A History of Green County’s Cheese Industry

By Emery A. Odell

A missing chapter in Green county’s recorded history, one treating of the origin of the cheese industry, the introduction of the factory system and the men who made important contribution to the advancement of the industry in its early stages. This review was undertaken for the purpose of establishing facts in a printed record gathered from such information as could be considered authentic.

Green county histories written up to the present time do not contain a printed chapter recording the beginning of the foreign type cheese industry which has made Green county an outstanding dairy district, not only in Wisconsin but in the entire country.

It is known that cheesemaking in Green county had its inception when the Swiss settlers in New Glarus township were driven to it in desperation after repeated crop failures, but the writers of the time did not anticipate that some day there might be appreciative public sentiment in favor of honoring the pioneers in the cheese industry, who laid the foundation so well that the prosperity of the county in the years to come was built thereon, by erecting suitable tablets to establish for all time the exact location of the first cheese factory that began turning out a product that had a cash value in the outside market.

Where Should Marker Be?

Where would one go in Green county to erect a tablet to mark the spot and honor the achievement as well as the memory of men who are entitled to credit for their vision in launching the cheese business in a practical way so it might grow until there was developed here in Green county what is now recognized as the center of the Swiss cheese industry in this country—and here in Monroe, the Swiss Cheese Capital of the U. S. A.?

The history list of “first things” in Green county published in 1884 does not include the first cheese factory. Indeed, it may be that even at that time it was not realized that a highly specialized industry was taking form as the chief operation of the farming section here.

Review of the history of the early days of commercial cheese making reveals the fact that now in 1928 it is 60 years since the first cheese factory was put in operation in Green county. Cheesemaking started long before that and the first cheesemaker was doubtless the wife of some Swiss colonist for the first cheese presses were in the kitchens of the homes.

Used Skimmed Milk

As soon as the colonists had cows they had cheese, for they were used to cheese in Switzerland. However, it was not a whole milk cheese for they skimmed their milk for butter. The use of butter was considered extravagant and butter was traded at the market with the eggs for necessities or money that was needed for taxes. The skim milk was used to make cheese that was bluish in


color and tough in texture but it served as food and was eaten with bread instead of butter, or with boiled potatoes. People now living still remember that skim milk cheese. This cheese was made for home consumption and for that reason it is not easily forgotten. The principal merit of this cheese was in the way it lasted in the memory of the people who as children were obliged to eat it.

But on the point of the exact location of the factories that were built for the purpose of making Swiss, Limburger and brick cheese in Green county nothing very definite has ever been printed beyond the generally accepted belief that dairying was introduced by the Swiss colonists who came from Switzerland and founded New Glarus in 1845 and who in the years following when their efforts at farming failed turned to dairying.

**Cinch Bug Pest Recalled**

This was not until nearly a score of years had passed, for Conrad Zimmerman, writing the history of the town of New Glarus in 1884, said:

"The town of New Glarus has been a wheat growing district for many years. Those hillsides and plateaux have in many instances stood the abuse of being plowed and sowed with wheat for 12 or 15 successive years. Little else was raised during the time of 20 years, from 1850 to 1870. But when the price of wheat came down after the close of the war, when the hillsides were cut up by numerous ditches, when the arable portion of the fields was washed away in many places, and above all, when the cinch bugs appeared and ate up the wheat crop year after year, then the farmers were forced to think of the next thing on the program.

"Either cheese or nothing, and happily we got cheese. The old wheat fields were seeded with clover and grass. Cows were put on them. Cheese factories were built. After the fact was proved that there was a ready market for cheese, it only took five or six years until cheese making was the main branch of work for the whole farming population. It not only pays better but the farms are constantly made more productive."

A pailful of skimmed milk, a stove kettle and a wooden hoop split from a sapling was the extent of equipment for the first cheesemaking in the homes. The cheese was round and the size of a milk pan and was flattened by heavy weights used to press out the moisture.

Home cheesemaking was carried on to greater or less extent and as operations enlarged, it became necessary to use what was called the cheese house, usually a little addition like a small shed where a copper kettle might be used, with fire boxes of brick or stone with a crane constructed to swing the kettle on or off the fire.

Eighteen factories were operated in New Glarus township at that time, 1884.

**First Cows In 1846.**

Drovers from Ohio came to Exeter in the spring of 1846 with cows and these were purchased in sufficient number to give each family one, it was written by Judge John Luchsinger in his history of the colony. The cost was $12 each and was paid out of an unexpended balance of $1,000 aid that had been sent from Switzerland.

"The colonists excelled in the care of the cow and here the Switzer turned to his benefactor in the old country," he said.

In 1846 the livestock inventory of New Glarus township was 1 bull, 18 cows, 15 heifers and 25 calves.
Dairying was certainly in its infancy at that time.

In Desperate Circumstances

Even until after the civil war the Swiss colonists were in desperate circumstances, being obliged to go to the length of their immediate resources for their own existence since they had little money and lived almost entirely upon the things they were able to grow, the wild game, such as deer and rabbits and the fish in the streams. They traded the best of their produce for flour and sugar.

The rennet starter was made from the stomach of calves, cured at home and salted down for future use.

Much of the earlier cheese was called Schab-Zieger. The cakes weighed a few ounces that became very hard in curing and was grated for table use. This was not a commercial proposition but served well the uses of the Swiss settlers. This variety of cheese, also known as green cheese, may be purchased in the local market at the present time, but it is now imported from Switzerland.

The fact is well established that the Green county cheese industry originated in the homes of the early Swiss settlers.

Washington Township Reference

There is reference to early cheesemaking in the history of Washington township.

