on Sunday mornings, the little booths crowded with people sipping malted milk from great big glasses, the high school students at the counter selling double dip ice cream cones for a nickel each, and families lining up outside to buy hand-packed ice cream.

Making all that ice cream required separating the cream from the milk and being left with lots of skim milk.

"We used to run [the skim milk] down the sewer, hundreds of gallons of it, and sold it to farmers for two cents a gallon for the hogs, just to get rid of it," remembers Ralph. Some skim milk was used to make cottage cheese.

(The Leslie Fullerton Dairy, on Frorer Avenue, sold a soft serve ice cream mix made of sugar, corn syrup, and 3% milk to independent operators in Peoria, Springfield, and Champaign. The dairy helped Ed Barnes from Atlanta start his little dairy bar on Broadway in Lincoln.)

Ralph churned a lot of butter from cream, too. He put an ad in the paper that he would pay two cents over what the creameries were paying, and "boy, those farmers brought it in!" he remembers.

Along with home delivery, Hegele Brothers sold milk to most of the restaurants in Lincoln; serviced grocery stores, nine schools, and all the ice cream socials in town; and provided Lincoln High School with nickel Dixie cups—1,000 at a time. Ralph serviced restaurants and grocery stores in Burtonview, New Holland, Mason City, Middletown, Mt. Pulaski, Beason, and Chestnut. ■

Down on the (Dairy) Farm

Former farm wife Florence Rosevink Hubbard says her kids, Ronald and Mary Ann [Parker], used to love turning the separator and watching the milk pour out of one spout and the cream out of the other. Taking the disks out of the separator and washing them was a chore, though, so Florence says, "I was never so happy in my life as when we sold whole milk!"

Farmers used to sell cream to the creameries and dairies to be made into butter, feeding the leftover skim milk to the pigs. Creameries sold the butter to grocery stores and other retail outlets. Often the buttermilk that was left over was mixed with supplement and sold as hog feed.

Egg and cream checks brought in extra cash between crops. As the Lincoln Dairy Company claimed in February of 1923, cream checks were "The Only Harvest That Lasts the Year Round!"

In 1927, the new Logan County Dairy Association had 250 members; that March, members sold their cream for 43 cents a pound.

Not all cream went into butter and ice cream, of course. Cream was whipped, poured into coffee and on cereal, and used in cooking. In the twenties, the Harold Garton family poured the cream right out of the separator into little half-pint bottles with the name "Basket Grocery" printed on them, capped them, and took them directly to the store.

The WORD Of The DAY
FOR LINCOLN & LOGAN COUNTY HOUSEWIVES
ARMOUR'S CLOVERBLOOM Butter
MADE FROM LOGAN COUNTY CREAM!
Cloverbloom Butter is on sale at all leading Lincoln markets. If you haven't tried it yet, you're missing a treat! Order some today!
builds sturdy bodies!
ARMOUR CREAMERIES
Lincoln, Illinois

Lincoln Evening Courier, *July 28, 1939.*

John and Maurice Irwin Remember

John and Maurice Irwin remember when their dad stopped using the separator in their basement and started selling whole milk instead. He carried the 10-gallon cans out to the cows' water tank, which cooled the milk to about 55 degrees. Within an hour or two of milking, the milk was on its way to town.

Often farmers placed the milk cans at the side of the road, where the dairy trucks picked them up, leaving empty cans behind.

Today, the Irwins' milk is pumped directly from the cows into a refrigerated stainless-steel tank that cools it to 38 degrees. Every other morning, the bulk truck from Prairie Farms picks up the roughly 4,600 pounds of raw milk.

"Grandpa would be amazed just watching us milk," says Maurice. "We don't touch the milk, and we don't bend over."

And they don't carry milk cans, either. In the milking parlor, John, Maurice, and John's son Steve stand in a pit, with four Holstein cows on each side of them at ground level. That way, the animals are at just the right height for the men to reach over, clean the cows' teats, and attach the milking machines. No bending over—and no more bad knees.

Milk passes through glass pipes to the bulk tank; 50 minutes later, when the last of 29 cows has sauntered out of the milking parlor, electronic controls run detergent and water automatically through the whole system, leaving it squeaky clean. No pails to wash, no brushes to clean.

