THE CHEESE MANUFACTURING REGIONS OF
WISCONSIN, 1850-1950

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ANTECEDENTS OF THE INDUSTRY IN WISCONSIN

The manufacture of cheese, throughout three hundred years of American history, has “moved” from east to west across the northern portion of the nation—the agricultural region utilized for dairying, and known today as the American Dairy Region. The colonists of Rhode Island, Connecticut, and eastern Massachusetts were the main dairymen and cheesemakers of an early period, and Narragansett cheeses of Rhode Island, Braintree cheeses of Massachusetts, and Litchfield cheeses of Connecticut were well known in the seaboard markets of the colonies. In time, cheese manufacture was transported to interior New England, particularly the Berkshire region of Massachusetts and to Vermont as those areas were settled.

The settlement of upstate New York by New Englanders, following the Revolutionary War, resulted in the transfer of cheese manufacture to the Mohawk Valley and to western New York. New York State superseded New England as the great cheese state. The settlements of New Englanders in the Western Reserve of Ohio (the northeastern portion of that state) likewise resulted in the rise of an important cheese industry. For fifty years or more the Western Reserve bore the nickname “Cheesedom,” and, during the period of one hundred years ago, New York State and Ohio contributed the bulk of the cheese manufactured in the United States. The cheese was marketed under either a regional name, as in New England, or as New York cheese. Actually nearly all of the production consisted of the English-style Cheddar Cheese, now known in the United States as American Cheese.¹

CHEESE MANUFACTURE DURING THE SETTLEMENT DAYS IN WISCONSIN

The southeastern portion of Wisconsin was settled during the 1830’s and 1840’s by pioneers who moved from the East by way of the Erie Canal—Great Lakes waterway. These settlers arrived mainly from New York State, but many Vermonters and other eastern Americans were among them. Milwaukee and Southport (now Kenosha) were important points of entry, and from these ports the New Yorkers and Yankees spread to the interior counties of the extreme southeast.

During the late 1840’s the first of several waves of foreign immigrants also began to reach Wisconsin; Germans entered the lakeshore counties north of Milwaukee, Swiss settled in Green County, and Norwegians founded several communities.

Dairying and cheese manufacture was important on some farms of southeastern Wisconsin from the days of earliest settlement. Some of the Eastern settlers, particularly New Yorkers who had moved from cheese regions, engaged in the manufacture of farm-dairy cheese almost from the time of their advent in their new homes. The Census of 1850 records that 400,283 pounds of cheese were made on the farms of Wisconsin during 1849, a very respectable total considering the short time that settlers had been in the region. Kenosha County, the heart of Yankee settlement, produced 57,271 pounds of cheese, or nearly 15 per cent of the total. Other counties “high” in output were Walworth (53,240), Waukesha, Racine, Rock, Jefferson, Dodge, and Dane. At this time the “German” counties north of Milwaukee had practically no production, and the “Swiss” county of Green produced only 8,417 pounds.

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1 The reader is referred to the numerous publications of the Wisconsin Historical Society if he is interested in more detail. The purpose of this paper is not that of dealing with the settlement, but with the cheese industry as influenced in part by that settlement.


4 The first successful cheese factory in the United States was not established until 1851. Farm-dairy cheese was made at home before this.

5 This original low output of the “foreign” areas is not surprising, despite popular belief to the contrary. Well-documented sources in the State Historical Library show that the Swiss, like others on the frontier, were originally wheat farmers, and turned to dairying in numbers only after their hilly fields became badly eroded, and their wheat became subject to the difficulties which beset wheat elsewhere in Wisconsin. Once the shift was made, however, they became avid dairymen. It was mainly the eastern American (called Yankee at the time, even though he need not have come from New England) who introduced cheese manufacture to Wisconsin.
CHEESE MANUFACTURE DURING THE “WHEAT PERIOD” IN WISCONSIN

Wisconsin’s cheese production was 1,104,300 pounds during 1859. At this time the state was still in the midst of its wheat boom; in fact the year 1860 witnessed the largest wheat crop grown in the state (but not the largest acreage). Thus, even during the wheat period of Wisconsin’s agricultural history the farm-dairy manufacture of cheese was important, particularly in the southeast. Settlers from Ohio, as well as from New York and New England, were of importance in cheese manufacture. John V. Robbins of the Town of Burke, Dane County, who had migrated there from Cincinnati, exhibited a farm-dairy cheese weighing 650 pounds at the Wisconsin State Fair of 1859, and one weighing 1650 pounds at the Fair in 1860. Many of the cheese producers of the southeastern part of the state worked cooperatively; neighbors “changed milk,” one making the cheese one day and another the next out of the combined neighborhood supply of milk. In fact, Koshkonong, Wisconsin, claims a “cooperative cheese factory” dating from 1848 or 1849, prior to the establishment of the first cheese factory in the United States in 1851 in Oneida County, New York; it was, however, not the actual forerunner of the cheese factory system, as was the Williams factory of New York.