Adam Blumer, native of Switzerland, came here in 1849, locating in Washington township, where he entered 240 acres of land from the government, erected a log house, purchased two pairs of oxen and put the oxen immediately to work as he commenced plowing, and improving the land. He had been reared on a dairy farm in Switzerland and learned the art of cheesemaking. The first spring, which was in 1850, he bought five cows and made butter and cheese, and branched off into grain and stock raising. He died in 1855 leaving a widow and five children. The youngest was Adam Blumer, who succeeded his brother-in-law, Jacob Hefty, in the brewery business in Monroe. The son married March 23, 1865, and located on the old homestead. He began making limburger cheese in 1868, keeping at that time 20 cows. He continued the manufacture of cheese and in 1884 had 75 cows, which was more than other farmers of that day thought of keeping. The farm was increased to 476 acres and as many as 80 to 100 cows were milked in later years, when he had as high as 150 cattle on the farm.

First Cheesemaker

Rudolph Benkert, who came to Monroe in 1867, was known in after years as the first cheesemaker in Green county. He went to work the same year he came on the Martin Zumbrunnen farm in Washington township. He started experimental limburger making in a small building and the cheese was taken to the cellar of the home for curing. Cheesemaking up to that time had been carried on in a haphazard sort of way in the homes without commonly practiced methods and no thought of uniform shaping.

Mr. Benkert was born in Canton Berne, Switzerland, May 22, 1841. He was the son of John Benkert and when he came to this country with his parents in 1851 they settled in Oneida county, New York, where limburger was first made in this country. He learned something about it there and when he came here he began making limburger with moulds in the form of the small bricks. This work was carried on by him in a small way in 1867 and it earned for him the reputation of being the first cheesemaker in Green county.
Also Made American Cheese

When he was married to Catherine Zimmerman, of Washington township, Feb. 17, 1871, they moved onto a farm in Monroe township where he built a factory and made cheese from the milk of his own cows and milk delivered by several farmers. He did not buy the milk but they made it up as a company. He made cheese for 20 years or more, making both limburger and American. The American cheese he sold to grocery stores at Freeport at 8 cents a pound and the limburger only brought 6 cents. When limburger was up to 10 cents he thought he was making money.

He retired from farming in 1905 and moved to Monroe, where he died Feb. 20, 1918. His children are: Fred E., Robert, Mrs. Kate Blum, Mrs. Ida Klossner, Monroe township; Rudolph, Jr., Clarno; Mrs. Sophia Isely, Adams; Mrs. Anna Asmus, Sylvester; Mrs. Ella Kundert, Clarno. Charles, Monroe, and Frank Benkert, Freeport.

While living in New York he enlisted in 1863 in the 1st New York Mounted Rifles, under General Butler. He served to the close of the war. He was dispatch carrier for six months. Although wounded in each arm in a cavalry charge at Bontack, VA., he was incapacitated only two weeks during his enlistment. Mr. Benkert served as assessor in Monroe township for several years. He was a republican and much concerned in the welfare of the farmer.

Early Maker Still Lives

John Marty, one of the first cheesemakers in Green county, lives to relate his experiences as a cheesemaker in 1868. He is now 86 and with his wife by second marriage, lives with his children on the old homestead in Mount Pleasant township, where he located in 1864. The stone building built in 1868 as the cheese house is still standing. It was enlarged by a stone addition when it was converted into a shelter for farm machinery.

Mathias Marty, oldest son, says his father made cheese in a small way, having his own milk and buying milk from Thomas Conway and John Jenny, who were his neighbors.

Tried “Hard Cheese” in 1868

First he made what was called “hard cheese,” of skimmed milk after the style of Swiss cheese but it did not work out just right. His building had two rooms which he figured would take care of the making and curing the same as in Switzerland, where he had seen the above ground factory, but the building was too warm and he had to move the cheese to the cellar of his home in order to keep it on the shelves.

He made round Swiss which he peddled in Madison with butter when there was no other market for it, continuing his operations until about 1885 when a cheese company was formed and Jacob Karlen bought the milk. A new factory was built in 1905 but it has been idle now for 20 years.

Uncles Owmed Monticello

Mr. Marty’s uncles, Jacob Marty and Mathias Marty, bought the whole village of Monticello in the forties and owned much land in Mount Pleasant.

John Marty came in 1864 with his father, John Marty, and worked out the first two winters. Then he bought the farm from his uncle, Jacob Marty, who went to Texas for his health. The farm consisted of 300 acres, and is located five miles southeast of Monticello. Mr. Marty was born in Canton Berne, Switzerland. He has eight children living, Mathias, Henry, Jacob, Herman and Mary, at home, Adam Marty, Monroe; Mrs. Anna Balziger, Spring...
Grove, and John Marty, Janesville. Mrs. Henry Babler, Monroe, is a sister to Mrs. Marty.

**Nick Gerber Founds Factory**

The development of the factory system followed the farmers' cheese house and early accounts, first published in The Times in 1915, reveal Nick Gerber as the founder of the first farmers' cheese factory in Green county.

Mr. Gerber was a native of Switzerland, born in Canton Berne in 1836. He learned cheesemaking there in 1856 and came to America in 1857. He located at Booneville, Oneida county, N. Y., and introduced the manufacture of limburger cheese in New York state. He operated this factory six years. Then he moved to Wheeling, near Chicago, but a factory he opened there did not prove successful. He came to Green county in 1868 and built and equipped a limburger factory in the town of New Glarus on the farm of Albert Babler. This, it was stated by The Times, was the first farmer cheese factory operating in Green county.

The next year, in 1869, Mr. Gerber started the first Swiss cheese factory, which was located on the Dietrich Freitag farm in Washington township.

Mr. Gerber was familiar with the operation of the factory system in New York and Ohio and persuaded the settlers to build factories and cellars and deliver their milk to the factory for outright purchase.

