

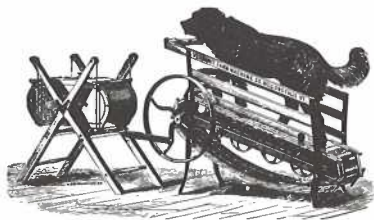
# FARMER'S GOLD



“The churn for making butter, to be used when enough cream had been saved, was a strong barrel with iron hoops. The cover clamped down with iron fasteners. The cream was churned by two men, one on each side turning the handles.

“One day Grandpa and Bastion decided to churn the cream. The inside of the churn was carefully cleaned and the cover was placed on top. Then one turn was made, followed by a yell of **dismay**. The cover had not been **securely** fastened, and all the beautiful yellow cream, so carefully saved and so badly needed for ‘cash money,’ flowed out over the slate slabs by the door. But the cream was not wasted. It was carefully scraped up, little stones, dry grass and what have you, and fed to the hogs, to make future well-smoked ham and bacon.”

Bernice Beatty Wing’s story describing the buttery in her grandfather’s farm in North Ferrisburg took place in the days when butter was produced on thousands of Vermont farms. Families used it in place of cash for trading with neighbors or at the village store.



Dog-powered swing churn

Today, dairy sections in the supermarkets are stocked with many brands of butter, none of which are made on the farm. The quarter-pound yellow sticks are commercially produced, wrapped in waxy paper printed with tablespoon measurements, and packaged

four to a box. Most of us use some every day but few of us make our own.

Vermont has a long history of buttermaking. Early settlers came here with a few farm animals. Their cows provided families with milk, butter, cheese and meat. Many were used as work animals as well.

As farmers raised more and more cows, their dairy production went up. By 1870 the milk cow became the main source of income for the average Vermont farm. A cow could produce anywhere between 100 and 300 pounds of butter per year. At about twenty-five cents per pound, a farmer with a small herd could bring in extra cash needed for his family.



Farmers taking milk to the Elgin Spring Creamery

By the middle of the 1800s a factory system for the production of butter developed. So widespread was the switch from farm to factory that it wasn’t long before the traditional making of butter at home was replaced for the most part by this new system.

Franklin County became the center for Vermont’s dairy industry. In fact, St. Albans supposedly had the largest buttermaking plant in the world. Farmers throughout the region brought their milk to separator stations where the cream was removed. A monthly paycheck and the skimmed milk went home with the farmer. Farm wagons or trains carried the freshly

separated cream to St. Albans. There it was made into butter at the rate of 20,000 to 24,000 pounds a day.

Vermont's location near Boston and New York made it the number one source of dairy products for these growing cities. But getting butter and milk to them without refrigeration was a problem.

The height of the butter season was in the summer when cows produce plenty of milk and cream. However, warm temperatures at that time of year made shipping difficult. Much of St. Albans' butter was sent south by boat in the fall when temperatures were cooler and Lake Champlain and the canal connecting it to the Hudson River were still open. Other shipments were packed on sleighs and sent to markets in Montreal during the winter. In 1854, the Vermont Central Railroad began running one "butter car" a week between St. Albans and Boston. The butter was packed in ice to make the long trip without spoiling.

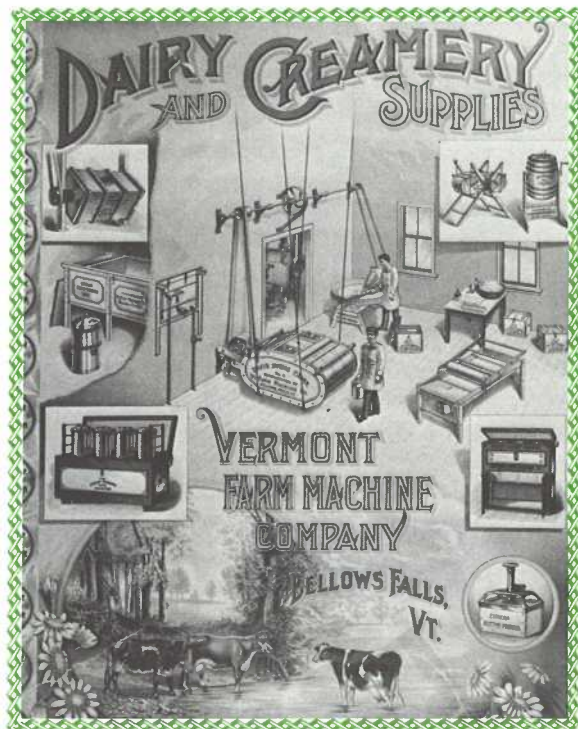
Butter production reached its peak in Vermont between 1880 and 1915. Today Vermont's production and sale of milk is far greater than that of butter.

Since the early days of our state's settlement, buttermaking has changed **dramatically**. The time when the flavor as well as the design stamped on a pound of butter could identify the maker is gone. What cows grazed on, how much buttermilk the farmer worked out of his or her butter, and the amount of salt added made one household's butter taste different from another.

The old churns, butter paddles, and hand carved butter prints were once standard equipment in every farm's buttery. Today they are found only in a few homes or antique shops.

No longer must we rely on the farm well or spring to keep our butter cool. Preserving butter by pickling it in homemade brine is not practiced much, if at all, anymore.

Who today is familiar with the "flip-flop" sound when the butter separates from the buttermilk while churning? How many know that summer butter is yellower than winter butter because cows grazing on fresh greens make more of a **pigment** called carotene?



Circa 1890 poster

Memories like Clara Mason's, of Johnson, Vermont, reflect experiences that few of us have had today.

"My father made his own butter for a good many years in a barrel churn. We kids would help turn the handle and then I remember his patting it into patties. I'll never forget once his going by and scraping the butter up and putting it in our mouths. Oh, it was delicious."\*

\*Excerpt from  
*Shunpike Folk*, page 82

### VOCABULARY

**dismay** - alarm or unhappiness

**secure** - strong; stable

**dramatically** - greatly

**pigment** - a substance that produces a characteristic color