The entire setting of the settled portions of Wisconsin, during the early period under discussion, was mainly that of a wheat state on the frontier. Dairying and cheese-making, although important over wide areas, was subordinated, except in a few regions, to wheat culture. The state was a leading wheat producer during the 1850’s. By 1860 wheat occupied 15 per cent of the cultivated land, and was grown on more than a million acres; during the Civil War Wisconsin was the “granary” of the North; Milwaukee in 1862 led all wheat markets of the World. In 1878 over two million acres of wheat were harvested, the top year in acreage. However, the top in wheat production had been reached on the smaller acreage of 1860—nearly 30 million bushels. The late 1860’s and 1870’s saw declining wheat yields. Soils had been depleted by one-crop agriculture, chinch bugs had seriously affected the crop of several years, and rusts, smuts, blight diseases, and winter-killing had taken tolls. In the ten years 1878 to 1887, wheat acreage declined from over two million to less

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8 Benjamin H. Hibbard, The History of Agriculture in Dane County, Wisconsin, Bulletin of the University of Wisconsin, No. 101, Madison, 1904, p. 158.
than one million, and in 1895 it was down to only 300,000 acres in the entire state. The farmers of Wisconsin by this time could not compete in wheat with the newer lands of the prairies farther west; wheat declined in both actual acreage and in the percentage of cultivated land it occupied, until it soon was down to less than one per cent—the present situation.

Dairying became much more important in Wisconsin as wheat declined; the increased dairying added to, and built on, the foundation that had been made by some of the Eastern Americans and a few foreign settlers, from the start of settlement. In other words, while it is commonly said that "the state shifted from wheat to dairying," the shift was not made by the many individuals and regions which had been important in cheese and butter production from the first. The increase in dairying, and in cheese manufacture, was owing to many reasons. Among these were: (1) the environmental similarity to New York dairy regions; (2) the fact that many settlers had possessed experience in dairying during their youth on the farms of New York and western New England; (3) recommendations made by many persons of the Wisconsin Agricultural Experiment Station; (4) the energy and enthusiasm of Governor Hoard, both officially and unofficially; (5) the early start made in dairying by hundreds of eastern settlers in their new homeland, many of whom had prospered during the time their neighbors had been beset by difficulties with wheat,—hence they served as examples to be copied in their neighborhoods; (6) the presence, in compact colonies, of Swiss in parts of southwestern Wisconsin and of Germans along the lake shore north of Milwaukee, many of whom, like the New Yorkers, had possessed dairy experience in their homelands; and (7) numerous other reasons, prominent locally. Negatively, as the shift was made from wheat, the Wisconsin farmers, owing to the environmental framework, could not engage in the Corn Belt agriculture which was developing to their south in Illinois.

Access to eastern markets was undoubtedly of great advantage to Wisconsin as it shifted from wheat to dairying. The lake route was utilized during the open season from the days of earliest settlement. However, by the 1850's and 1860's through railroad lines from Chicago to the East had been well established, and trunk and branch lines reached practically all parts of settled Wisconsin. The refrigerator railroad car had been perfected dur-

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ing the period of 1870 to 1875, and "through fast freight" service was available. The railroads, anxious for business, promulgated special rates. Beginning with 1874, it was possible to ship Wisconsin cheese to New York in refrigerator cars for $1.00 per hundred pounds. After this date Wisconsin joined New York in becoming an important exporter of cheese to Great Britain, and Wisconsin cheese competed with New York cheese in the cities of the Atlantic Seaboard.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHEESE FACTORIES IN WISCONSIN

The first cheese factory in Wisconsin was built in 1864 at Ladoga in Fond du Lac County by Chester Hazen, a transplanted New Yorker. Other early factories were erected in Bear Valley, Richland County, and in the southeastern counties. Between 1864 and 1870 fifty-three American cheese factories were built. The first Swiss cheese factory was built in 1870 near Monticello, Green County, by Niclas Gerber, a Swiss immigrant, who had previously spent several years making Limburger cheese in the Mohawk Valley of New York. Following this year, the expansion in number of cheese factories was very rapid.

By the end of the nineteenth century several specialized cheese regions had developed (Fig. 1). Wisconsin's cheese production was 77,748,600 pounds, Ohio had been passed (1880) in production, Wisconsin had surpassed New York State in number of cheese factories, and was about to pass that state in cheese production, and assume first rank in the nation—this occurred between 1900 and 1910. By 1899, Wisconsin contained some 1,500 factories, located at rural crossroads—the central place to which farmers delivered their milk; of these 1,227 were making cheese alone.

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11 The relatively slow start of the Swiss cheese region in Wisconsin is shown by the fact that the cheese production of Green County in 1859 was only 7500 pounds, less than in 1849, while the state increase during these years was from 400,000 to more than a million pounds. This is even further evidence that it was the Eastern Americans rather than the "foreigners" who were the mainstay of the early industry in Wisconsin.
12 The Commissioner of Agriculture in Wisconsin lists 2,522 dairy manufacturing plants operating in 1895–1896. Of these, 951 are listed as creameries, and 1,571 as cheese factories, but no distinction is made of combined butter and cheese plants. (Biennial Report of the Dairy and Food Commissioner of Wisconsin for the years 1895–1896, Madison, 1896). The United States Census of 1900 credits Wisconsin with 1,227 cheese factories making cheese only (see Table VII), and 60 combined cheese and butter factories. The first listing made in Wisconsin, that of 1899, contains names of plants as cheese factories which were later listed as creameries. These were apparently combined plants. The 1,571 cheese factories listed by the state are seemingly more nearly correct in this case, and the Census figure of 1,227 is possibly too low.
The great increase in number of cheese factories, and in cheese production in Wisconsin after 1870, was attendant upon many favorable market factors. Among these were: (1) the increasing market in the growing industrial cities of the Atlantic Seaboard and the Great Lakes shorelands, and (2) the important (at that time) overseas market in Great Britain, which was served mainly by the cheese regions of New York and Wisconsin, although Canada was a growing competitor during the 1880’s, and virtually captured the entire British market by the late 1890’s. So important was the British trade during this period that Wisconsin, like New York, received official complaints from England whenever cheese was not of high quality, or when “filled cheese” was shipped overseas.13