Not only has milking changed, but "Grandpa's cows would have produced a whole lot better if he knew what we know today about feeding," says John.

In the old days, cows were put out to pasture on May first. Today, cows eat silage year round and wear transponders around their necks that automatically signal the feeding system to drop just the right amount of feed when a cow walks up to a trough.

Computers keep track of how much feed each cow eats each day, as well as how much milk she gives.

Walter and Marion Rankin Remember

In the forties, most farmers in Logan County had milk cows. Today, John and Maurice's Irwindale Holsteins, near Beason, is one of only two dairy herds left in Logan County; Walter and Marion Rankin, who live near Atlanta, own the other one.

They believe their dairy farm may be unique.

"I was born and raised with Guernsey cattle and married a Guernsey woman," says Walter. "My son married a Guernsey girl, and my daughter married a Guernsey boy."

Watching Marion, grandson, T.J., and daughter-in-law, Gretchen, milk while Walter jokes with them, one senses that these folks don't really mind milking every 12 hours. They have been doing it most of their lives.

Walter was milking his own red cow by hand when he was eight years old. His dad started the present herd in 1934, milking eight or ten cows by hand when Walter was a little boy. He bought his first milking machines in 1950.

Walter built the milking parlor in 1972; before that, he milked in a stanchion barn.

Among other places, the Rankins have sold milk to Hanson's Dairy in San Jose, Leslie Fullerton, Ray Fullerton, Laesch in Bloomington, and Prairie Farms.

Fairs have been a big part of Rankin family life. Their herd won Premium Breeder at Louisville and at the Madison World Dairy Expo. When their son, Buster, proposed to Gretchen at the Illinois State Fair in 1994, she ended up wearing a piece of baling wire as her first engagement ring.

Marion says one "fun thing" was seeing their kids win a blue ribbon at the state fair and watching Governor Thompson put his daughter on top of their champion cow. Then there was the time Buster was showing a cow named Dandy, when she got tired and lay down right in the show ring.

Jean and Hubert Stoll Reminisce

The Logan County Fair has always had "just wonderful" dairy shows, says Jean Stoll, while the Black and White Show of the state Holstein Association brings an "unbelievable" number of cows to the fairgrounds.

Of course, dairy farming in the county itself has changed. In the fifties, Logan County had an active Dairy Herd Improvement Association, with about 30 different farmers. Through the University of Illinois Extension, a tester checked each cow's milk for butterfat content and weighed the production in a 24-hour period. Top honors were published in the *Courier* every month.

All breeds of dairy cows were present in the county: Milking Shorthorn, Guernsey, Jersey, Ayrshire, Brown Swiss, and Holstein. But when the state required farmers who sold Grade A milk to install bulk tanks for the milk, many dairy families gave up their herds.

Southern Illinois Breeders Association used to provide an inseminator who came to the farm to service the cows; today, each dairy farm has its own canister of frozen semen.

Jean's husband, Hubert, began his dairy after World War II, when his uncle Will Opperman helped him buy a registered Holstein cow and a lifetime membership in the Holstein Friesian Association.

By 1949, Hubert had built a milk house with an electric cooler and had moved from Grade B to Grade A milk, which meant frequent visits from the "dreaded milk inspector." Alvin Dierker and his sons picked up the milk daily and delivered it to Kentland Dairy in Decatur.

Intrigued by the displays of modern equipment at the Logan County and Illinois State Fairs, Hubert invested in a surge parlor in 1953, the first bulk tank in Logan County, and the second Surge Electro-brain (to wash the milkers and stainless steel pipeline) in the state of Illinois.

Jean and Hubert's four boys and four girls "really enjoyed the cows and also dreaded all the work," says Jean, though it was "good training."

At one time, the Stolls had nine calves, each drinking milk from a bucket. "It was a real circus every morning and every evening," Jean remembers.

Only six kids were big enough to hold the buckets. The calves would start bucking, and the kids would lose the buckets and have to start over.