**Factory System Beginnings**

Farmers at first did not respond favorably to the factory system plan of making cheese. Many had made Swiss cheese for years on their farms from the milk of their own herds and were satisfied. Besides, the peculiar process of making Swiss cheese, which had not varied for centuries, made them believe that it was impracticable to work up the milk in large volume. Experiments proved that these opinions were wrong and that cheese of better quality and greater uniformity could be made by the factory system.

Factories were first operated as a string, the farmers selling the milk, the maker and supplies being furnished by the buyer of the milk. The price paid at the beginning was as low as 40 cents a hundred. Then the price kept stepping up to 50 and 60 cents and finally to 75 cents, but this was not until years afterward.

**Gerber Started Chain**

Nick Gerber in time was conducting six or eight cheese factories in New Glarus and Washington townships, and he was buying the cheese from others so that the industry was becoming fairly launched on basis that was proving helpful to the farmers. Times had been very tight and money that came into the districts for cheese aided immensely in putting the farmers on their feet.

The interesting volume of Green county history written by Miss Helen M. Bingham in 1876 touches upon this budding industry that was due to spread over the county in a way that establishes the large part Mr. Gerber played in it at that time. He is credited with three factories in Washington and New Glarus townships producing 227,900 pounds of Swiss cheese. Jacob Karlen had three factories making 24,000 pounds, John Boss was making 24,000 pounds in one factory and G. Babler 22,000 pounds in one factory. There were four limburger factories with production of 39,000 pounds as follows: Jacob Freitag 5,000, Paulus Kundert 6,000, George Legler 8,000 and Stauffacher & Weiss 20,000.

"From the very first," Miss Bingham wrote, "the Swiss made cheese to use at home and sell in the county, but its manufacture in large quantities was delayed
until five or six years ago when Nicholas Gerber started two factories in southern New Glarus and one in Washington. At first only Swiss cheese was made but of the two lines of industry the manufacture of limburger cheese is now the more important.”

14 Washington Factories

Washington had 14 factories and was then distinguished for its cheese, according to Miss Bingham's history. The output in 1876 was 225,000 pounds of Swiss, sold at an average of 12 cents a pound, and 775,000 pounds of limburger at 10 cents a pound.

D. and H. Freitag and M. Zimmerman had Swiss and limburger factories; G. Wittwer, R. Karlen and J. Zimmerman Swiss factories; and N. Gerber, Jacob Karlen, G. Behler, C. Theiler, John Boss and Miller, Frautschy & company had the limburger factories.

Outside of New Glarus and Washington townships there were 15 factories making Swiss and limburger in the county, four in Exeter, four in Clarno, one in Sylvester and six in Mt. Pleasant. Monroe had no cheese shippers at that time.

These figures, while not bearing upon the point of origin, indicate that dairying was going forward. Mr. Gerber's part in the change that was coming in the farmer's situation was recognized and appreciated, although rivalry in the business in the years following deprived him of some of the credit he deserved for it was due to his earlier efforts that dairymen continued to derive benefit in being able to sell their cheese and receive cash for it.

Children of the first dairymen still living hereabouts have pleasant memories of this kindly man as he traveled the country on his regular visits to his cheese factories, as this was the only way he had of keeping in touch with them. The struggling dairymen welcomed his visits as they were mutually interested in an improvement of conditions and relations existing between them were the best. Mr. Gerber wore a long black beard and always drove a white horse hitched to a single buggy. He made regular trips over the road in New Glarus and Washington townships where he carried on his principal operations.

His Reward Inadequate

There are still traces in some of the neighborhoods or among those of the younger generations now grown up who came from his factory districts of the affection farmers held for him at the time when he was alone in the field. His nursing of the infant industry did not permit of the financial reward his efforts deserved, and although his influence and activities were productive of results there were others to participate in the benefits resulting with enlarged development as they became competitors in producing and marketing.

The years were eventful because of rapid expansion which brought on a critical period that almost proved disastrous. There was a slump in prices that created a problem in distribution because there was not sufficient outlet for the product of all the factories engaged in making.

When there were only a few factories producing a small amount of cheese it could be easily disposed of but new markets had to be found as the production mounted. As the market became glutted, prices went down to the point where farmers suffered losses, even where they were selling their milk under contract. However, the farmers had a taste of the better times and willingly sustained losses in order to help the buyers who were seriously pressed and on the verge of ruin and being forced out of business. Then, as new markets could be
opened, prices advanced again and the permanence of the industry appeared to be definitely established.

Unfortunately, Mr. Gerber did not recover the losses he met with in 1878 at New Glarus when the cheese industry suffered a severe blow resulting in hard times. He was one of the organizers of the Green County Cheese Manufacturing company Jan. 22, 1878, with Gottlieb Wittwer, Gottlieb Beller and Edward Ruegger, which failed after the tragic death of Mr. Wittwer in a Denver hotel Feb. 23, 1883. Money was tied up in cheese and there was no movement because of market slump. Mr. Wittwer’s trip to the west was made in an effort to find sale for the cheese. Mr. Wittwer’s death, presumably suicide, precipitated the failure of the company with losses that fell heavily upon all who were interested. The cheese in stock had to be sold in the settlement of affairs. Limburger was sold as low as 3 cents a pound in order to convert it into cash.

Mr. Gerber moved in 1880 to Brooklyn to take advantage of improved shipping facilities, but he remained there only a year, coming to Monroe in April, 1882. He retired except for dealing in cheese factory supplies he received from Switzerland, at the same time engaging in the saloon business with Edward Ruegger, conducting what was known as the Spring Hotel on South Jackson street opposite Spring square. Mr. Ruegger became sheriff in 1882 and Mr. Gerber remained in business alone, Mr. Ruegger later returning to the old stand while Mr. Gerber moved into the old McKay block at the southwest corner of the square.