Regionalization of Wisconsin Cheese Regions to 1900

Cheese manufacture in Wisconsin was highly regionalized (Fig. 1). Two main areas stood out by 1900—(1) the lakeshore counties north of Milwaukee, and (2) part of southwestern Wisconsin. Within these areas, and adjacent to them, however, there were five well-developed cheese regions. These were based on (1) location and (2) the type of cheese manufactured—whether the American cheddar cheese or a foreign variety, such as Swiss or Limburger. The five regions were:

1. The American cheese region of the extreme southeast of the state—Kenosha, Racine, Walworth, Waukesha, and nearby counties. This was the core region of original cheese manufacture based on Eastern American settlement.

13 An example, published in the First Annual Report, State Dairy and Food Commissioner of Wisconsin, 1899, Madison, 1899, is the following—a letter from seven members of the Liverpool Trade Association written on March 26, 1899, to H. C. Thom, Dairy Commissioner of Wisconsin:

"Dear Sir: We desire to inform you that a committee of the undersigned has been appointed by this Association to watch the interests of the cheese trade, which are being seriously menaced by the continued increase in the manufacture of the article known as 'filled cheese.' . . ."

"The legitimate interests of the 'Trade' are seriously imperiled, and the reasonable expectation of the consumer disappointed, and we are clearly of the opinion that the distribution of 'filled' cheese is disgusting to the British public with the pure article, and that our Trade and mutual interests are in danger of suffering a permanent and lasting injury.

"We are in communication with the Home Sanitary authorities, are placing the matter before our Agricultural Government department, and members of the House of Commons. . . ."

Of interest in the increasing awareness of Wisconsin in its position in cheese manufacture was the reply, which pointed out that no filled cheese was being manufactured in the state as of 1896, but admitted that some Wisconsin skimmed milk was being hauled six miles into Illinois for filling. The "filling" of cheese was usually with oleo oil; in other words this was substituted for butterfat. New York outlawed this practice during the 1880's, and Wisconsin soon followed suit with the enactment of stricter dairy regulations.
2. The Brick cheese region of Dodge County, also in glaciated southeastern Wisconsin northwest of Milwaukee. Although Brick cheese is classed as a "foreign" cheese, it was actually developed in Dodge County in the late 1860's by John Jossi, a cheesemaker who was interested in perfecting a type intermediate between Swiss and Limburger.

3. The American cheese region of the eastern lakeshore counties of Wisconsin. This extended from Milwaukee north to Green Bay and out the Door Peninsula, and inland to the Fox River Valley—Lake Winnebago countryside. The region centered on Sheboygan County. Much of this area received the bulk of the early German settlement in Wisconsin, but had earlier a veneer of Eastern Americans who preceded the Germans and other foreign colonists—such as the Bohemians of parts of Manitowoc County, Belgians in Kewaunee and Door counties, Luxemburgers in northern Ozaukee County, Dutch in southeastern Sheboygan County, and others.

4. The Swiss and Limburger cheese region centering on the Swiss colonies of Green County.

5. The American cheese region of the southwest. This was north and northwest of the Swiss area, but contiguous to it. Included in this region were parts of Iowa, Grant, Richland, and Sauk counties.

In addition to the well-defined regions of cheese specialization, cheese was manufactured in scattered locations in the Driftless Area of western Wisconsin, and in the north-central area of developing agriculture. This latter region, destined to become one of Wisconsin's leading cheese regions of the twentieth century was beginning to be outlined in 1900, particularly by the increasing concentration of cheese factories in northwestern Wood, northeastern Clark, and western Marathon counties (Fig. 1). During this period, however, much of the region was still in its lumber era, or was just emerging into the period of agricultural development.

WISCONSIN CHEESE REGIONS AT THE CLOSE OF THE
NINETEENTH CENTURY

The reasons for the locations and the type of product of the cheese regions of Wisconsin are varied from place to place. Although some are clear (i.e., transfer by New Yorkers of

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34 For a map of the main regions of German settlement in Wisconsin see Loyal Durand, Jr., Dairy Farms of Southeastern Wisconsin, Economic Geography, Vol. 18, 1948, pp. 37-44.
American cheese production to southeastern Wisconsin and knowledge of Swiss types of cheese by many Swiss colonists who had had experience in the industry before they came to America) others are more involved. Many factors entered the picture, although they all operated under the general setting of a favorable climatic, economic, and human environment. The present paper does not purport to explain these; the following summary deals, rather, with the historical geography of the cheese regions as they existed at the close of the nineteenth century. As in New York, northeastern Ohio, and even in Europe at the time, cheese manufacture in Wisconsin was carried on in highly specialized regions. These did not include all of the dairy districts of the state; other regions, for example, specialized in the manufacture of butter.