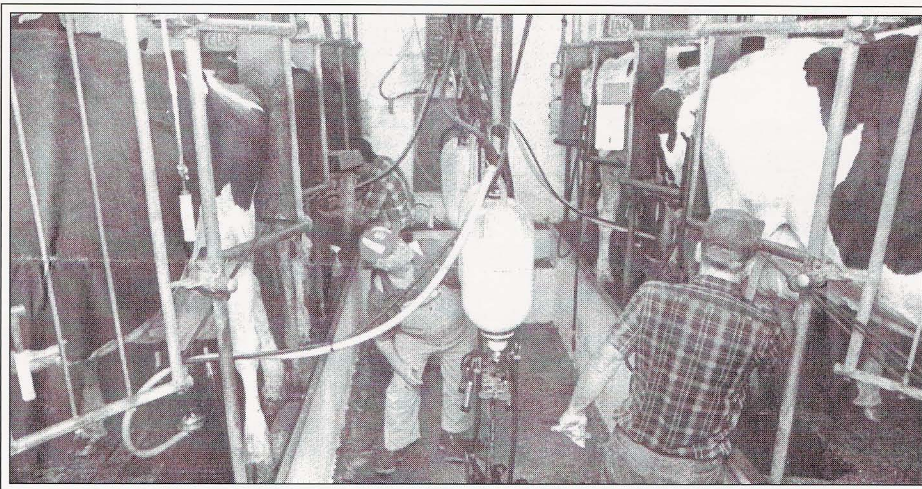
Before they had the bulk tank, the Stolls pasteurized their own milk and sold some of it by word of mouth. After the Stolls taught them how to use the stirrer, people came to the barn to get milk at all hours of the day and night, leaving their money in a peanut can in the window.

Jean and Hubert have had a few misadventures. After a sleet storm in 1959, the milk man could not pick up milk because there was no electricity to pump it. So Jean had to resort to skimming cream off the tank and making butter with the blender any time the electricity came on.

Finally, they had to "just open up the spout and let her go down the driveway," says Jean. "It was a tearful experience" that probably led to their buying a generator in later years.

In 1991, "when the last cows went out the driveway, it was tough," says Jean, "because our cows weren't just a number. They were a name and a family, and we knew each one."

When they visited some of their cows in Woodstock, one cow came running over to see them. "You wouldn't think a dumb old cow would know the difference, but she did," Jean remembers. ■



John Irwin, right, and son Steve, rear, do the milking. Center is John Kinder of the Dairy Herd Improvement Association. The Courier, *Aug. 26, 1998.*

Armour Creameries

In 1940, Armour Creameries celebrated its 16th year in Lincoln by entertaining the community with an old-fashioned barn dance—complete with sandwiches and coffee—in its newly-completed receiving station and egg-handling department at Second and Maple Streets. As an additional promotion, Margaret Dea, cashier, had paid that week's $4,000 payroll in silver dollars.

As the shiny coins began to appear in area stores, the point would be driven home: not only did the company spend a million and a half dollars a year on farm produce from the area, its 125-person payroll was good for the local economy.

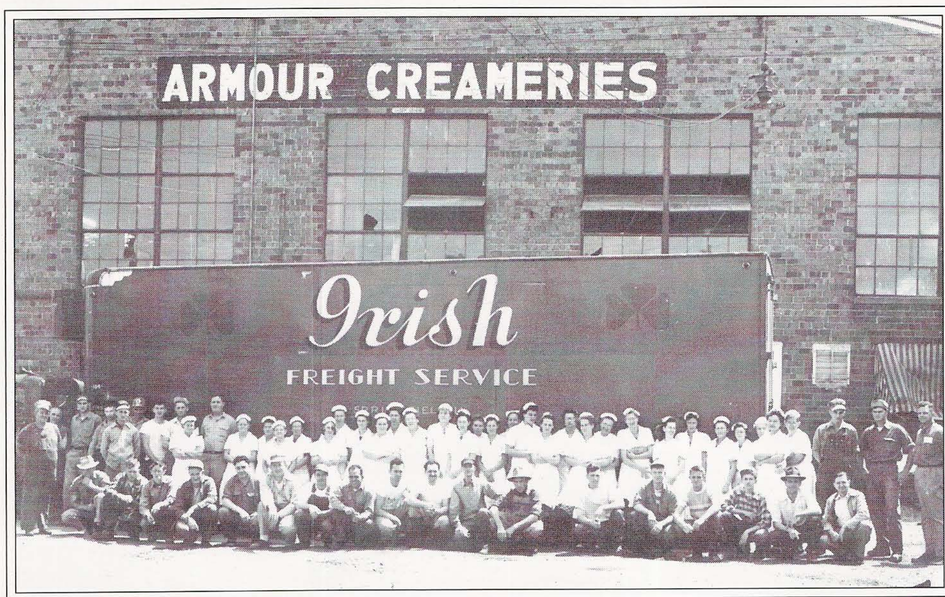
Armour and Company came to Lincoln in 1924, when it bought out the Frank Atlass Produce Company. After moving to Lincoln in 1890, Atlass had built a successful business that purchased eggs, poultry, hides, wool, and junk and shipped the poultry and eggs all over the Midwest and as far east as New York. Armour's continued in the role of middleman between the farmer and the consumer. In 1929, its Lincoln operation was one of five in Illinois.