Pioneer In Iowa, Too

In 1893 Mr. Gerber left Monroe, moving to Laverne, Ia., where he again pioneered in the manufacture of cheese. He later engaged in the retail cheese business in Omaha, but owing to breaking health he returned to Monroe, where he died May 8, 1903, aged 67 years. Mrs. Gerber, his widow, is still a resident of Monroe, residing at 713 E. Washington street. Mrs. Sophie Alder, 814 East Russell street, is a daughter by his first wife. Mrs. Alder was a child when the family located at Wheeling, near Chicago, where they remained while the father came to Green county to interest the farmers in the factory system. At last they were ready to move to New Glarus, but they were delayed by the fire that swept Chicago in October, 1871. Children still living besides Mrs. Alder are Mrs. Ed. Liebley, Rice Lake; Mrs. I. P. Harrison and Mrs. William Kempt, Winnipeg, Canada; John Gerber, Ames, Ia.; Ed. Gerber, Kansas City, Mo.; Will Gerber, Los Angeles, and Henry Gerber, Council Bluffs, Ia.

Poem Pays Tribute

After the death of Nick Gerber in 1903, there was found among his effects a poem entitled, “A Song of Cheese,” that was written by John Peter Luchsinger, of Washington township, Green county, in 1882. It was dedicated to Mr. Gerber, who 14 years previous had come to Green county from New York and started the foreign cheese industry on the foundation laid by the Swiss settlers. At the time the poem was published in 1903 and again in 1915 it was agreed that Mr. Gerber really deserved this crude but honest tribute, and what was true 46 years ago is certainly true today.

In translating the poem, which was written in German, effort was made to preserve the quaint ideas and the verses, the translation being as follows:
A SONG OF CHEESE

I will sing a song of long, long ago,
A story old and true,
When oats and corn were failures
And wheat, through cinch bugs, too.

Our needs were great, and interest
Had gone to highest notch—
And farmers all around us thought
That they had made a botch.

Our lands to us no harvest gave,
The ground was almost bare,
Earth washed down from every hill
And stones most anywhere.

A savior was surely due
To help us in our need,
And he arrived, and then he said,
"Change your affairs with speed."

"Bid all the cinch bugs go abroad,
"By seeding your acres down;
"Keep only cows and feed your hogs
"I'll quickly change your frown."

"Plant only corn and nothing more
"To feed your hogs and swine,
"Build better barns, milk more cows
"And riches will be thine."

He started in and showed us how,
To turn the milk to gold,
With two or three cheese factories
To which the milk was sold.

Then money soon commenced to flow,
A full, great, golden stream,
Which all into our coffers came—
It was just like a dream.

Nick Gerber was this hero's name,
Who came to us from far,
Who was our teacher in this art,
Who was our guiding star.

If cows could talk and have some sense
How thankful they would be
And to Nick Gerber an recompense
A monument you'd see.

But then the calves, they felt not so,
Of milk they always had their fill,
But now they bleat a tale of woe,
They're fed on whey and swill.

So let us then all thankful be
To Nick, who did this all,
For he it was, and none but he,
Who started first the ball.

Which rolled us to prosperity
And to our wealth galore;
Therfore we can but grateful be
Now and forever more.

Of course I know that I will not
Reap thanks from everyone.
For there are some who claim that they
Did more than anyone.

But I don't care! Give praises to
Who praises does deserve.
I know that Nick, before them all,
Came here, and on his nerve.

He started this; and now you see
Yourself what it became,
Therefore, I say, here's three times three
To Old Nick Gerber's name!

Three Other Leaders

Closely joining Nick Gerber in early cheese factory development were three other men who soon became leading factors in the industry. All were natives of Switzerland and all were Berners—Nick Gerber, Jacob Karlen, John Boss and Jacob Regez. Most of the Swiss settlers at that time were Glarners. They were the four aces in the wholesale cheese trade of their time in Green county. Jacob Karlen and Jacob Regez continued as vital forces for 35 years. The cheese business experienced its greatest development under the leadership of these men. They had market connections in many parts of the country, the necessary experience and the means needed to finance cheesemaking. They provided the factory equipment and makers. The makers, their tools and supplies, rennet starters and nearly everything came from Switzerland.

Like Mr. Gerber, the other three were practical cheese men. Their cheese won favor in the larger markets both east and west. All prospered, each gaining a competence by reason of the successful management of their business.

Jacob Karlen came from Booneville, N. Y. He became a wholesale dealer in Monroe in 1878 and continued until he retired in 1909. It is generally considered that he personally predominated the cheese trade locally to larger extent than any other individual. His business was known for its heavy volume and wide distribution. Born in Boltigen, Canton Berne, Switzerland, Jan. 18, 1840, he came to New York in 1869. After a year he came to Wisconsin, locating at Hanover in Rock county, where he was engaged as a stone mason. In 1872 he opened a cheese factory in Jefferson township, Green county,
what was known as Richland, now the Ruff & Pfund factory, operating it one year as maker. In 1872 he made cheese in Jordan and from 1873 to 1876 he made Adams moving next to the Becker-Wittenwyler factory in 1877 and to Monroe in the fall of 1878, living first in the south part of the city.

First Milk Vat

Knute Olson, now a resident of Stoughton, who was a tinner in Monroe, is credited with having made the first milk vat for factory cheesemaking in Green county when Mr. Karlen fitted up the Wild factory in Jordan. Previous to that whey cans and boilers were used where kettles were not obtainable.