(1) The Southeastern American cheese region, at the close of the century, had 72 cheese factories. Twenty of these were concentrated in Jefferson and Walworth counties in the environs of Whitewater. There were factories in the extreme southeast corner of the state, at that time well beyond the outer limits of the Chicago milkshed, and even in Milwaukee County. Unlike the other cheese regions, this area likewise contained many creameries and was important in butter production, and, also unlike other regions, it had passed its peak in number of factories. This was apparently attained during the 1880’s. The peak cheese production of the extreme southeast was also attained during the 1880’s; Kenosha County was higher in output at this time than in 1900, and Walworth County, during 1885, produced $2\frac{1}{4}$ million pounds of cheese, and Jefferson over 3 million pounds, and were fourth and third, respectively, in cheese manufacture among Wisconsin counties—positions they had lost by 1900.

(2) The Dodge County Brick cheese region was highly localized, but overspread slightly into adjacent counties. Dodge County alone contained 122 rural crossroads cheese factories, many of them less than two miles from one another.

(3) The cool eastern lakeshore region north of Milwaukee led Wisconsin as a region in numbers of factories and in cheese production. It contained well over 600 rural crossroads cheese factories, and was the heart area for the production of American cheese. Sheboygan County was the core of the region, and possessed 136 cheese factories, or one factory for every 3.8 square miles of area. Within the county, the marketing center of Plymouth, by the 1890’s, had superseded Little Falls and other New York markets as the price-quoting center of the United States American cheese industry, and was the headquarters of the
FIGURE 1. Wisconsin Cheese Factories, 1896. At this time the counties of the extreme southeast had passed their peak in number of factories. The Eastern Lakeshore American Cheese Region and the Green County Foreign Cheese Region of the southwest were outstanding; note the extreme concentration of cheese factories in both Sheboygan and Green counties. The Dodge County Brick Cheese Region was contiguous with the Eastern Lakeshore Region on the former’s northeast.
Figure 2. Wisconsin Cheese Factories, 1949. Note the absence of factories in the old producing region of extreme southeastern Wisconsin, and the northward and westward migration of Wisconsin's cheese factories. Factory densities in the Eastern Lakeshore American Cheese Region have declined appreciably. On a county basis the present greatest density of factories is now in Dodge County and in Green and immediately adjacent counties (southwestern Dane, southeastern Iowa, and eastern Lafayette).
Cheese Board. Adjacent Manitowoc County possessed 111 cheese factories, Fond du Lac County had 73, and Kewaunee 64. The manufacturing region started immediately north of Milwaukee and continued northward for over 150 miles, extending the entire distance out the Door Peninsula between Green Bay and Lake Michigan; Door County had 36 cheese factories, one even on Washington Island off the northern end of the peninsula.

(4) The Swiss cheese region of southwestern Wisconsin, beyond the glaciated territory, contained over 300 cheese factories. Green County led Wisconsin on the county basis in number of factories with 208; this was one cheese factory for every 2.8 square miles of area. The Swiss people of the region, frugal and excellent farmers, were expanding outward from their original locations; many of the farmers followed the custom of purchasing a farm for their sons upon the latter's marriage. The Swiss thus were moving into southwestern Dane and eastern Lafayette counties, and "transporting" Swiss cheese manufacture with them. By 1900 the six southwestern towns of Dane County had been included in the Swiss cheese region, and 43 factories were located here.\(^{15}\) The region of manufacture was also expanding in other directions, including a southward movement into northwestern Illinois.\(^{16}\) The Swiss region, located in the dissected Driftless Area, had cheese factories on the crests of limestone ridges as well as in sandstone (and some limestone) valleys. The late O. E. Baker, during his work in Wisconsin, attempted to correlate cheese manufacture with the limestone lands of the uplands.\(^{17}\) Trewartha found no such correlation.\(^{18}\) A factor of some importance in the spread was the continual arrival of cheesemakers from Switzerland, each anxious to start his own plant in the New World.

(5) Parts of the southwestern Driftless Hill lands of Wisconsin developed American cheese manufacture, particularly in Sauk and Richland counties to the north and northwest of the Swiss cheese region, and in parts of Iowa, Lafayette, and Grant counties to the west. The Richland County area was one mainly of Eastern and of Ohio settlement, the Sauk region of mixed eastern American and German settlement. This region possessed some 150 cheese factories in 1900. Iowa County, divided between the American and the Swiss cheese regions, had 88.

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\(^{15}\) Hibbard, op. cit., page 178, recognizes this localization as "social." He also attempts a climatic interpretation as a partial explanation of why Dane County, consisting of 36 townships, had all but one of its cheese factories in this small southwestern section.


\(^{17}\) Wisconsin Agricultural Experiment Station, Bulletin 223, 1912.

Lastly, cheese manufacture was developing in the east-west band of newly settled territory across the north-central part of the state. Here settlement followed the lumber period. During the 1890’s this region, except locally, was still mainly in a semi-pioneering state. The sources of settlers were in the “old” lakeshore counties to the southeast, such as Sheboygan and Manitowoc, or directly from Europe. No doubt some of the lakeshore pioneers “transported” their interest in cheese manufacture with them.\textsuperscript{19} Cheese factories entered the region as land was cleared and devoted to stumpy pasture, then to hay and improved pasture. Each factory helped materially in aiding farm improvement by providing a steady local market for the milk produced by the cattle grazing on new clearings. Marathon and Clark counties, destined later to become two of the leading cheese manufacturing counties of Wisconsin, had 13 cheese factories each in 1896.