Armour's moved into the Atlass poultry plant at the corner of Pulaski and Hamilton Streets (present home of The Glass House). In 1927, it moved into a new brick building at the corner of First and Maple. Years later, the Pulaski Street building became Armour's uptown station, where farmers brought eggs.

Despite its name, Armour Creameries dealt only with eggs, chickens, hides, and wool until 1939, when the creamery was built. Early on, eggs were candled, graded, and shipped out; later, they were broken directly into 30-pound cans, frozen, and sent out to feed the troops during World War II. Eventually, the 30-pound cans of eggs were sold to bakeries all over the country.

A farmer could bring in his produce, or he could sell his chickens to one of the men who drove their pickup trucks from farm to farm, filling their coops with spring chickens and any hens who weren't laying their fair share of eggs.

Some of the buyers who bought from farmers and sold to Armour's over the years were Tommy Johnson from Hartsburg, Carl Garber from Emden, and the Agnews and Hullingers from Middletown.



Employees of Lincoln plant, May 27, 1951. Manager at time was F. W. Vickrey; his immediate predecessor was Marvin Scott. Courtesy C. Eckert.

Armour's also bought breeder chickens that came from farms that supplied eggs to hatcheries like Sieb's.

At first, Armour trucks went to the little neighboring towns to pick up chickens and eggs. Later, Armour driver Merritt Stoll picked up chickens from branch houses in towns like Havana and Waverly and delivered eggs to Chicago.

A chicken that arrived at the Armour weighing station, wiry and muscular from chasing its peers around the barnyard, would soon find itself confined to a battery in the feeding station on the second floor, with nothing to do but rest, eat—and grow plump. It could take anywhere from five to ten days from arrival at the plant to slaughter, depending on the class of chicken (springs, fryers, or roasters).

In later years, when Armour got into the broiler business, chickens arrived from Arkansas and Georgia dehydrated and were usually pellet-fed for a day or two before being killed.

Not all chickens were processed before leaving the plant. Some live chickens made a trip to New York in a boxcar, being fed and watered along the way by Vincent Hertzfeldt.

Next stop after the feeding station was the picking room, where the chickens were killed and picked. Hanging by their feet from a continuous chain, they passed through the boiling water, hot wax, and finally cold water to harden the wax.

When Florence Cronin Funk worked at Armour's in the thirties, her job was to take a chicken from the chain and pull the wax off, taking the feathers with it. What pinfeathers were left, she picked off. She was paid for the number of chickens she picked.

Richard Funk worked in the picking room for 12 cents an hour part of one summer during high school and re-

members it as "really hard work." Those chickens "just kept acomin' at you eight hours a day," Richard says, with each person picking the wax off a different part of the bird.

