

Do You Remember?



By Anne Homan

Livermore Creameries

What do you expect today when you go to a creamery? Cream, ice cream, butter, cheese, a good family meal? In 1896 the Livermore League of Progress, precursor to the Chamber of Commerce, decided that a creamery—at that time a place where milk and cream are separated, and butter and sometimes cheese are made—would be a profitable addition to local business. A local meeting in January 1896 filled the room above the old fire house on Second Street to capacity to hear information from two representatives of the Pacific Creamery Construction Company. In response to questions from the audience, the *Herald* reported, “it was stated that a fully equipped creamery with capacity for the milk of 1,000 cows could be furnished for about \$5,000; that the expense of making the butter would be from 1 to 2½ cents a pound; that the average quantity of butter per cow for the entire season could be about ¾ of a pound a day, and that to realize the full profit hogs should be kept in connection with the creamery (to feed on the skim milk).”

A committee of five men—W.W. Wynn, John Beck, I.J. Righter, R. Hunter, and August Hagemann—was formed to investigate the matter further. Their report must have been favorable, because in mid-February the stockholders met and elected directors. The creamery building was to be started immediately at the intersection of Maple Street and East Avenue, across the street from what is now Livermore High School. The building was planned to be 30 by 40 feet in size on a brick foundation with an accompanying lean-to 12 by 28 feet. Also, a well was drilled on the site.

By the second day of business in March 1896, the first batch of butter was turned out and was for sale in stores. By the third day of business, the creamery had a daily supply of 1,800 pounds of cream from local farms. The first box of butter was shipped to the Farmers' Union in San Jose, where it was favorably compared with other brands. For a while, the creamery had a branch at Altamont; Chester Young was the manager there in March 1897. In her younger days on the Holm farm, Tilli Calhoun remembered milking cows, using a cream separator on the milk, and then taking the cream to this creamery. Vesta Conniff Breihl, who lived in the Altamont hills off Cross Road, recalled that creamery employees came to the Conniff ranch to collect cream.

By 1900 Archer Young, Chester's brother, had bought the Livermore creamery. Later, he began working for the Coast Manufacturing and Supply Company, and in 1912, according to Malvern Sweet, Archer sold the creamery to another brother, Fred. Western Meat Company of San Francisco bought the creamery from Fred Young in September 1920. John V. Silva managed the creamery for Western Meat until World War II. It probably went out of business then because of the rationing of butter.

The Golden Rule Creamery was not the sort of business that collected cream from local residents to make butter, as the old creamery had. The Golden Rule on the northeast corner of Second and J, across from Foresters Hall, was THE teenage downtown hangout in the 1940s and '50s. “We would get a cherry Coke and then go out and sit on the fenders of cars parked diagonally in the street,” Mary Henriques recalled. Meals for her family inside were only 75¢.

George and Vettie Mize had moved to Livermore in November 1947 to take over the Golden Rule Ice and Fuel Company. The original business, started by Walter Thompson, included ice delivery and a soda fountain, where customers could order light lunches and ice cream. George Mize had worked for Dari-Maid ice cream in Tracy, so he expanded the ice cream plant here when the Mizes took over, even selling ice cream wholesale to local groceries and restaurants. They named their new enterprise the Golden Rule Creamery. Local residents took home their hand-packed ice cream.

In April 1949 George died suddenly. Vettie found the ice cream side of the business too difficult to keep up. She began specializing instead in “home-cooked meals, as near as I would cook at home.” Despite a fire in November 1949, she persevered, and her cooking appealed to a clientele of all ages. The *Livermore News* noted, “Her banquet room serves all of the regular weekly luncheon and dinner meetings held by organizations in town. They include the Lions, Rotary, Business and Professional Women, Soroptimists, 20-30, and Toastmasters.” During the Korean War, she kept a wall of soldiers' photographs in the Creamery. She wrote as many as 30 letters a week overseas to them. Norman Volponi remembered proudly that “Mom” Mize was his pen pal. Vettie Mize sold the business in October 1957.

Today, the Golden Rule Creamery building is occupied by the Riata Diner and Tavern. A new creamery, the Coldstone Creamery, is in a strip mall on North Livermore Avenue near Interstate 580. What is your best guess as to what you will find at this creamery?

(Readers can reach me at am50homan@yahoo.com.)