**Summary to 1900**

Cheese manufacture was a firmly established subdivision of the dairy industry of Wisconsin by 1900. The industry was highly concentrated regionally, as in New York and elsewhere. Rural cheese factories, located at country crossroads, were important landscape features of the cheese regions, and were the focal points for the daily early morning delivery of milk by the farmers; in the foreign cheese areas, during the warmer portions of the summer, the factories received milk twice a day, after the morning and evening milking, and cheese was made twice a day during this season. Plymouth in Sheboygan County became the marketing center for American cheese, and Monroe in Green County the marketing center for the three main foreign varieties manufactured in the state—Swiss, Brick, and Limburger. At the close of the century the cheese regions of Wisconsin received practically no competition from city urban markets or from condenseries.

**Cheese Manufacture in Wisconsin, 1901–1950**

The cheese production of Wisconsin increased remarkably during the half-century 1901–1950. Cattle increased in number from one million to 2½ million. Milk production per cow in-

\textsuperscript{19} For a more detailed study of part of this region see Loyal Durand, Jr., The West Shawano Upland of Wisconsin: A Study of Regional Development Basic to the Problem of Part of the Great Lakes Cut-Over Region, *Annals Association American Geographers*, Vol. 34, 1944, pp. 135–163.
creased to more than 5,500 pounds of milk per year (national average 4,500). Thus, although the state was invaded by the urban milkshed of Chicago, became a source of milk for the growing cities of Wisconsin, supplied fresh milk and cream to many Eastern and Southern cities, became the leading producer of condensed and evaporated milk, and continued as a large butter manufacturer, the cheese industry was able to continue and expand. Cheese production rose to 148 million pounds in 1910 (greater than New York State’s production had ever been), to 363 million pounds in 1925, and 561 million in 1950. Percentage-wise, Wisconsin’s largest share of the nation’s cheese production was in both 1923 and 1927, each with 71.5 per cent. At present, despite the large production, it is about half of the national output—reflecting the development of new cheese-producing regions elsewhere.

The number of rural crossroads cheese factories in Wisconsin reached a peak of 2,807 during 1922, and has declined steadily in numbers since then. More than 1,000 new factories were built between 1900 and 1918. However, by 1925 many factories began to close, and others consolidated. Closed factories generally were in the areas near the cities, and in their expanding milksheds, and could not compete in price for milk with the urban distributors. Others were forced out of production by the building of condenseries in their neighborhoods. Consolidation began with improved roads, with the advent of trucks for collection of milk from a wider area, and with the concentration of manufacturing operations in order to compete on a firmer basis with other types of dairy plants. The Depression and later the World War II consolidation hastened the elimination of marginal cheese factories. By 1928 the total number of cheese factories was down to 2,400; the figure dipped below 2,000 in 1937, then dropped steadily to 1,509 in 1945 and 1,313 in 1949 (Fig. 2). New multiple-purpose plants have been constructed, many of them in villages rather than at rural crossroads; these are equipped to manufacture not only cheese, but other dairy products, depending upon price conditions. The very fact that 1,313 plants produced half a billion pounds of cheese in 1950, and that 2,807 factories of 1922 made 301 million pounds, tells the story of the increasing size of Wisconsin cheese factories. Although several hundreds of the one- or two-man crossroads cheese factories remain in Wisconsin’s cheese regions, and are a distinctive feature of the cultural landscape, they are even now being further reduced in numbers as a

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result of continuing trends toward consolidation of the industry into larger central plants, employing several cheesemakers.\textsuperscript{21}

The general movement of the cheese industry in Wisconsin during the first fifty years of the twentieth century was north and west (Fig. 2). As will be noted in the following regional summary of cheese regions, all of the cheese areas outlined during the nineteenth century continued production, with the exception only of the extreme southeast—the earliest producing region, and the one closest to Milwaukee and Chicago. The other cheese regions, however, expanded northward, even into the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, and westward, to the Mississippi River in extreme southwestern Wisconsin. As a consequence of this expansion the cheese regions of southeastern Wisconsin in general attained their maximum number of cheese factories early in the century and even before this in the very southeastern counties; their decline had begun before the state maximum of 2,807 factories was reached. The cheese regions farther north and west reached their maximum number of factories somewhat later, and the more northern areas were ones which witnessed expansion in the total number of rural crossroads cheese factories even into the 1930’s.

The cheese regions of Wisconsin, during the 1901–1950 period, retained their identity as “American” and “foreign” regions. At the end of the period the state was manufacturing just about half of all the American cheese made in the United States. Its percentage of foreign cheese was much higher, although the total poundage of these varieties is far less than that of American cheddar cheese. The Wisconsin Swiss cheese region makes two thirds of the national total of Swiss cheese. The state percentage of United States manufacture of Brick cheese is about 90, it having declined slightly from a top of 94.2 per cent in 1933. Wisconsin produces 95 per cent of the Muenster cheese, between a half and two thirds of the Limburger cheese, half of the Italian cheese, and 20 per cent of the Cream cheese of the country. For other varieties the combined output is 40 per cent of the national total; these include Neufchâtel, the Dutch types—such as Edam,