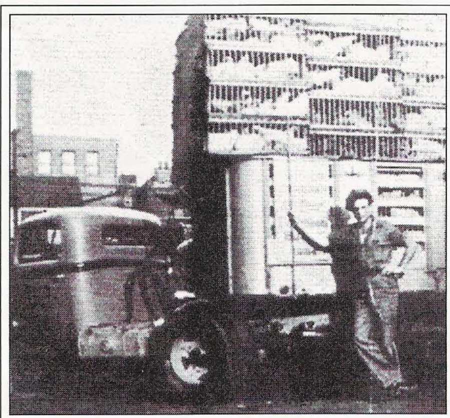
Wearing a dress, rubber apron, and knee-high boots, Fern Baker Decker worked first taking off pinfeathers, then was moved up to the wax tank. She had to reach up, pull the chicken's head down to straighten it, and then break the wax off. "You had to keep up with the chickens or get way down in the line," she remembers. "If you didn't get them fast, then you went to the end of the line with them."

(In later years, workers took the wing and tail feathers off by hand after the chickens came out of the scalder; machines removed the other feathers.)

The work was hard and hot, and it only paid 15 cents an hour until the National Recovery Administration raised wages—probably to about 35 cents an hour, says Fern. She remembers marching in the rain with other Armour workers in a big NRA parade meant to call attention to the need for a raise.

The amount of work available depended on the number of chickens brought in: Fern worked long days, half days, and some days not at all.

If there weren't enough chickens, she went to the other building to candle eggs, putting them up to a light to make sure there were no blood spots (indicating fertilization) and that the eggs weren't rotten.



Merritt Stoll with Armour truck in 1935. Courtesy Judy Stoll Lumpp.

But to get back to the chickens. Once they were picked clean, they went to the cooler, where they were cooled overnight to get all the body heat out, then separated for grade and size, the perfect chicken being given the Cloverbloom name. They were washed several times, and the giblets were stuffed back inside. Packed twelve to a box, frozen, and packed in ice, they were sent out New York style—whole, not eviscerated, with the heads and feet on.

Chuck Eckert came to work in the packing room at Armour's fresh from high school in 1937, working his way up to foreman of the packing room and then to assistant plant manager. He has seen a lot of changes over the years.

Once government inspection and full dressing of chickens came in, he says, the chickens were cooled quickly in tanks of ice water rather than in coolers. Government inspection also meant white uniforms and hairnets for the women and paper hats for the men who worked on the lines. If someone walked in without a hat, one of the two USDA doctors would shut the plant down.

Dr. Waldimere Bialyja, a doctor from White Russia, and his assistant examined every chicken after it was cooled. If Dr. Bialyja saw a sick bird, he would throw it into the dumpster—and sometimes throw in four or five more, says Jackie Brannan Petty, who worked as secretary to plant manager Wilbur Kalb.

Jackie typed Dr. Bialyja's USDA reports, so when he began throwing out hundreds of chickens, her boss would send her over to "soothe his ruffled feathers." Chuck Eckert could handle the doctor, too.

Once Armour's went into the commercial broiler business, the plant had a steady supply of chickens from Arkansas and Georgia, as well as Illinois. On Friday, Chuck would tell Floyd Derrickson, the buyer, how many thousand head were needed for the next week. Floyd would check his map of broiler houses in Illinois and send the trucks out to pick up the chickens.

At one time, Armour's produced 250,000 pounds of poultry a week. Although the big orders went to Kroger's and other large chains, Mr. Frank Krotz, for example, could buy chickens and eggs for his local grocery store at wholesale prices, and Mrs. Eva Edgell at the Hotel Lincoln could specify that her chickens be cut a certain way. Over the years, local people came to the door of the plant to buy cracked eggs for very little and even good eggs at low prices.

Armour Creameries supplied work for many Lincoln families. In fact, one day not too long ago, a woman came up to Chuck Eckert at Wal-Mart and grabbed his arm. "Don't you remember me?" she said. When Chuck admitted that he didn't, she told him her name and said, "I worked for you at Armour's years ago."

"Well, who didn't?" laughs Chuck.

The plant paid a livable wage, and employees were treated to picnics, with softball games and horseshoe pitching. At one of their Christmas dinners, Florence Funk says she had "the best sweet potatoes I ever ate in my life."

So it came as a shock in 1959 when the company announced right before the Christmas party at the VFW that it was closing the Lincoln plant.

"It was a pretty glum night," says Jackie Petty.