Mr. Karlen late in the seventies built the first cheese cellar in Monroe. Being a mason by trade in Switzerland he had the cellar built of stone and mortar with a wide circular arched ceiling which gave the cellar the appearance of a large tunnel. It was built into the embankment of the C. M. & St. P. Ry. Co.’s right-of-way on West avenue. It is still in service being connected with the Carl Marty plant by tunnel under the street. Mr. Karlen used the cellar for storage, curing and shipping during the thirty years he was in business here.

Back in the early years of the cheese business when Monroe first became a shipping point, people protested because of the odors emitted by the loads of limburger that were being delivered here for storage in cellars of store buildings down town to await shipment, for there were no regular storage cellars. One day Mr. Karlen came from Farmers Grove with six or seven teams with wagons loaded with limburger. The teams were lined up and hitched along the court house park on the north side of the square. Mr. Karlen did his banking at the First National bank, where his drafts from the east were deposited and these made him a valued patron. As the extent of the business was impressed upon the public by this cheese caravan open hostility began to subside and limburger found its way finally onto the table of the Yankee households in Monroe.

Children Pinched Noses

There was also prejudice against limburger in the country where there were down east farmers who at first refused to take their milk to limburger factories. School children along the road pinched their noses as the limburger wagons passed on their way to town. It is said that at one time an ordinance was proposed in the city council to keep limburger hauling off the main streets because the odor was so offensive. As it became realized that limburger was an important commodity of trade the cheese became more respectable.

John Boss was born in Canton Berne Switzerland, June 6, 1836. He learned cheesemaking there as a boy and when he was 17 he went to France to engage in the occupation. He came to America in 1856, locating in New Jersey. After one year he went to New York, making cheese in Oneida county until 1870, when he came to Wisconsin. He started two factories at Watertown, which he sold in 1874 and came to Green county. He went to cheesemaking in Washington township in 1874 in the factory now known as the Burgy-Wittenwyler factory. He also engaged in the wholesale cheese business, buying cheese at other factories while associated with Mr. Gerber. His factory was the headquarters of the industry in this section. Mr. Gerber used to plan his trips for night stops with Mr. Boss. Mr. Boss was a man of keen mind and original wit, being known for his jolly good
nature. The farmers liked him, although recognizing him as a shrewd buyer. His buying operations began to extend out into other producing districts and in time he was joined by Sam Knutti, another Berner, with whom the making of limburger was a fine art. It was said of him that he never had a failure. He was a 6-footer of heavy build. He never left his factory except for the annual cheesemakers' ball in Monroe and then, it is said, he made the most of the holiday. He applied himself closely to cheese-making, proving a valuable man to Mr. Boss, who was then more active out in the buying field. Mr. Boss was making money for in 1881 he bought the Jared Fessenden farm of 160 acres adjoining the factory when he was buying the milk of 130 cows. Mr. Boss lived on his farm until he moved to Monroe, where he died in May, 1913. Two daughters, Mrs. G. F. Sickinger and Mrs. W. E. Trukenbrod are residents of Monroe.

Became Wealthy

John Boss and Jacob Karlen were in the wholesale business together for a short time. Mr. Karlen was a widely different type of man, being stern and forceful, traits that helped make him powerful and respected as he promoted his string of factories. He bought the milk long before cooperative factories became the rule. At one time he ran 30 factories. He became one of the wealthy men of the city when monied men were few, and despite his comfortable accumulations he was content to live until his death on Jan. 10, 1920, in the modest home on Greenwood drive where he located in 1879. He always did business in his own name to the time he retired in 1908, when the business was conducted in the name of J. Karlen & Son, with Jacob Karlen, Jr., in charge until the Badger Cheese company resulted from a consolidation of local cheese concerns. Mr. and Mrs. John Werren, Mrs. Werren being a daughter, occupy the Karlen homestead. His sons, Jacob Karlen, Jr., and G. A. Karlen are no longer active in the cheese business. Another son, Fred J. Karlen, carries on the manufacture on a large scale of fancy cheese at Winslow, Ill.

Following the death of Louis Schuetze in 1886, Mr. Karlen bought the United States house, paying $7,750 for the hotel at the northeast corner of the square with the barn and other buildings, the lot extending back across the alley to Payne street. The hotel was moved away and a stone foundation was laid for a new hotel, but Arabut Ludlow opened Hotel Ludlow in 1885, which was a pretentious hotel for that day and appeared ample for the hotel needs of the city, and Mr. Karlen abandoned his hotel project. The work stopped when the foundation walls were completed and the foundation was afterward used for the Karlen block, which was built in 1891, operations being carried on with the building of the court house.

Jacob Regez came on the scene in 1874 filled with the enthusiasm of youth for he was only 25 and snowed ambition and energy fitting his years. He was born in Canton Berne, Switzerland, Sept. 18, 1849. Coming to the United States in 1872 he located at Iowa City, Ia. He had come to America in 1869, locating at that time in Ohio, then going to France to take charge of a cheese factory for his father. After two and one-half years, with the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war, he came to America with his brother, Rudy Regez. Jacob Regez, coming to New Glarus, first made cheese and then he was organizing factories and buying the milk. He was soon making headway but be-
cause others were in control of the business here it was necessary for him to interest farmers beyond established factories. His brother established factories in Dane county.

Won Considerable Fortune

Mr. Regez was married in Washington township Jan. 20, 1875, to Louise Wittwer, whose parents settled there in 1852. Mr. and Mrs. Regez came to Monroe, where his activities centered until he retired in 1909 after a successful career of 35 years in the wholesale cheese business. He had many factory connections, buying milk at one time for a considerable string and also buying cheese according to the demands of his wholesale business. He also rated well up in the scale of fortunes of the well-to-do of his day in Monroe. His death occurred in 1914. Mrs. Regez occupies the old homestead at 501 North Adams street, and his children, Mrs. John Strahn, Jacob Regez, Jr., and Herman Regez, also have their homes here. Jacob Regez is a member of the Badger Cheese company, and Herman Regez and Rudy Regez, Jr., are in business as the Regez Cheese company.