\textsuperscript{21}The United States Census of Manufactures, 1947, does not shed much light on the size of cheese factories, in terms of employment, because the smallest listed classification is that of 1–19 employees. On this basis over 97 per cent of Wisconsin’s cheese factories possessed 19 employees or less. Actually many of the factories may have only one or two cheesemakers, and perhaps employ five or six truckers to collect and deliver the milk, and then return the cans to the farm. There is still some patron-delivery of milk, but it is declining. This is also the situation “in old cheese regions” like New York, where 87 per cent of the cheese factories possess 19 or fewer employees. However, in “new cheese areas,” to which the industry has been moving, there are very large cheese factories; thus in Tennessee, 60 per cent of the cheese factories have between 20 and 99 employees.
Gouda, and Leyden—types such as Primost, Bond Ost, and Nord Ost, the Blue Mold cheeses, French cheeses, Tilsit cheese, and others. In addition, a “secondary” production of process cheese occurs in the cheese regions.22 The raw material for this is already-manufactured natural cheese. The cheese is ground up and processed at 16 large plants, located in cities of the cheese regions, and built next to railroad facilities for the national distribution of their product. Their location is thus urban, rather than at rural crossroads or in villages; Green Bay possesses four processing plants, Plymouth has two, Monroe and Manitowoc one each and the other eight are in smaller cities.

**Wisconsin Cheese Regions, 1901–1950**

There were seven cheese regions in Wisconsin during all or part of the period 1901–1950. One went out of production early in the century. Two northern ones developed mainly during the period, following the settlement and development of parts of the northern half of the state. The five older regions, as discussed in the section previous to 1900, will be described first.

1. The old Southeastern American cheese region, at the southeastern corner of the state, succumbed to the inroads of condenseries early in the twentieth century, and later the few remaining cheese factories were overwhelmed by the great areal increase of the Chicago, Milwaukee, Racine and Kenosha milksheds. Today the former cheese region is the heart of the out-of-state shipments of market milk to Chicago. During 1950, Kenosha, Racine, and Walworth counties shipped over 311,000,000 pounds of milk out-of-state; this was 30 per cent of the total shipped from Wisconsin. Despite this, some condenseries still remain, but the cheese industry is unable to face the severe economic competition, and the high prices paid for market milk, and only a few factories persisted even into the 1920's.

2. The Dodge County Foreign (Brick) cheese region continued its intensive cheese production. This region “overflows” slightly into adjacent counties, but Dodge County alone is the largest cheese producing county in Wisconsin, and in the entire United States. The 1950 cheese production of Dodge County, which contains only 897 square miles, was 42,552,000 pounds. This county total exceeded the cheese production of every state except New York, Illinois, Missouri, Minnesota, Ohio and Tennessee; it was approximately the same as the two last-named.

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22These figures are not included in the total of cheese production, because the cheese which is processed has already been recorded as natural cheese.
The Dodge total in 1950 was composed of 14,546,000 pounds of Brick and Muenster cheese, 5,097,000 pounds of American cheese, 3,452,000 of Italian types, 15,000,000 or more pounds of Cream cheese, and the balance of other types. Originating as a Brick cheese region, the appellation with respect to the region is no longer strictly correct; other types are now more important in quantity. Brick cheese was perfected within the county in the late 1860's, however, and has continued to be important; the advent of other varieties in the county manufacture has been owing mainly (1) to difficulties in the Brick cheese market since the 1940's, and (2) the establishment, by a large national distributor, of a Cream cheese factory to service the midwestern markets with packaged cream cheese.

The manufacture of Brick and Muenster cheese is quite widespread in the region. Other types are more concentrated in their regional distribution, largely owing to individual choice and to establishment of local marketing and manufacturing operations. Beaver Dam is the center of Cream cheese manufacture. Mayville and its environs have an important Dutch-type-of-cheese industry. Rolling Prairie is the regional center for the French types. Campbellsport in adjacent Fond du Lac County is an important focus for the Italian types, but many crossroads factories in Dodge County contribute to this total.

Dodge County, at the close of the first fifty years of the twentieth century, had 118 cheese factories, the greatest county total in Wisconsin. It was one of two southern Wisconsin counties with as many factories as in 1896, but had experienced a decline in numbers from the peak of 170 in 1922. At one time there were as many as three cheese factories in certain single rural square miles. The *regional* total of cheese factories in the entire region today is about 165.

(3) The Eastern Lakeshore American Cheese Region intensified its production during 1901–1950. The region contained nearly 1,000 rural crossroads cheese factories in 1920. Factory densities per unit of area were very high; there was one cheese factory for every 4.2 square miles of area in Sheboygan County, for every 5 square miles of Manitowoc, 6.2 of Fond du Lac, and 6.7 of Kenosha. During this period the region made over one third of Wisconsin's cheese. The names "Plymouth" and "Sheboygan" had replaced the names "Little Falls" and "Herkimer"

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as this Wisconsin region took over the national quotations and quality market formerly held by the New York city and county.

Some 450 cheese factories now constitute the operating units of the region. Cheese output remains at a third of the state total. Within the region the centers of manufacturing and marketing have shifted northward. This is partly because of (1) encroachments on the south by Milwaukee milk distributors, (2) because of the growth of fresh-milk markets in the lakeshore and Fox River Valley cities, (3) owing to the advent of condenseries in the region (built there by large national corporations desiring to locate their plants in very large milk-producing areas), and (4) because of increased cheese production after 1910 in the farming regions north of Green Bay, following the lumber and cut-over period. Plymouth retains its importance as a marketing, processing, and wholesaling center, as the location of the Cheese Board, and as the source of price quotations in the national marketing of American cheese, but it is no longer the geographical center of this cheese region. This location has been taken over by Green Bay with the northward advance of cheese manufacture; as a result Green Bay today possesses processing, wholesaling, and warehouse facilities, and is the site of several major national distributors of cheese.