The creamery had been closed in 1957. The poultry plant had continued to operate, in spite of rising sewer bills. Manager Wilbur Kalb told the *Courier* that Armour's had been shipping in poultry from five states to have enough to operate the plant. Also, says Chuck Eckert, "everybody was going south" where labor was cheaper. Armour's closed in January of 1960.■

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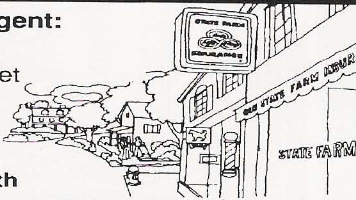

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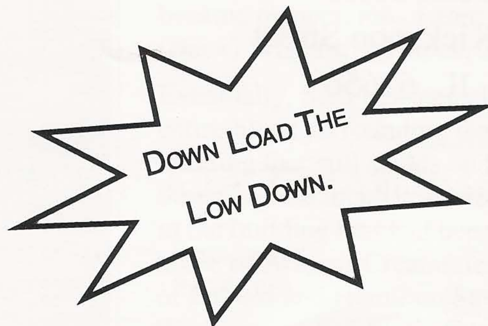

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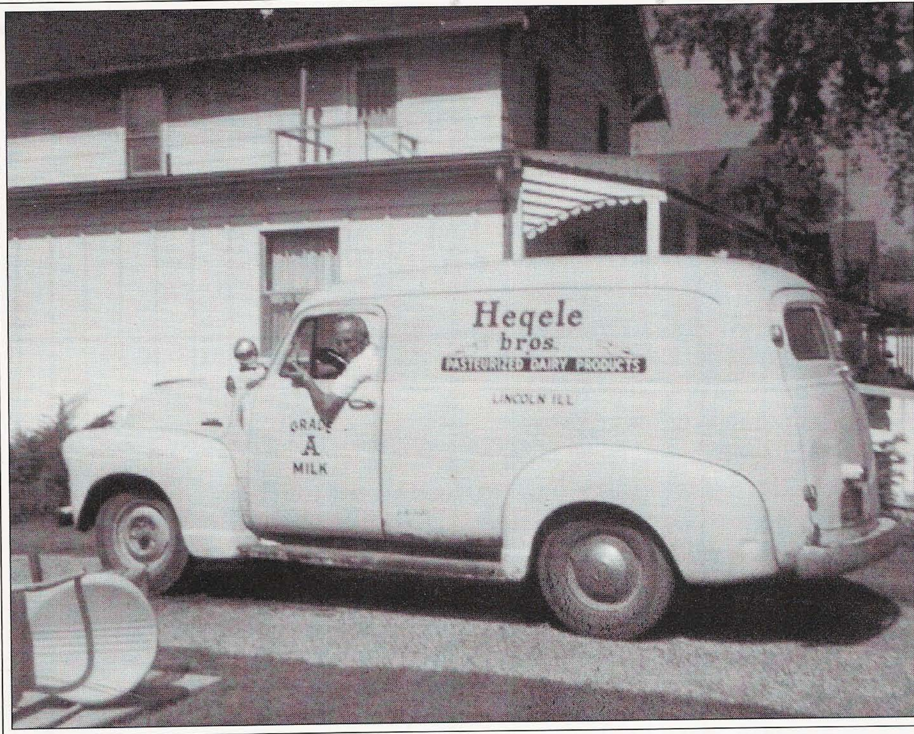

Ralph Hegele with Hegele Brothers Dairy truck. Courtesy Ralph Hegele.

If you lived in Lincoln years ago, breakfast was very much a Logan County affair. You drank milk from Logan County cows, buttered your toast with butter churned from their cream, and fried eggs that were laid by Logan County hens (sold to the grocery store or traded for groceries). Dinner meant frying up a chicken that was raised on a Logan County farm, processed at Armour's, and sold to a neighborhood grocery store. Dessert? Chocolate chip ice cream, courtesy of Logan County cows and Hegele Brothers Dairy. ■

Our Times

The People, History, and Culture of Logan County, Illinois

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Here Comes the Milkman!

Down on the (Dairy) Farm

Armour Creameries

Material for this issue came from *History of Logan County Illinois 1982;* the *Courier* under its various names; Lincoln city directories; and the memories of our friends, both old and new.

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