Beller First Dealer Here

Gottlieb Beller, also a native of canton Berne, Switzerland, was an early Green county limburger maker, starting in 1874 in Washington township. Miss Bingham in her history of 1876 gives his name as Behler. He was with Martin Zumbrunnen. In 1875 he made cheese in the Goodrich factory, later the Davis factory, southeast of Monroe, and on Jan. 27, 1876, when he married Elizabeth Yordi he moved to Monroe, and always lived on Greenwood drive, 222 East Greenwood, where Jos. Acherman, son-in-law, and Miss Anna Beller, sister to Mrs. Acherman reside.

He was the first dealer to locate in Monroe. He joined Nick Gerber, Edward Ruegger and Gottlieb Wittwer in the Green County Cheese Mfg. company in 1878 and in the crash that followed the death of Wittwer in 1883 he lost everything. Upon a credit of $2,000 he engaged in business for himself opening three factories, one being the Goodrich factory where he made the cheese and employed the makers in two other factories. He increased the number to nine and also bought cheese.

In those days the factory season closed in October, but in 1879 when business slumped and there was no market with a surplus of Swiss on hand, he was the first to begin winter speculating. He bought up Swiss and stored it in the old brewery storage where the Badger Cheese company is located and cared for the cheese all winter. In the spring there was a revival of the market with new demand for Swiss cheese and he received high prices. His venture at first was ridiculed by the cheese men but in after years others began speculating, which has since featured the business. He was 17 when he came from Switzerland. He remained in business 16 years meeting with his share of success and retired at 41. For ten years he was a member of the city council. He died at 51, on April 27, 1902, with a record for honest dealing and conscientious service for the city in an unusually active capacity as alderman.

Others who have had important part in the development of the industry in the years after the pioneer days are the late Deitrich Wyss, Ferdinand Grunert, John C. Wenger, Albert C. Trachsel, Christ Roth, the late Peter Stauffer, the late Ed. C. Wenger, all of Monroe; the late Henry Holdrich, Christ Bontly brothers and Edward Wittwer brothers, Monti-
cello; Carl Zuercher and Jacob Marty, Brodhead, and Fred Voegeli, New Glarus.

The wholesale business continued for many years in the hands of local wholesalers but outside interests now figure in the local situation, the Kraft-Phenix company being represented as well as Chicago houses, so important has become the Green county producing district in the national trade.

Prices Down In 1879

In the period after the earlier activities, adjustments that followed were not serious and practices became well settled except for the natural competition in the buying in the factory and the selling in the market. Differences gradually entered into the deals with the farmers and contract sessions in the factories sometimes continued long into the night as arguments arose over the price to be paid for the milk or as they haggled over a few cents or a fraction of a cent in the price to be paid per hundred pounds for milk.

By this time patrons expected more than 60 cents and it did not come easy as buyers were obliged to figure closely because of unsafe market. Then came the six months contract, and a difference of 5 cents between the summer and winter price. In 1879 the farmers contracted at 70 cents for the summer and 75 cents for the winter but buyers were not able to go through with it and paid only 60 cents straight. Factory deliveries had to be made twice a day. The hog market also went bad. Farmers delivering hogs in Monroe received $2.15 cents a hundred, the lowest price ever known in the county.

Farmers Took Over Factories

Prices started on the upgrade after the cheese business survived the depression that threatened to ruin it, and then tricks of the trade began to worry farmers who suspected buyers were making too much money and were paying too little for the milk. They did not have the opportunity there is today to be informed upon the selling prices and as the dairymen came to know more about prices existing conditions became upset and the cooperative factory was the next step. Farmers then employed their maker on the percentage basis, the maker providing his own tools and supplies as he does today, while the farmer patrons selected their salesman who dealt with the buyers. The revenue from cheese was divided according to the quantity of milk delivered. The factories have operated now for many years on the cooperative basis, although some farmers continued to sell their milk after the first factories adopted the cooperative plan.

Farmers were very cautious for even in that day they did not take readily to changes without being certain of the benefits, and besides it was a move that was not favored by the buyers who controlled numbers of factories. They strongly resisted cooperative buying as agitation grew out of the dissatisfaction over prices being paid for milk but the farmers learned it meant better prices for them and the cooperative idea succeeded. Cooperative factories became the rule. Now the butterfat test is gaining favor as the proper and fair basis for figuring milk and the patron's share in the factory income.

First Farmer Factories

At the outset of this review dealing with the origin of the cheese factory system in Green county, question was raised as to the location of the first factory. Then reference was made to a statement in The Times in 1915 that revealed Nick Gerber as the
founder of the first factories with the opening of a limburger factory on the Albert Babler farm in New Glarus township in 1868, and the opening of a Swiss cheese factory on the Dietrich Freitag farm in Washington township in 1869.

It was anticipated, since the purpose of the account of the incidents leading to the factory stage of the development was to establish the location of the first factory, that contention was liable to follow such as might make necessary a sifting of claims, but apparently facts have been established beyond controversy. The factory locations first presented may now be safely set down in the record as the sites of the initial ventures in the field of factory cheesemaking in Green county.

Steinman Gives Data

These sites were merely touched upon in passing. Now they answer the question asked at the beginning.

J. C. Steinman, Monticello, who is regarded as an authority of local history, comes forward with complete data so that the whole question may now be considered closed to argument or dispute on the point of facts.