(4) The Green County Foreign cheese area includes all of Green County, southwestern Dane and southeastern Iowa counties to its north, eastern Lafayette County to its west, and northeastern Stephenson County, Illinois, to its south. It has also expanded, during the 1940's, in a protuberance westward across Lafayette, and into Grant County, the southwestern county of Wisconsin. Green County is the core of the region, and manufactured 17,000,000 pounds of Swiss cheese in 1950, or just about 40 per cent of the total of the Wisconsin portion of the region. Green zealously guards its name for Swiss and Limburger cheese; like Herkimer County, New York, in the past, it has obtained a name for quality. Other forms of dairy manufacture (several condenseries have been built because of the very large milk production per unit of area) are tolerated but are not exactly welcomed. Monroe, Mount Horeb (Dane County) and some

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25 One large national chain-store organization built a condensery in the city of Manitowoc, said to be now the “largest” condensery in the world. During 1950, Manitowoc County produced 16 per cent of all the evaporated and condensed milk of Wisconsin, and a little over 3 per cent of that of the entire United States. Cheese production in the county dropped from 21 million pounds in 1933 to 15 million in 1950, and cheese factories declined in numbers during the same period from 194 to 56.

26 For example, between 1896 and 1920 Shawano County cheese factories increased in number from 20 to 101, Oconto from 4 to 69, and Marinette from 2 to 40.
other towns conduct an annual cheese festival and elect a Cheese Queen; local Chambers of Commerce stress the industry. Every effort is made to aid the cheese industry and to advertise it nationally.

The expansion of the Swiss cheese region has been in part through out-movements of the sons of farmers of Swiss ancestry. A high percentage of the Swiss remain on farms, and buy out neighboring farmers. In large part, however, the expansion has come through the “migration” of Swiss cheesemakers, who move outward, yet who do not wish to be too far from their “regional capital” and center of the industry at Monroe. The region has received a constant influx of cheesemakers from Switzerland, many of whom have served apprenticeships on the Alpine upland pastures. A third factor in the movement has been the relatively high price for Swiss cheese. By no means are all of the cheesemakers Swiss, although the majority are; the Flanagan and Olson Cheese Company, for example, manufactures Swiss cheese in Green County near Argyle. The farmers who supply milk to the factories are mainly of Swiss descent near the core of the region, but are of Norwegian, Irish, German, and early American ancestry in other localities.

The production of Swiss cheese in 1950 in Wisconsin set an all-time new record; the output of 53,260,000 pounds increased by 5,000,000 pounds over 1949. Of the state total, Green County contributed 32 per cent, Lafayette 24, and Dane 12; the region contributed 83 per cent (Barron County in northwestern Wisconsin made 12 per cent). Monroe is the main marketing center, and Brodhead, also in Green County, a secondary center.27

The increased Swiss cheese production has been attained by fewer, but larger factories than in the past, although like lakeshore Wisconsin the rural crossroads factory is still a very important feature of the regional scene, and more than 150 still operate. The 208 Green County factories of 1896 had been reduced in number to 157 by 1922, exactly 100 by 1941, and 87 at present. The number in other counties has also decreased. Some very large factories, employing several cheesemakers, have been constructed in Monroe and other communities, and draw supplies of milk from greater distances than the small rural plants. They manufacture Swiss cheese throughout the year, while the smaller crossroads factories make Brick cheese during the winter.

27 Only Wisconsin, Illinois and Ohio are important in the manufacture of Swiss cheese. Actually the Illinois output is just south of Green County, mainly in Stephenson County, and is regionally a part of the Monroe and southwestern Wisconsin area. The Ohio Swiss cheese region is the second regionally in the nation, but Illinois is the second state in production.
if the daily supply of milk is not adequate for a 280-pound wheel of Swiss cheese.

Limburger cheese factories are scattered throughout the Green County region. Wisconsin in 1950 manufactured 3,479,000 pounds of Limburger, more than half the nation’s total. Monroe is the marketing center for this variety. It is, in fact, the “foreign cheese center,” and quotes prices on Swiss, Brick, and Limburger cheese.

(5) The American Cheese Region of Southwestern Wisconsin merges on its east and south with the Swiss cheese region. Some 200 cheese factories constitute the operating units of the region. Of these, 74 are north of the Wisconsin River in the rugged Driftless Area hill lands of Sauk, Richland, Vernon, and Crawford counties; approximately 140 American cheese factories are south of the river, in the rugged north-facing escarpment lands in northern Iowa and Grant counties, and on the gently rolling back slope of Military Ridge in southwestern Iowa, western Lafayette, and southern Grant counties. Boscobel, Blue River, and one or two other towns serve as marketing and wholesaling centers; there is not the regional dominance of any one market such as is found in other Wisconsin cheese regions.

The eastern portion of the southwestern cheese region is “old cheese country,” and was well established before the turn of the century. The western portion, next to the Mississippi River in Crawford and Grant counties is “newer cheese country,”—the cheese industry has expanded westward to the Mississippi, much as it has expanded northward in other parts of Wisconsin. Cheese production in Crawford and Grant counties has increased steadily; it gained by nearly 50 per cent in Crawford between 1940 and 1950, and by almost 150 per cent in Grant. Grant County, by 1950, had become the third American cheese county in Wisconsin, with a production of 24,315,000 pounds, and the fourth county in total cheese production—28,000,000 pounds.

