

## Offered Historical Submittal

I am always asking a friend of mine who attended culinary school about different tips and secrets for improving recipes and furthering my enthusiastic skills in the kitchen. He once told me that after all of his experiences, he is convinced that adding basil, bacon, or butter to any recipe will ultimately improve the experience for the subsequent taste buds that come into contact with the aforementioned food. I didn't argue, and I can't think of too many scenarios where I would stop someone from adding more of these ingredients to something.

Thinking about the various cooking lessons I've had from wonderfully experienced grandmotherly women who are as comfortable serving a fellowship hall filled with hungry Lutherans as they would be hosting tea for the Queen of England, keeping a vat of butter around one's house is one of the most important marks of a seasoned master of gastronomy. Looking at the history of the area, however, there are many things about this area that made it a perfect place to locate dairies and creameries, and one of the largest in the state once was located in Rapid City.

A result of the discovery of gold in the Black Hills after Custer's expedition, Rapid City was founded in 1876 and incorporated in 1882. The rails of the railroad reached Rapid City in 1886, cementing its future as a growing center of business for the surrounding territory. Prospectors and treasure seekers were pouring into the hills, and with them came entrepreneurs and others wishing to provide services for the growing mining communities. From this trend came the arrival of farmers and ranchers who brought dairy cattle, and with the inflated prices one could charge in the mining camps for almost any of the essentials, let alone specialty items, dairy production became a successful way for people to make a living.

There were some natural advantages for dairy production in the Black Hills. The landscape provides grazing space for cattle, and the running water of its creeks stays the right temperature and is "free of deleterious minerals" for the "working of butter," according to the National Register of Historic Places, to which the Fairmont Creamery Company Building was added in 2006. The location of Rapid City on the railroad also made it easy to transport products, so it made sense that entrepreneurs would pick this spot to start their business.

Rapid City's first creamery opened in the late 1880s, operated by the Forshay family. A second, North Start Creamery, would open in 1906, started by Ole Peterson, and he ran it until 1919 when W.A. Arlt bought the business. He then sold it to the Fairmont Creamery Company, located in Omaha, Neb., in 1926. This company was established by Joseph R. Rushton and Wallace Wheeler in Fairmont, Neb., in 1884. While the company focused primarily on butter production in its early days, it soon added other processed dairy products, as well as eggs, snack foods, vegetables, and poultry, and by 1959, it would be included in the list of the country's 500 largest corporations.

Rapid City's location and favorable conditions for dairy production earned it the title of "Butter Center" of the state by 1929, according to the Gate City Guide, and the Fairmont Creamery Company would expand production that year, constructing a new, modern creamery and cold storage plant, designed by architect F.V. Thomas and built by the Henry Carlson Company, on the corner of Main and Second streets in Rapid City. Construction began in 1927, with the grand opening of the building celebrated in December of 1929. The building was made from brick produced in Belle Fourche, with pink sandstone trim out of the Evans Quarry in Hot Springs. The Gate City Guide described this building "as one of the most complete plants of its kind in the country," and it was designed so that it could easily be expanded in the future. The company did make additions to the building in 1940 and 1962.

In addition to using local materials to build the creamery, the Fairmont Creamery Company also bought from local producers. Milk, cream, potatoes, eggs, and poultry were among the products the company purchased, though the dairy side of things was the main focus of its production. According to the National Register of Historic Places, the creamery spent \$500,000 in 1929 on these products. It employed 23 people, and "the company was a heavy purchaser of supplies and other raw materials locally while also increasing the city's tax base."

The Fairmont Creamer Company Building, also known as the Creamery Mall, is significant for many reasons, but it is also notable because there were not many creameries built in South Dakota after 1920. The industry began to decline after 1945, and the plant continued production through 1968. In 1971, it was sold to Brown Swiss Dairy. Its days of dairy production were over, however, and today, the building houses various office and business space, including a restaurant. Though it has been remodeled to accommodate new tenants (under the oversight of Historic Preservation to retain the structure's historical integrity), the original hardwood floors, red brick flooring and natural cork walls remain from the building's early days.

The building played an important part of Rapid City and remains a landmark on the city's Main Street. It reminds me of the importance of butter in the satisfaction of my palate, and it makes me appreciate the local food and products South Dakotans have been able to enjoy throughout its history.

By Kaija Swisher; Friday, July 20, 2012