

The Original Cheese Capital of the World and Why... Part 1

March 16, 2016 By [Tanya](#)

The following excerpt was published in 1977. Where it was published and the name of the author are unknown. It is a thorough, detailed description of Plymouth's historic importance in the production and distribution of cheese.

A MAN'S DREAM

In 1948 Leonard Gentine, Sr. had a driving desire to build a large cheese corporation. He started in a small shed behind his funeral parlor in Plymouth, Wisconsin. It was called "The Plymouth Cheese Counter." He had many ideas and hopes of new products and packaging that he felt consumers wanted and needed.

In July, 1953, Mr. Gentine and Mr. Joseph Sartori introduced the first consumer-size Italian cheese packages to the New England marketing area. It was then that the name Sargento Cheese Company came into being. Because of the excellent acceptance of these items, he soon introduced these and other sizes of Italian cheeses into other parts of the country.

In 1956, with space in Plymouth now too small and nothing else available, the company moved to a larger building in near-by Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin. It was now possible to add American, Cheddar, Colby, Brick, Swiss and Muenster to the line. A new industrial park developed in Plymouth in 1962, and Sargento Cheese Company built a new plant. This plant was to handle a new type of random weight chunk and sliced cheeses. In 1969 Mr. Gentine became sole owner of Sargento Cheese Company. The company continued to prosper and in 1972 they added 37,000 square feet to the Plymouth plant. This facility, along with the company's well-kept Elkhart Lake plant, provides for a clean and modern cheese operation. Sargento has concentrated on innovation in packaging and merchandising techniques, and the current demand for its cheeses has become world-wide. Currently they have a chain of food brokers representing them across the United States and recently appointed a food broker in Rome, Italy, to represent them in the world market. To sum it all up, and in the words of Mr. Leonard Gentine, Sr., "There is no stopping a man's dream when he has faith in himself and the people working with him."

THE STORY OF THE WISCONSIN CHEESE EXCHANGE

Cheese has been produced in the state of Wisconsin for over 112 years, there being some record of an early cooperative venture in Jefferson County as early as 1841. The early cheesemaker had no storage facilities at his factory. His cheese was perishable and he had to dispose of it promptly. He needed a buyer who would take his entire output from week to week, regardless of amount or grade. At the outset such buyers did not exist. The consumer bought from his grocer or possibly from a peddler, and the grocer, through whatever arrangement he could make, ordinarily dealt directly with the factory. Those arrangements were usually unsatisfactory. The factory might or might not be able to fill the grocer's order when received, and the cheese obtained might or might not be of a grade desired.

THE CHEESE DEALER SERVED AN IMPORTANT FUNCTION

Before long the cheese dealer entered the picture, his functions were those of a jobber or wholesaler. He maintained warehouse facilities which enabled him to buy cheese from the factory as it was made and hold it until a market could be found. He was able to grade, separate, and age the cheese purchased from the factories with which he did business and sell to the grocer or other retail outlet the precise type of cheese for which that outlet had a demand.

FIRST "CALL BOARD" ESTABLISHED IN 1900

It was to improve the position of the factory operator that the so-called dairy boards were established, 1873 being the year in which they first made their appearance. A board was established in Plymouth, Wisconsin, on May 22, 1879, and Plymouth has continued from that date to occupy an important place in the marketing of cheese. Essentially, a dairy board was no more than a market place where buyers and sellers of cheese might get together. The cheesemaker had an opportunity to come into contact there with more buyers than the limited number who might call at his factory. He had an opportunity to learn to some extent what other cheese factories were getting for their cheese. Such boards were also time-savers for the buyer. He no longer had to travel from factory to factory in order to buy his cheese. For a while these boards contained considerable popularity since over 50 were in existence at one time.

Originally, negotiations at a board meeting were conducted between an individual seller and an individual buyer. As time passed, however, the cheesemaker saw an opportunity to improve his position by disposing his cheese through a form of auction. The cheesemaker or other factory representative would list his cheese upon a blackboard provided for that purpose, and then call for bids. Both the offers and the bids were termed "calls" and the dairy boards soon began to be termed "call boards." The call board method of trading was adopted at Plymouth in 1900.

BEGINNING OF THE WISCONSIN CHEESE EXCHANGE

As buyers contracted for the output of more and more factories, new problems were created. Originally it was the cheesemaker who had to worry over the disposition of his cheese. When a dealer contracted for the entire output of a number of factories, however, he could no longer keep his receipts and sales in perfect balance. Particularly in periods of flush production he might receive more cheese than he could dispose of through his normal outlets or more than he could afford or had the facilities to store. Originally, the cheesemaker was the only one who had cheese available for sale on a call board. By 1918, the dealer frequently found himself in that same position.

On April 24, 1918, the Wisconsin Cheese Exchange was founded. It was an exchange in name only. In substance it remained a call board. In one important respect, the Wisconsin Cheese Exchange marked a departure from its predecessor board, the Plymouth Central Call Board of Trade, and from other boards. Dealers for the first time were in accord with equal privileges with the cheesemakers.

On August 12, 1938, the Wisconsin Cheese Exchange finally became an exchange in fact, as well as in name. After an exhaustive study of the operations of other commodity exchanges, and after consultation with various state and governmental agencies, an intelligible, workable set of rules was adopted. The assembly charge, a charge which enabled them to recover the costs incurred in assembling and grading factory cheese received by him, was increased to 5/8 cents per pound, which approximated the seller's actual costs and made it possible for him to sell as advantageously on the Exchange as through outside channels.

