

THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

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The Iowa Dairy Association

The officers of the Iowa State Dairy Association were in a quandary. For years only a handful of members had attended annual meetings when thousands should have come. Something drastic had to be done if the organization were to be a vital force. In this crisis President W. B. Barney suggested that a dairy show be held in conjunction with the annual meetings of the association. Barney contended that farmers would come a long distance to see a good cow but would stay at home and pitch hay rather than listen to anybody explain a cow. His arguments seemed so plausible that the idea was adopted for the next meeting at Cedar Rapids in 1909. The Waterloo Dairy Cattle Congress was the offspring of this first experiment in visual education.

Humble as was the beginning of this now nationally famous cattle exposition, it was more auspicious than the genesis of the Iowa State Dairy Association, whose origin may be traced to

the Northern Iowa Butter and Cheese Association, and ultimately to the leadership of John Stewart. It is doubtful if any one contributed more to Iowa's dairy history.

Born in Ohio in 1836, John Stewart had served in the Union army throughout the Civil War. In 1866 he became a jobber in butter, cheese, and farm produce at Saint Louis. The work must have appealed to him for in 1867 he engaged in the same business at Galena. Moving to Manchester in 1870, Stewart started a creamery a few miles east of that thriving little community in 1872. His Spring Branch Creamery is said to have been the first butter creamery in Iowa.

At that time eastern dairymen held western products in low repute: they not only scoffed at the poor breeding of Iowa cattle but they questioned the ability and honesty of all western dairymen. Such a situation must have seemed intolerable to a man of John Stewart's character. Having won prizes on his butter at Saint Louis, he determined to compete at the International Centennial Exposition at Philadelphia in 1876. The chances of this obscure Iowa man against the finest butter makers of Europe and America must have seemed exceedingly slim, but the judges awarded the gold medal for the "best package of Butter exhibited" to John Stewart. This honor is

said to have removed much of the "prejudice" against Iowa butter and was calculated to have added from \$500,000 to \$1,000,000 annually to the income of dairymen in the Hawkeye State.

Encouraged by Stewart's success, sixty-six dairymen convened at Manchester on February 2, 1877, and organized the Northern Iowa Butter and Cheese Association. John Stewart was naturally elected president and Robert M. Littler of Davenport was chosen secretary-treasurer. On account of the "general depression", only a few new names were added to the membership roll in 1878, but the officers were not discouraged. The third annual meeting, like the first two, was held at Manchester, which was becoming known as the "Elgin of Iowa". Despite "cold and stormy" weather, many dairymen attended from Iowa, Illinois, Kansas, Nebraska, and Dakota Territory. An eye-witness declared that the caliber of dairymen who packed the Manchester city hall was "seldom equalled and never excelled". The membership of the association was increased to 190 and steps were taken to have Iowa products exhibited that summer at the Royal Agricultural Society International Fair at London.

The conventions of 1880 and 1881 were held at Monticello. At the Cedar Rapids meeting in 1882 the name of the association was changed to "The

Iowa Butter and Cheese Association". Marshalltown entertained the dairymen in 1883 and Strawberry Point in 1884 and again in 1885.

The growing importance of Iowa as a dairy State was proven by the eleventh annual meeting of the association which was held at Manchester in 1887 in conjunction with the National Butter, Cheese and Egg Association. It was a proud day for Manchester and Delaware County. A committee of 110 members had been appointed to make "full and ample" arrangements for the 1500 delegates. Representatives came from places as widely separated as New Hampshire and Colorado. President Schermerhorn called the convention to order and State Dairy Commissioner H. D. Sherman welcomed the guests. Speeches were made on almost every phase of agriculture and dairying — a note of warning being sounded by David B. Henderson of Dubuque against the oleomargarine interests. The display of dairy machinery was exceptionally large.

The westward expansion of the dairy area in Iowa was attested by the meeting of the Iowa Butter and Cheese Association at Fort Dodge in 1890. At the fifteenth annual meeting at Waverly in 1891, the dairymen reorganized and adopted the name Iowa State Dairy Association.

Between 1892 and 1909 the Iowa State Dairy

Association held meetings in ten different towns. Cedar Rapids and Waterloo each acted four times as host, Ames and Mason City twice, while Charles City, Des Moines, Dubuque, Marshalltown, New Hampton, and Storm Lake welcomed the dairymen once. Speeches and papers ran the whole gamut of dairying in all its varied aspects. A partisan explosion invariably accompanied debate on the merits of the dairy cow and the dual-purpose cow.

Although Iowa had made giant strides since the days of John Stewart and '76, a note of warning was sounded by E. R. Shoemaker of Waterloo in 1908. Almost any farmer could herd cattle profitably on five dollar land, he declared, but could it be done when land sold at \$100 or \$150 an acre? Shoemaker urged economy in two directions: first, by the erection of silos to save the forty million dollars wasted in corn stalks; second, by the improvement of the dairy stock. Iowa was twenty years behind as a dairy section, for her 1,500,000 dairy cattle produced an average of only 140 pounds of butter fat yearly. In Europe dairy cows averaged 300 pounds of butter fat annually. Shoemaker estimated that Iowa dairymen were losing from twenty to thirty million dollars a year because of poor cows and archaic methods.

It was this situation as well as the small attend-

ance which prompted the officers of the Iowa State Dairy Association to adopt President W. B. Barney's suggestion to hold a dairy cow exhibition in conjunction with their regular meeting at Cedar Rapids in 1909. About twenty-five cattle were exhibited: Holsteins by W. B. Barney and Frank White of Hampton, Jerseys by C. T. Graves of Maitland, Missouri, Ayrshires by Iowa State College, and Guernseys by a local breeder. During the four-day convention Professor Hugh G. Van Pelt gave demonstrations of the good and bad points of dairy cattle, using the stock on exhibition for illustrative purposes. This was the "first time that anything of this nature" had been done and the "extreme interest" created stamped the Cedar Rapids dairy show as a real success.

The future course of the Iowa State Dairy Association was clear. Most of the members of the association preferred to supplement the convention with a cattle show. In line with the new policy the energetic Hugh G. Van Pelt was selected for general manager. The choice of a meeting place was not as easily decided, for keen rivalry existed among several Iowa towns. Was it an act of destiny that Waterloo was finally chosen? Time alone would demonstrate whether the "Waterloo Way" was the right way.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN