THE FOREIGN CHEESE INDUSTRY OF WISCONSIN.

Hon. Thos. Luchsinger, Monroe, Wis.

President Southern Wisconsin Cheese Makers' Association.

Mr. President and Gentlemen of this Convention:

I have been called upon by your Secretary, Mr. Baer, to make a few remarks about the Foreign Cheese Industry of Southwest Wisconsin, and the kinds of cheese made in our territory and for one of which we enjoy a celebrity and reputation second to none, for the reputation of Green County's limburger is world wide and wherever we go we meet with that odor that reminds us of Green County fully as much as an orange or an orange blossom will bring home to the citizen of Florida or California recollections of his native state.

If we wish to explore the territory of a river, we usually begin at its mouth and follow its course to its source, which I propose to do today; also I know that the time allotted to me will not be much more than necessary to properly introduce my subject.

About ninety miles west of Milwaukee on the Mineral Point Branch of the C. M. & St. Paul Railroad, there is a fine little city called Brodhead, situated on the Sugar River, which rolls its quiet course through the eastern center of Green County, traversing it from North to South. Along this river runs a branch of the same railroad, which is called the Albany and New Glarus Division, and I propose to you to take a ride with me over it to its terminus, New Glarus, about twenty-four miles north. New Glarus, in which only a few years ago, everything, the houses, the people, and speech, reminded you of Switzerland, is today a pleasant village of about eight hundred inhabitants, which differs in nothing from the common American village of its size, excepting by the magnificence of its buildings both public and private; fine churches, banks, stores, and a host of fine private houses immediately remind you that you have struck a center of wealth, and public utilities are not wanting. Municipal light and water works are there, and the time is not far away when a network of street track, together with an interurban road to Monticello, six miles south, will make New Glarus an ideal country village. When you look over the landscape, the thought arises within you, what has caused all this wealth and appearance
of plenty? High, steep hills, narrow valleys with a small river or creek meandering through its tortuous course, it cannot be farmed in the true sense of the word, for these hills cannot be tilled, because the rains and snow would wash the humus away, so it must be something else which has worked all this wonder. There are no mines or factorics, there is no water power of any magnitude to invite such, and therefore we must seek elsewhere for the source of this apparent wealth. Sixty-three years ago, a number of colonists were settled by the Canton of Glarus in Switzerland on the land surrounding the village of New Glarus. Twenty acres of land were allotted to each of these colonists, and which twenty acre piece, as the quaint instruction reads, which was given to the parties who were sent ahead to select this land should contain tilling land, hay land, timber and water. This was a hard task, and a hard quest had these select men, until they found what they wanted. Sections fourteen, fifteen, twenty-two and twenty-three, and parts of twenty-five and twenty-six. Town four north, range seven east, Green County, Wisconsin, were chosen, and a rugged, hilly spot it was, and many Americans, some of whom were settled in the Neighborhood, made it the subject of their jokes about this choice of the so called "Experts", as these select men were called. But they chose better than they knew, for these very hills and dales which reminded the colonists of their native foothills in the Alps, held the very substance and forces of nature which in after years became so valuable to them. Among the colonists were some who had been herders and dairy-men in the old country, who had spent their short summers on the Alps, earning a scant living at herding cows which they rented from the people in the valley, and made their cheese and butter from the milk derived from the short but sweet grass of the Alps, and one or two of them were expert cheese makers. As soon as these owned a cow or two, they thought of the swiss cheese which they made in the old country and commenced to hanker after it as the Israelites did after the flesh pots of Egypt. They wondered if the American milk would also make cheese. They knew how to procur the rennet from a calf's stomach, their wash boiler had to serve for a cheese kettle, the nearest hickory or swamp burroak furnishd the hoops, which they well knew how to make, and the swiss cheese industry was born. A few more cows added, a copper kettle procured the world knows from
where, later on some were imported and others procured in the state of New York, and later on from the state of Ohio; but at first the old wash boiler for years held its place and position. Soon other colonists and settlers followed from Switzerland and among them some more experts in cheese making, and soon a half dozen or more little farms existed where Swiss cheese was made. At first the cheese was all consumed in the settlement. Not all the Colonists, but only a small fraction of them being cheese makers, they naturally called upon their neighbors who were, and either bought their cheese, or delved into the mysteries of the art until they too commenced to utilize their milk and did the best they could. I remember my own grandfather trying his hand at it, making what he called Swiss cheese, which by January got so hard that if we wished to get a piece for breakfast we actually had to split it off from the small loaf with an axe.

As cows multiplied there was more cheese made, and of a larger mold, and a market was soon found for it at Galena, Freeport and Madison, and the more German a population of a city, the better was the market.

Packing was not very elaborate. Wagon boxes lined with fine sweet-smelling hay was all that was used. Into that came a layer of cheese, when the first layer was complete, hay was again laid on top, then another layer of cheese, and again a layer of hay and on top of that a few blankets or quilts to keep the hay from blowing off, and that was the entire outfit, and the industry of Swiss cheese making had been founded and commerce therein started and was destined to stay.

For twenty years nearly it remained in this state, excepting that copper kettles took the place of the wash boilers, and out houses were used for factories, and if the cellar under the house was too small for the output, then an extra cellar was dug into the hill side and covered with earth.

But you must keep in mind that only a few of the original settlers, and but a few of the newcomers were initiated in the handi- craft and science of cheese making, and only a few derived benefit therefrom. The rest of the Colonists farmed and tilled their lands, raised wheat as long as the soil was ready and willing to produce it, but when they gave out they were at their wits ends and in a sorry plight on their steep and stony hill farms. But whenever a calamity is greatest, help is near, and it appeared in
a couple of cheese men from the east, whose names deserve to be on record forevermore, Gerber and Neumeister. They saw that the country was ready and ripe for a change and just what was needed. The high hills, giving a sweet and nutritious grass, which would produce the best of milk for their purpose, and they built a few factories and bought the milk of the farmers, which so far had been almost worthless to them, as butter brought but poor returns, and these men advised the farmers to purchase more cows and become dairy farmers instead of wheat growers. They were not slow to take their advice, because necessity compelled them to do something. Others followed Gerber and Neumeister, cheese makers commenced to flow in from Ohio and New York and then from Switzerland itself, and cheese factories, at least what represented and what was meant for such, sprung up at every cross-road like mushrooms after a rain, and the inevitable happened, for these factories produced more cheese, especially limburger, which was introduced and was then almost unknown, than the limited market could consume, and a great reduction in the price of cheese, and consequently of milk, took place, which, however, struck the cheese and milk buyers more and harder than the farmers, and proved the financial ruin of more than one. This time in the 70's is know as the panic in the cheese industry of Green County, and will be remembered for a long time by quite a few cheese makers and milk buyers who lost their all in that first hard blow.

But our industry did not die out as some predicted. From that time on the cooperative system came into practice so that today that is the rule, and milk buying the exception, and the time when one milk buyer operated from one dozen to twenty and more factories within our county is of the past. The most of the milk which is bought within our county is by some practical cheese maker who works up his own milk. Still there are a number of milk buyers who buy a few factories, but the number of cheese dealers is Legion and proves the magnitude of our present industry better and stronger that more figures and statistics. Suffice it to say that not only the Swiss of Green County, where they are the predominating nationality, but the American, Irish and Norwegian have followed the example of their Swiss neighbors and the Irish of Lafayette County and Norwegians in the Southern part of Dane County, the Pennsylvania Dutch of Northern Illinois were not slow to follow.
The official statistics are far from being correct, and it would be necessary in order to be accurate and correct to take a special census of cheese factories and their products in those counties named. A very conservative estimate by one of the cheese dealers who is well posted in this matter by the nature of his occupation gives his estimate that there are over four hundred fifty cheese factories in the territory embraced by the Foreign Cheese Industry, and gives the number of pounds of cheese as estimated by him at forty million pounds, and the returns from same at about $4,250,000.00, which is much nearer correct, a wonderful growth indeed. Giving employment to from twelve to fifteen hundred men, to say nothing of the thousands of farmers who furnish the necessary milk and all becoming well to do, as the fine buildings, residences and barns, are the best evidence.

This is what the Foreign Cheese Industry has done for Green County and its vicinity. That it is going to stay is another fact, and the past season is a good proof of that. When prices went sky high so that conservative dealers became alarmed and feared that it was a boom created by some unknown agency and that just as brilliant as the boom was, just so much dejection would come when the inevitable reaction would set in, but fortunately they were agreeably disappointed. And what is the reason that the prices did not drop as far as these men feared? It is this that while only a few years ago brick and limburger cheese were almost unknown in a good many localities of the United States, and only the better class of stores and saloons of the larger cities had it on their bill of fare, now every hamlet and village of any size in the United States from Washington to Maine and from Minnesota to Florida has some one or more places where it is not only kept, but sold; and where there were but a few dozen persons acquainted with this cheese, there are now hundreds of consumers, and the demand gets larger as the years roll by.

But we cannot expect to keep it all in Southwest Wisconsin. Jefferson, Dodge, and Winnebago Counties have manufactured this cheese in large quantities years ago, especially brick and limburger, and Northern Wisconsin has also through emigration from Green County commenced to manufacture, and a number of factories are springing up there, and in Minnesota and Iowa we have our competitors. But still the old hills of Northern Green County, southern Dane and Iowa, and the entire east portion of LaFayette County, can naturally be considered na-
ture's store house, where the materials grow which are necessary for the making up of a fine flavored Swiss cheese, and the Swiss people who still manufacture over ninety-one hundredths of it are still the people who can be depended upon to produce the best article, which, as is conceded, can be safely put side by side with the imported Swiss cheese without having to be ashamed of it, if it is well tended, cured and ripened. While we have learned a good many things in the United States which have been of great benefit to us, we have also adopted some which are not quite so beneficial, and foremost among them is great hurry. Swiss cheese, like no other, must have special care in its curing and tending. While, of course, the grass and the milk produced from it is a great factor, and the utmost care taken in the making process just as necessary, but the same care, if not more, must be given to the curing process, and unless the latter is well attended to, and the cheese left to ripen in the right temperature, it will be spoiled in the transportation and by the hurry by which it is put on the market. One of the reasons for this hurry is that the farmers want their money, the cheese maker his wages, the cheese dealer quick returns from his investment. Our cheese factories being too small, we must do something with our surplus, and unless we have a cold storage, we are not able to take care of it as it should be taken care of. Some attempts to procure cold storage for Monroe, Brodhead, Monticello and New Glarus were attempted, but without success. I will readily admit that a good deal of good milk is spoiled by unskillful cheese makers, who are not well enough skilled in their profession, and our farmers and cooperative dairymen often hire this class of men for the cheapness instead of the skill. We have tried to remedy this by a union of the cheese makers among themselves for the purpose of examination as to the necessary qualifications, but wonderful to relate we meet with the heaviest opposition by the farmers whom we are trying to benefit thereby. One farmer said to me the other day, "Are you really going to give us guaranteed cheese makers?" I said, "Yes". Then he asked, "Are the cheese makers going to guarantee their cheese?" I said "Yes, upon one condition,—that you farmers guarantee your milk."

We are trying our best in an humble way to do all we can to keep the foreign cheese industry at the high water mark, but there are a number of things which are still necessary, better
factories, better roads, better accommodations and conditions for cheese makers cold storages so that the surplus and overflow of the cheese cellars can be stored and brought to a condition of full ripeness for shipping and a host of other things which we are working hard to remedy and bring about reform. We have accomplished a great deal. A number of those old broken down shanties and mud holes called cellars which were formerly used for factories are disappearing fast, and fine modern structures are taking their place, worthy of the industry which they represent, and which gives life, wealth and pulsating commerce to all our community.

Now, gentlemen, one last word in conclusion: while we are in honest competition with each other to a certain extent, we are no more so than the farmers, one of whom raises beef, the other pork, and the third mutton. Variety is the spice of life, and when we tire of one kind of cheese, we like to get hold of another kind. Therefore, we are all working for the same purpose, and let us all make a strong pull, and a long pull and a pull altogether, and we will be able to keep Wisconsin on the map as one of the greatest, if not the foremost, dairy States in the Union.

The President: Mr. Luchsinger has certainly given us a very interesting and instructive talk at this time. We will now call on Mr. Peter Zumkehr, of Monroe, to give us a talk on Limburger Cheese Making.

LIMBURGER CHEESE MAKING.

Peter Zumkehr, Monroe, Wis.

Traveling Cheese Instructor for Southern Wisconsin Cheese Makers’ Association.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

About fifty years ago, when times were hard for the farmer, when he could raise only very poor crops, and market conditions being poorer still, the thought came to some farseeing farmers, that the dairy industry would be the ideal industry for southwestern Wisconsin. They started to make cheese,