

Growth and Change in the 1900s

In 1895, the government of Canada started a program to promote the growth of dairy farming in the west. The government encouraged the development of **creameries**, or places where dairy products like butter and cheese are made, and cheese factories. Creameries became an important influence on the growth of many Alberta communities in the first three decades of the 1900s.

The Rise of Creameries

The Markerville Creamery was constructed in 1902 in the **hamlet** [a small village] of Markerville. It was established as part of a cooperative association of community farmers. An ice house was built close by in 1902. The Markerville Creamery was the first creamery west of the Red Deer River. It was an important source of money for many farmers in central Alberta.

The Bonnyville Creamery was constructed in 1924. Before then, most homesteaders and farmers in the area used cream produced by

their cows for their families. However, extra cream was sometimes sold to other families in Bonnyville. Home-churned butter was sold or exchanged for goods at the general store.

When the Creamery started, it supplied butter to the Provincial Department Marketing Service. This service bought butter made at creameries and sold it throughout Alberta and British Columbia. Some butter was even shipped to England, China, and Japan. Dairy farmers now could deliver their cream to the Bonnyville Creamery. The cream came in a variety of containers, from **five to eight gallon** [19 to 30 litre] cans down to **five pound** [2.25 kilogram] lard pails.

Butter at the grocery store now came in two different types. Dairy butter was butter made by farmers. Creamery butter was made at the creamery.

The Early History of the Bonnyville Creamery. The Historical Museum of Bonnyville website at <http://cnc.virtuelle.ca>.

The Markerville Creamery, 1902



Photograph courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Alberta: A.6044.

The Donalda Cooperative Creamery Association was formed in 1937. Many farmers and creamery owners formed **cooperative associations** [a business formed when farmers work together and combine their resources] so they could work together. The Creamery was moved to this building in 1954. It still used equipment from the 1920s and 1930s. This equipment included a Babcock Tester, which was used to measure the fat content in milk. It also included a cream tester, a **centrifuge** [a machine that rotates at high speeds to separate liquids from solids], bottle holders, scales, a cream can washer, and butter churns.

Pass the Cheese, Please

The Ridge Valley Coop Cheese Factory operated at Crooked Creek in the South Peace area between 1939 and 1948.

Farmers had a surplus of milk and no market for it, when they heard from friends and relatives in Linden, Alberta where people were

able to make a **profit** selling milk to a cheese factory. A profit is the final amount of money made once all costs or expenses are paid.

These farmers formed a cooperative in 1937. Members could pay in cash or by exchanging milk for work like logging, sawing lumber, or building.

The farmers began building and borrowed operating money from the Linden Cheese Cooperative. The board of the cheese factory were mostly from the Mennonite community, but included some other neighbours.

The cheese factory was built beside the Deep Creek in which a dam was built to maintain a water supply. The water was filtered through sand and gravel leading to a well. The water supply was also of great importance because steam heat was needed to make cheese. In high water often the dam was damaged and needed repair. Thanks to 'Mother Nature', the beavers moved in and took on the repair job.

The Donalda Creamery



Photograph courtesy of Alberta Culture and Community Spirit, Historic Resources Management Branch.

Much could be said about the early hardships of the cooling and delivering of milk. Without deep wells for real cold water and no electricity, it was hard to cool milk fast and keep it good. Many of the milk shippers had ice houses. Ice was taken out and added to the tubs or barrels where the milk cans were cooling. Often milk was hauled by wagon and by buggy.

Cheese was made daily. It is believed that cheese was made and sold for just under \$.20 a **pound** [slightly less than half a kilogram] and that the price for milk was about \$.70 “a **hundred weight**” [100 pounds, or 45.5 kilograms] when the factory first opened. The money from the sale of milk and cheese was the only real cash income many farmers received. Cheese from the factory was sold to Horne and Pittfield Wholesalers, and Frank Ratzlaff hauled much of the cheese as he was one of the first truckers. Cheese was also sold to other small grocery stores and to individual customers.

In 1948, many milk shippers were realizing a slightly better price for their raw milk in Grande Prairie at the Northern Alberta Dairy Pool (N.A.D.P.). In time, the N.A.D.P. took on more milk shippers. On October 1, 1948 the cheese factory closed and remained closed. Records show that in 1948, twenty eight boxes of cheese weighing **2 337 pounds** [1 060 kilograms] were sold for \$747.84. There were about twenty milk shippers left this last year and the price of milk was \$2.04 - \$2.13 for “a hundred weight,” with cheese makers’ **wages** [money received for work] that year being \$125.00 per month.

Adapted with permission from Fran Moore, “Pass the Cheese, Please.” *Telling Our Stories*. South Peace Regional Archives, Volume 1, Issue 4, September 1, 2010: p. 6.
www.southpeacearchives.org/pdf/September%202010.pdf



In the 1930s, trucks such as this Woodland Dairy truck were used to deliver butter, eggs, cheese, ice cream, and milk to stores.



Photograph courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Alberta: A14977.

Using Photographs and Articles



Creameries were often established by farmer's cooperatives. A **cooperative** is a business that is owned and operated by a group of individuals. Farmer's cooperatives were an important part of Alberta's agricultural history and were established for dairy and wheat farmers in the early 1900s.

Do you think cooperatives helped farmers make a better living? Why or why not?

Why do you think cooperatives affected the growth of many of Alberta's rural communities?



In the late 1920s, a game that used the cardboard milk caps used to seal glass milk bottles became popular. Players would build equal stacks of milk caps, called pogs. Each player would then take a turn throwing another cap, called a hitter or slammer, onto the top of the stack. Any pogs that landed with the picture side up would be kept by the player. The pogs that stayed face down were then stacked again for the next player.

In the 1990s, this game became popular again. Thousands of different types of pogs were made and sold around the world.

