Starke County tidbit 36 --- Milk ----

I wonder if some people still think that milk comes from the grocery store.

When I was a kid, Dad would milk about 10 or 12 cows every morning and every night. This was before milking machines - all milking was done by hand. There is nothing like a glass of warm milk right from the cow. Dad would secure the cows into the stanchions for their feed, then get his stool. He had a four-legged stool, but many farmers used a three-legged stool, and I have even seen a one-legged stool used quite often. Dad would position himself on the right side of the cow and start milking. It was fun to watch him because once in a while he would squirt the cat in the face with the milk. Of course the cat would love that and lick the milk from his fur for quite a while. Sometimes Dad would let me milk the cow, but when I started to squirt the cat more than into the bucket, that stopped.

The folks had an in-ground "cooler" on the north side of the house - a 30" glazed tile in the ground with boards for cover - that cooled the milk somewhat. The temperature in the "cooler" was always 55 - 60 degrees. Later, Dad would pour the milk into the cream separator (see attachment). I got to crank the machine. This was really a centrifuge. It had a series of cones in it that, when spun, separated the cream from the milk. We could then make cheese or butter from the cream.

Remember, this was during the depression. The folks would sell the butter (and the eggs that Mom had gathered from the chicken house) to the grocery store. The rest of the milk that wasn't separated was sold to Drews' Sanitary Dairy at 405 S Main in Knox. They would pasteurized it, bottle it and deliver it to their customers' door steps. This was before homogenized milk. The cream would rise to the top of the milk bottle, and you could tell the quality of the milk by how much cream was on top. Generally, it was thought that the taller the layer of cream, the better the milk. In the winter, if the bottles of milk were left outside too long, the freezing temperature would push the lids off. (see attachment) As for why the bottles didn't crack, well, I'm speculating that with whole milk, at least, the cream that collected at the top acted as a lubricant, allowing the ice to move freely upward, relieving pressure and keeping the bottle intact. On the coldest of winter days we would sometimes make "ice cream" by placing a bowl of the cream into the snow so it would freeze. Later, the homogenizing process was invented which breaks down the fat of the milk into smaller particles so that it stays suspended in the milk and the cream doesn't rise to the top.

My wife, Melba, came from a farm in Eastern Indiana and showed Red Poll cattle all over the United States. Red Polls are considered dual-purpose animals, giving great meat production and good milk production, also. One time as a teenager, while showing at the Indiana State Fair, the owners of the 4-H Grand Champion cows in all dairy breeds (Jersey, Holstein, Guernsey, Red Poll, Milking Shorthorn, etc.) participated in a milking contest. Of course the contestants were all boys, except Melba! Her cow had just had a calf the week before and milked very easily - she knew she could win this contest. They even brought in a cow for the Governor of Indiana to milk, just to make the contest a little more fun. That Governor was our own Henry F. Schricker from Starke County.

The contest starts - Melba started to milk her cow - but got no milk. The cow just stood there and "Mooed" - she wanted her calf. Melba's Dad quickly realized that fact and ran to get the calf. As soon as the cow saw the calf, the milk poured into the bucket. As fast as the milk came, Melba couldn't make-up for lost time. Both she and the Governor lost the contest to a **boy**!

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