

BLACK DIAMOND CHEESE

SEPT. 29, 1969

Tomorrow was here years ago in the Quinte cheese business.

It was ushered in by a trade name — Black Diamond.

Years ago the Belleville company, with its up-to-date business outlook, fell heir to the aging Quinte cheese tradition, giving it a spruce, new look.

Now, as a newcomer to the international Brooke Bond food industry group, Black Diamond keeps a century-old local industry contemporary with the sophisticated perspective of modern business.

For Belleville it means continued enjoyment of an international reputation for enjoyable cheddar cheese.

The surrounding Quinte countryside is still one of Ontario's largest producers of the renowned foodstuff — a staple that became a delicacy.

Black Diamond still draws its supplies for international marketing from this source — where international ribbons for quality are nothing new.

The cheesemaking craft came with the early pioneers. But it was in the immediate pre-Confederation that it first developed into an industry of importance to the public economy.

By 1866 the fledgling industry was spreading through the Quinte district, with the first factories going up around Belleville.

Because of a small home population exports — particularly to Britain — became paramount. Distinguished by unique flavor and high quality, Canadian cheddar won consumer cheers in Britain.

The boom was on and more and more factories were opened around the Quinte district to meet a flourishing demand. So much so, the industry reached its peak with 2,300 plants producing nothing but cheese.

The early-20th century saw the golden years of the industry. Still the British market was a prime source when Robert F. Hart — a native Englishman who came to Canada via the U.S. cheese business — launched Belleville Cheddar Cheese Ltd. in 1933.

Hart was testing a new marketing idea.

To that time, most cheese exported was shipped unaged, the British importer usually completing the maturing process. Hart argued that a standard home-matured product could find a ready export market.

Cheese was shipped into Belleville from the countryside matured on Hart's premises.

The cheese was unwaxed and during the aging process, a surface mould formed on the rind. When waxed later for export it was found the moulded rind turned black.

Hart had ready-made inspiration for a trade name — a diamond among cheese for flavor, its packaging black in appearance.

Early in the company's career Hart had his attention drawn to the domestic market. Cheese was exported in 90-pound wheels. Domestic demand from connoisseurs and catering establishments necessitated a new departure. Hart began ordering 10-pound wheels from the nearby Foxboro Cheese Factory.

Today, Black Diamond cheese circles are mailed by tens of thousands, around the world. The Foxboro producer still manufactures for the company.

The post-World War II era was a difficult time for cheese exporters and Black Diamond turned to developing Canadian markets.

A series of company purchases ensued in following years, climaxed by amalgamation with an historic firm — W. S. Cook and Son, of Belleville, in the cheese business since 1874.

In 1959 also came a complete reversal of a traditional role. Black Diamond was named North American representative for Milk Marketing Board of England and Wales, marketing English varieties of cheese. The company had moved from exporting to importing.

Meantime, up-to-date techniques in marketing, packaging, maintenance of standards kept Black Diamond a leader in the Canadian cheese business.

It continued to widen its range of products — marketing the traditional cheddar along with wine-cured, beer-

aged, hickory-smoked cheese among varieties under its label.

Marketing process cheese it was the first to introduce a consumer table jar for its gourmet Cheez Plees.

In 1961 it took first prize from the Packing Association of Canada for consumer-packaging design.

In 1965 Black Diamond International sold its European business to a London corpora-

tion Trengrouse and Nathan strengthen world organization of Black Diamond.

The final change came in 1968 when the company joined the Brooke Bond group, big international producer of food products — Red Rose and Blue Ribbon teas and coffees, Oxo meat extracts are among its popularly-known labels.

Some time soon, Brooke Bond and Black Diamond also will be neighbors. The cheese company headquarters is just across the Macdonald-Cartier Freeway from the new Erooke Bond factory, one of Belleville's newest industrial acquisitions.

However, Black Diamond still plays a familiar and traditional role in the Quinte economy.

Most of its cheese is still obtained from local factories — which also maintained a proud tradition of their own.

Black Diamond itself points to such suppliers as the Selby

Cheese Factory — several times winner of the British

Empire Dairy Show, and 1965 grand champion of the Olympic Dairy Show, in Britain.

Local suppliers have had the highest cheese grade averages in Central Ontario.

In the Belleville area, cheese — of high quality — still is a most important product.

INTELLIGENCER

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