The information is first hand, so that every shadow of doubt is removed. Mr. Steinman was a lad of 14 when Nick Gerber started up his limburger factory in 1868 on the farm of Albert Babler, in New Glarus township. The factory was started in a log house that stood ten rods from the road four miles southwest of New Glarus and two miles north of the Fred K. Hefty farm. Later it was moved next to the road close to the Babler-Hefty school house. The cheese cellar was built back into the hill back of the Babler farm. The walls of this cellar still stand as part of the cattle barn. Mr. Babler and five or six farmers delivered milk to this factory the first season. John Pfund, who learned to make cheese from Gerber, was the maker. In after years when a new factory was built the site was changed, this one standing twenty rods west of the log factory. The factory is no longer in operation.

Mr. Steinman was born in Canton Glarus, Switzerland, May 13, 1854 and in 1868 he was working for J. C. Blum, half a mile west of the Babler factory at the time it was opened by Mr. Gerber. He hauled milk to the factory and he well remembers Mr. Gerber and Mr. Pfund who “kept batch” at the factory. Mr. Gerber, he remembers, was engaged in promoting factories and frequently visited Chicago the first year as he had left his children at Wheeling, his wife having died in New York, and he interested a Chicago man by the name of Newmeister, in the industry he was launching here. Mr. Newmeister came out frequently to look into the situation. He was taking most of the cheese at that time.

Started In Town Washington

The next season, which was in 1869, Mr. Gerber started the Swiss cheese factory in Washington township, on the Dietrich Freitag farm, a mile and one-half north of Monticello, just this side of the Jac. Voegeli farm on highway 69. The building still stands on the north side of the concrete road, answering now as a machine shed. The cellar in the Freitag home was used for the cheese. Mr. Freitag and two or three farmers were the patrons. Sam Rubin, father of Otto Rubin, residing at the Five Corners, was the maker in this first Swiss cheese factory.

Mr. Gerber married Catherine Pfund, of Jefferson township, Oct. 18, 1870, and they took up their home in the Freitag factory. Mr. Gerber's children, four sons and two daughters, came from Wheel-
ing in 1871, to make their home with him.

In 1870 Mr. Gerber was opening another limburger factory in Washington, this one on the Casper Becker farm and was known as the Becker-Wittenwyler factory. This factory is located three miles west of Monticello close to the little branch of Sugar river. Christ Wittwer was the maker. The factory was erected by the farmers and Mr. Gerber bought the milk and Mr. Newmeister took the cheese. Mr. Gerber moved his family there and in the spring of 1877 he moved to the Durst-Ott factory in New Glarus township, where he remained until he located at Brooklyn.

Mr. Steinman in 1874, when he was 20, learned to make limburger cheese at the Farmers Grove factory, under John Beller, maker, who worked for Jacob Karlen. Beller was there in 1873 and Mr. Karlen was in the Hilarius Wild factory in Adams. Mr. Steinman says he did not become a cheesemaker for Iowa was calling him west. He left for Iowa the spring of 1876 with Peter Hoesly, each with three horses, and driving through with two wagons.

**Was Model Winter**

Mr. Steinman recalls that the winter of 1875-76 was a model winter, much like the present winter and was without snow. They left March 4 driving through Monroe to Oneco for the first night. The next night they were at Savanna where they met snow and sleet. At Cedar Rapids their horse had distemper and they shipped to Ames, Ia. March 19, there was a heavy snow in Green county, Mr. Steinman remembers, because of the death of Mrs. Steinman’s mother, Mrs. George Legler, who was buried on March 21, when all the farmers in Washington township got out to shovel snow in order to open the roads for the funeral.

Mr. Steinman broke prairie in Iowa one year and when the grasshoppers descended upon the state in 1876 he returned to Wisconsin. Mr. Hoesly remained there and at present resides at Ames. Mr. Steinman went to farming four miles west of New Glarus in 1878 with a log bungalow for a home and a log barn. He had 71 acres and 13 cows, with the help of John Legler. He had been working summers for two seasons at $6 a month and attended school in the log school house two winters, making his home at the Albert Babler place. He tried the harness trade under Dan German at New Glarus and then cast his lot with the farm. He was married Jan. 31, 1878, to Miss Barbara Legler and they spent five years on the farm. The next year cheese and livestock prices hit bottom, he being obliged to sell his milk at 60 cents a hundred and his hogs at $2.15. Jacob Regez was buying the milk and offered the farmers the tools and everything if they would run the factory. The next season prices began to go up and he sold his November milk that year for $1 at the Deitrich Marty factory west of New Glarus.

“The first factories bought milk by the gallon,” said Mr. Steinman. “It was measured in a can with 8½ pounds as the gallon weight. The factories worked only six months of the year and the milk price went up from 60 to 70 and 75 cents except when the crash in 1879 put the price down again to 60 cents. Limburger sold normally at 9 and 10 cents while the very best Swiss was a shilling. When 2-pound limburger sold at 18 cents it was considered a good price. Afterwards the 2-pounders brought 25 cents, which was the retail price in Chicago early in the eighties.

Mr. Steinman remarked that
this price is now doubled while fancy Swiss cheese has trebled in price.

Kept Pocket Diary

Mr. Steinman's farming experience is in no way connected with the early factory history except that it illustrates the trend of the times in the first decade of the cheese industry. His information is not altogether drawn from memory for he has been keeping a pocket diary for many years. All daily incidents of any importance are jotted down. He has thirty of the books that are a complete record of the events of his neighborhood for the years he has lived here. If anyone around Monticello wants to know when a bridge washed out or if there is a dispute or a bet to be settled that hinges upon some happening or date, search is made of his diary record and what it says is accepted as correct. Aside from throwing light upon the farming conditions when farming was far from what it is today, Mr. Steinman's own career is interesting. Mr. and Mrs. Steinman have just celebrated their golden wedding. Mr. Steinman, besides having a hard time getting started as a farmer, had his own sad experience when he came to America May 13, 1861, when he was 7 years old. He came with his mother and his grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Casper Steinman. His father, Melchoir Steinman, an only son, had come in February, and after their voyage of 57 days in a sailing vessel they expected to meet him in New York, but something very tragic had happened.