Finally (6 and 7), there are two cheese regions in Wisconsin which have developed mainly during the present century.

(6) The North-Central American Cheese Region is located (1) north of the Central Sand Plain of the state, and (2) south of the northern cut-over and forest region. The heart of the region

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28 Only Wisconsin, New York, and Illinois are important in production of Limburger cheese. The Illinois manufacture is immediately south of Green County, Wisconsin, and the regional situation parallels that of Swiss cheese (see footnote 27).

29 Dodge, Clark, Marathon, Grant. In large part, of course, these are high on a county basis because of their large area, although Dodge heads the list on any basis.
is the heavy soil area (Colby Silt Loam and similar soils) of Marathon, Clark, and northern Wood counties. The pioneer and the cheese factory came to the region almost together. As new land was sold, the farmers utilized the land as stumpy pasture; as more land was cleared permanent pastures and hayfields followed. A cheese factory furnished a local market for milk. As more cattle were added to the farms of the region, the cheese factory expanded its production. A small crossroads cheese factory proved ideal under these “pioneer” conditions; the factory furnished an outlet for milk, provided the surrounding farmers with a monthly cash income, and manufactured a product which could withstand shipment from the region.

The North-Central Cheese Region was developed following a lumber period. It was settled mainly by colonies of Europeans—Germans, Poles, and others. Its early cheesemakers were American-trained, and were often graduates of cheesemaking courses (such as the Short Course at the University of Wisconsin), or American cheesemakers from southern Wisconsin who had served apprenticeships, and who themselves “migrated” northward. A regional product developed in this new area is the Colby-style American cheese, which differs slightly in its moisture content from the “normal” American cheese.

The North-Central Cheese Region was settled in only a few localities by 1900. In 1896 Marathon County possessed but 13 cheese factories, Clark had 13, and Wood 14. Between this year and 1922 the region was largely settled, and it witnessed the construction of 340 cheese factories. In the latter year Clark County had a total of 135 factories, Marathon 157, and Wood 64. Thus in a short quarter of a century the region attained its greatest number of factories. In line with the trend elsewhere in Wisconsin, the number has now been reduced to a total of 155 in the three‐county area, plus a few additional in adjacent counties which are partly included in the region.

The late start of the North-Central Cheese Region, compared to older southern Wisconsin, is reflected in production figures. Marathon County produced only 51,000 pounds of cheese in 1895. The production expanded with settlement; it reached a million pounds in 1904, 10,000,000 in 1914, and 25,000,000 in 1924. Clark County followed an almost identical pattern in years and quantity. After 1925 the region was almost entirely settled and developed; in 1950 these two counties, each producing 36,600,000 pounds of cheese, stood tied for second and third among Wisconsin counties (after Dodge) in cheese manufacture. Practically all of the product is American cheese.
(7) The Northwestern American and Foreign Cheese Region lies in Barron, Polk, Dunn, and St. Croix counties. Like the North-Central Region it is mainly a development of the present century. This region does not have the closely-spaced cheese factories, even today, possessed by Wisconsin’s other cheese regions. It is actually a dual area so far as American and Foreign product is concerned; the manufacture of Swiss, Italian, and American cheese is important, and the region actually constitutes the second cheese region of the state in the production of Swiss cheese. Individual factories specialize in one of the types. The northward migration of several Swiss cheesemakers from Green County to Barron County to found their own factories explains in part the origin of the Swiss industry. One of the Italian cheese companies, originally located at Lake Nebagamon in the cut-over country of Douglas County, south of Lake Superior, built several factories in the farming regions of the Northwestern Cheese Region when their needs for milk outgrew that which could be supplied by the farmers of the cut-overs. The American cheese industry of the region antedates the foreign types, it having originated during the 1890’s in the southern, settled portions of that time, mainly the St. Croix County part.

Summary

Wisconsin now produces half a billion pounds of cheese annually. This is half of the production of the United States. Absolutely, the manufacture of American cheddar cheese is the most important subdivision of the industry, but relatively the state’s manufacture of foreign types of cheese is a greater percentage of the national total of these types.

The centers of cheese production in Wisconsin have shifted north and west from southeastern Wisconsin, the region to which early settlers from New York and New England first introduced the industry. Seven main regions of specialization in cheese manufacture have characterized Wisconsin; six remain in production. In gross form, the combined cheese regions of today form a crescent in the state, with the horns in the southwest and northwest, and the body along the eastern lakeshore. The crescent of cheese manufacture includes very diverse terrain; part of it is in the rugged sedimentary Driftless Area; part is in smoother Driftless Area; a large share is in glaciated eastern Wisconsin; and some lies over the crystalline rock areas of the north-center, in glaciated countryside of both new (Wisconsin) and old glacial drift, and also in some of the unglaciated territory of this section.
Cheese production is of such importance in the cheese regions, and so of the state, that national fame for cheese has been attained. So important is the industry that, although greatly concentrated in the specialized cheese regions, there is at present some cheese manufacture in 60 of the 71 counties of Wisconsin. All of the main geographic divisions of the state engage in the industry in some degree, and moderate manufacture is carried on even in the Central Sand Plain of the state, and in the Northern Cut-Over and Forest Region. However, despite the widespread manufacture, the cheese industry, as formerly, remains highly concentrated in specialized regions so far as the bulk of production is concerned.