All offers and bids were required to be made at stated prices and registered in rotation and a bid was made against no particular lot of cheese. It was an offer to buy cheese of the type, in the quantity and at the price specified in the bid, from the first person willing to sell on those terms. An offer was an offer to sell cheese on the terms specified therein to the first person agreeing to buy on that basis. No longer was it possible for the seller to choose the buyer to whom he wished to sell.

An entirely new rule had a general effect of broadening the trading base by application of the so-called freight differential charge. Since the general move of cheese in Wisconsin was towards the south and east, the warehouses from which the freight rate to Chicago was the lowest occupied a favored position. All other factors being equal, a buyer would naturally purchase the cheese on which he had the lowest transportation charges to pay. By requiring the seller to absorb transportation costs to the extent that the rate from his warehouse to Chicago exceeded the rate from Plymouth to Chicago, this rule, in effect, enabled the buyer to purchase F.O.B. Plymouth. In the absence of such a rule, owners of warehouses which were unfavorably located from a freight rate standpoint found it difficult to sell their cheese on the Exchange.

The Original Cheese Capital of the World and Why... Part 2

March 22, 2016 By [Tanva](#)

S & R CHEESE CORPORATION

The S & R Cheese Corporation of Plymouth, Wisconsin is proud to have made its home in the Cheese Capital of America for the past 38 years. Its officers, management and personnel proudly salute the Plymouth Centennial. Begun in May of 1939 as a partnership between Paul and Joseph Sartori and Louis Rossini, S & R made its first cheese from approximately 500 lbs. of milk using the facilities of the Plymouth Dairy Products plant, on May 10, 1939. Paul Sartori had been the general manager for the Stella Cheese Company headquartered in Chicago for ten years prior to formulating plans for the new operation. Mr. Rossini had been Plant Manager for various plants of the same Stella Cheese Company. Joseph Sartori had shortly before graduated from the University of Wisconsin with a Bachelor of Science degree specializing in the dairy field. This formed a practical combination of marketing expertise, practical know-how, and technical knowledge. Growth was slow for several years due to a combination of depressed markets and competitive wrangling. Hard work, determination and perseverance overcame all obstacles eventually, and by the time of the United States participation in World War II, the new firm was well established. In 1947 the

company was incorporated, and in 1954 the Sartori family bought out the Rossini interest in the firm. Mr. Paul Sartori died in 1957 and today his son Joseph is president of the firm. Other officers include Guido Sartori, Dante Camilli, and Paul Sartori, while a sister of the president, who resides in California, retains an interest in the company as an inactive stockholder. From a meager start of approximately 50 lbs. of cheese daily, today S & R utilizes approximately 350 million pounds of milk annually to produce its line of Italian specialty cheeses. In addition to its own production at three locations S & R also purchases cheese under its auspices and control from approximately 8 or 10 other area cheese producers, thus serving as an additional market for the farmers in this area.

Some of the principal varieties of Italian cheese manufactured by the S & R Cheese Corporation include the well-known Mozzarella (pizza cheese), Provolone, Romano, and Parmesan. Basically S & R manufactures, cures, and distributes its specialties to the wholesale Italian cheese trade in the principal metropolitan markets of the United States. In addition to its United States sales, exports are also a valuable part of the sales total of approximately 30 million pounds of cheese annually. Much of the success in the foreign field can be attributed to the close attention paid to various trade missions throughout the world in which the principal officers have participated, including both State and Federal agency promotions. As one of the largest Italian-type cheese producers in the world, its firm base in the Plymouth area and its importance to the economy of the State is well acknowledged by authoritative sources.

KRAFT FOODS DIVISION OF KRAFT CO. CORP.

After World War I, the processing plant of Kraft-Phenix Corp. took up a vast quantity of "American" cheese in order to meet the demands of the new market which had been created in 1904 after several years of private and experimental study by J.L. Kraft. In "1929" Kraft/Phenix moved to Freeport and Green Bay, Wisconsin. During this period Kraft products were stored with the "Dairy State Cold Storage Company." Kraft Foods returned to Plymouth under the name of Kraft Foods of Wisconsin in approximately 1933. In June of 1949 the processing of cheese was moved from the Plymouth plant to Chicago, Illinois and the buildings were used for an assembly and storage unit. In 1958 Kraft Foods began operation as a storage and cheese curing facility which is the operation handled here at this time under the name of Kraft, Inc.

THE BORDEN CHEESE PLANT

The original Process Cheese Company which is now called Borden was founded in 1923 at Waldo by Messrs. Wheeler, Hubert, Brinkman, and Scott. The original name was Brookshire Cheese Company. In 1924 the Company moved from its small factory in Waldo to the Kiel Wooden Ware Warehouse on Appleton Street in Plymouth. This is the existing Borden facility called the "Old Plant" which is now used for storage. The company's name was changed to Lakeshire because of the similarity of Brookshire to Swift's brand name, Brookfield. Lakeshire Cheese Company developed and patented the flash pasteurization process, which enabled the Company to cook cheese in 45 seconds compared to the existing 45 minute process. This innovation enabled the company to successfully compete in the growing process cheese industry. The Borden Company acquired the Lakeshire Company in 1929. During the same time period Borden purchased several Wisconsin cheddar cheese assemblers, manufacturers and packagers. Among these were the Schmitt Brothers Cheese Company, A.H. Barber and the Emmenger Company. In the middle 30's the Borden Company purchased the Carl Marty Cheese Company of Monroe, Wisconsin and combined the two companies into the Lakeshire/Marty Company. The Carl Marty Company was one of the largest manufacturers and assemblers of Swiss cheese in this country.