Civil war recruiting had been carried on among the Swiss emigrants in New York and he had enlisted under the impression that the engagement would be of short duration that would amount to nothing more than a skirmish, it being expected the north would make short work of the south. He figured he would be back in time to meet his parents and family when they arrived. Instead he was killed in the first battle of the war. He was shot through the leg and in nine days he died.

Mr. Steinman relates that the sailing boat that brought him over was loaded with freight and started on the return trip, but it never arrived back in the old world, boat, crew and cargo having gone down at sea.

Comparisons Show Growth

Green county had 75 factories in operation in 1883, receiving the milk of 10,665 cows, which made 6,578,750 pounds of cheese of a total value reported by the assessors at $657,675, this being 10 cents a pound, which was the average price at that time.

The number of factories increased to 182 in 1911, when the producing cows numbered 36,449 and the production 14,144,016 pounds valued at $2,173,142.

The dairy income in 1926 was $7,189,670.

In 1925 Green county had a total of 64,201 cattle, of which number 63,418 were dairy cattle. This is a ratio of one dairy cow to each 5 1/2 acres of land and represents three cows to each inhabitant of the county.

The figures are from the 1925 United States census, the most recent census of agriculture.

This census gives the number of gallons of milk produced in 1924 at 29,666,588. This was nearly 5,000,000 gallons more than in 1919 and represented an increase in the average production per cow from 543 gallons to 658.

Notable Cheese County

Green county is the foremost county in the production of what is termed "foreign types" of cheese in the entire United States. In 1925 it produced 4,200,000 pounds of limburger cheese, which is almost all of the cheese of that type produced anywhere in
the United States. It also produced 7,300,000 pounds of Swiss cheese out of a total of 19,300,000 pounds produced in Wisconsin and 23,400,000 produced in the entire United States. The Green county district, now reaching out into the adjoining counties of Dane, Lafayette and Iowa counties produces 18,711,530 pounds of the state's Swiss cheese. Green county produced 3,300,000 pounds of brick cheese out of Wisconsin's total of 31,000,000 and 34,000,000 for the country. In this type Green county area is behind Dodge county but leads every other county in all the other foreign types.

Besides being an important cheese producer Green county in 1925 produced 37,000,000 pounds of condensed milk, being the sixth county in the production of condensed milk in the state, which produces one-third of the total condensed milk of the country.

Green county, it must be remembered, is one of the smallest counties of the state and because of its limited area dairying is more intensified here than elsewhere.

The cattle investment in 1927 was $3,659,920 and the value of all livestock $6,051,380.

The rural purchasing power, being the livestock and producing value, is $15,000,000.

The bank deposits in the 12 banks of Green county on Dec. 31, 1927, aggregated $10,800,000 the total resources $12,144,- with additional resources making 147.72.

The total assessed valuation of Green county as equalized by the tax commission for 1927 was $50,389,836. This is an average assessed valuation on the basis of the 1920 census of $2,615.

Average Farm Value High

The value of all farm property in 1925 as given by the United States census was $46,035,274, which gives an average value per farm of $19,157, the highest average value per farm of any county in Wisconsin.

The automobile registration in 1927 was 7,978 which is one automobile for each 2.7 persons. Only one county in the state has a lower average.

Green county is 4 townships square and has an area of but 593 square miles. Population in 1920 21,568, of which 4,788 is in the city of Monroe, 3,000 in six villages and 13,700 in unincorporated towns. There are 2,403 farms, 1,670 being operated by owners and 733 being rented.

Trade Mark Value Lost

Until recent years labels had not been used to any extent so that of the millions of pounds of cheese produced each year the industry has not been able to benefit by cashing in on a trade name by which established standards might be known to the consumer trade. Valuable prestige has thus been lost because the guiding influences have not been modernized to the extent of recognizing the benefit in dollars and cents of a name and advertising for the products of this highly specialized industry that is centralized in an intense dairy operation carried on in and about Green county. The qualities of Swiss, limburger and brick cheese in the fancy grades as made here amply justify the use of brands and labels as would fully establish its identity out in the markets of the country in order to give it rank in the trade it is rightly entitled to as a natural process health building food direct from the farm factories.

Leading Elements Organized

Active elements in the cheese industry at the present time are included in the membership of the Foreign Type Cheese Dealers' as-

Cooperating along progressive lines are the makers organized as the Foreign Type Cheesemakers' association with a model Swiss cheese plant as one of their objectives. The officers are: President, Adolf Applanalp; vice president, Fred Kuenzi; secretary-treasurer, Fred Glausner; directors, Christ Koenig and Emil Buchholzer.

Oldest in organization and service in promoting the interests of the industry is the Southern Wisconsin Cheesemakers' and Dairymen's association. The annual meetings are held in Monroe with two-day programs of topics and entertainment. Problems in connection with producing and marketing are discussed. The association is now close to thirty years old. Fred Marty is president, John Deininger vice president, Henry Elmer secretary and Joseph Trumpy treasurer. Gottlieb Waelti, Jacob Lehnherr and Fred E. Benkert are directors and Fred Kuenzi is employed as instructor in the field.

$10,000,000 Dairy Industry

Farmers and makers have aided in carrying on the development of what may be safely called Green county's ten million dollar dairy industry. This is considered a conservative estimate of the actual annual gross income from cheese, milk and swine. The volume of production and the producing revenue have steadily increased. Even from its small beginning it was within the lifetime of the men who figured in the origin of the industry that Green county passed from a condition bordering on poverty to one of prevailing prosperity in all the townships.