

Historic Farm on 10th Con. of Markham Township Produces Natural Cheese

By Lyn and Richard Harrington

Nearly 150 years ago, Christian Reesor and his family moved from Pennsylvania to the fertile forested lands around Stouffville. In linen-covered Conestoga wagons, they brought their household goods, their children, livestock and Bibles, to the new country.

Christian Reesor, pastor and leader of the community, did not live to see the rich farmlands yield their harvest. Killed by a falling tree while clearing land, his was the first grave in the tiny burial plot on the home farm. His log cabin was replaced by the massive stone house, built by his son Christian.

That stone house still overlooks the little Reesor cemetery. But the historic property has opened its heart to a new migration, to families from Germany and Switzerland. They call it Homey Farm, partly in compliment to Christian Reesor.

"Also, we think the name fits it," said Herman Sauer. "Never have we experienced such friendliness, such co-operation and kindness as amongst our neighbors in Markham Township."

When Hitler's warclouds were gathering, a group of friends decided to leave Germany. To Herman Sauer and his family, it was no longer the country they loved. Elisabeth David, her husband and daughter, his sister Mrs. Kaysersling, were equally anxious to put the unhappy country behind them.

They had something to offer a new land. Mr. Sauer had taken advanced degrees in agriculture. Mrs. David had studied cheesemaking in Switzerland's experimental stations. The group moved first to Italy in 1936.

"But we soon saw that was a mistake," said Mr. Sauer. "So we applied to come to Canada."

(In an amusing aside, he admitted that he had not then grasped the size of Canada. He read in an Italian paper that someone in Smithers, B.C., had a farm to sell. So he wrote a friend in Montreal suggesting that he take a look at it, some time when he was out driving. Horrified, the friend wrote back to explain that Smithers was as far west of Montreal as Italy was east!)

To Montreal, then, in the raw early spring of 1939, came the group of 13 people. Friends in Montreal made them welcome, helped them with their faltering English, showed them farms roundabout. But somehow, the Toronto area seemed a better choice for them, and they looked around in that locality.

"We saw so many beautiful farms," said Mrs. David, "each one better than the last, according to the agents. We didn't know what to think."

Mr. Sauer solved it, when he went to Ottawa to ask guidance of the Minister of Agriculture himself. He was directed to the V.L.A. administrators in Toronto.

"They gave us absolutely priceless co-operation and valuable advice," he declared. "We learned more about farmland around Toronto in two days than we had in three weeks before. Why, in two days we decided that this 200-acre farm was just what we wanted."

The huge house that once held so many family gatherings of Reesors now housed a large group held together by the bonds of friendship. At first they did only farming, with Mr. Sauer as farm manager. But after the war, Homey Farm expanded its activities and began to develop the project that had been lying fallow for ten years. They still wanted to make cheese.

"In Europe, cheese comes to the table at breakfast, and the cheese tray follows luncheon and dinner automatically," Mrs. David explained. "Canadian cheddar cheeses are unexcelled but there seemed so little variety on the whole."

So in 1946, they borrowed the services of Mr. Frauenknecht, a Swiss outstanding in making soft cheese. His advice and arrangements at Homey Farm cost a healthy sum, but it was worth it to get a good start. Later they secured the expert services of two skilled Swiss cheese makers, Walter Joss and Erich Bruhin. Mr. David was salesman.

"We wanted to launch our cheese slowly, because the market was not yet ready for any great quantity," said Mrs. David. "When my husband became ill, I helped him with the sales and took over the selling after his death last year."

The project was meant to use up the milk supply of the 60-70 registered Holsteins on the farm. But it has gradually grown beyond that point. Now Homey Farm buys milk of the same quality from the neighbours. Whole milk with a butterfat content of 3.9% goes into making delicate Camembert, bland Alpine, more odorous Old Vienna, and eyeletted Emmentaler cheeses. At first they sent to Switzerland for their bacterial cultures, and still do from time to time. But their chief supply comes from a Canadian bacteriologist who keeps the imported culture alive. The entire operation is carried

on in the generous basement of the big house. The "cheese kitchen," the curing rooms, each with its own thermostatically controlled temperature, the packing rooms are there. Different cheeses are packaged in separate rooms, which are carefully sprayed with disinfectant each time, to make sure that alien bacteria does not get in to spoil the batch.

In this matter of checking against undesirable mould, scientists from the Ontario Research Foundation did yeoman service. They spent two days, taking nearly 40 samples of air, workmen's clothing, walls and what not. They improved the situation considerably. But the cheese-makers are still extremely careful.

"But as for mould on cheese, it doesn't make any difference to the cheese itself," Mrs. David pointed out. "A natural cheese is alive; it goes on working. The mould can easily be cut off, although Europeans would eat it. What is the difference between eating the mould which is the important part of a blue cheese, and eating a mould which grows on the outside of some other cheese?"

Temperamental Cheese

Nonetheless, cheese can get past its prime. "Progressive" cheese which ripens to a perfect state, can become unpalatable past that point. Camembert is the most temperamental. At its prime, it is creamy to the point of spreading. One who has bought some aged Camembert, is timid about repeating the experience. That in fact is the main reason why Camembert is rare in this country. Such cheeses are quite fresh when delivered to the grocery store, in fact too young for the table. But they can be ripened by being kept at room temperature for about a day.

"But you can't do it backward," said Mr. Sauer with a smile. "So we stamp the date of packing on the carton. Then every couple of weeks when we make new deliveries to the stores, we check on any left overs. Outdated cheese comes back to the farm."

Unfortunately, outdated soft cheese has little or no use, and is a complete loss to the manufacturer. But Homey Farm would rather take that loss than lose a reputation for top-quality cheese.

The Camembert made at the farm has another distinctive feature in that each pat is made individually, not part of a larger round cut into segments. There is a little more work to this, but every edge is coated with the Camembert mould, whose flavor permeates each morsel. This type of mould remains white, and the velvety crust should not be cut off.

The second cheese brought out by Homey Farm is the Alpine, the Bel-Swiss cheese. Switzerland began to produce this about 40 years ago, 20 years after it had been developed in Italy as the Bel Paese cheese. It has a bland mild flavor and is made in wheels about 10" across. These are soaked in brine for 12 hours, then set to ripen in the shallow shelves of the curing room. They are then cut into wedges weighing 7 ounces, sealed in cellophane and labelled.

If you like Limburger cheese, you'll also enjoy Romadour, which is a more "noble" member of the same family, and is marketed by Homey Farm under the name "Nippy Old Vienna." It is a soft cheese, with its own penetrating aroma. This is shaped in aluminum slots, then set to cure for the required time. It is wrapped in foil, and sold in little 4-ounce blocks.

In September of 1950, Homey Farm brought another kind of cheese to market. This is the cheese that made Switzerland famous. Since the name "Emmentaler" is patented, Homey Farm simply labels its product "Swiss" cheese. You may have heard the glib saying "The bigger the holes the better the cheese," but don't believe it.

"The size of the holes in the

cheese is controlled by the bacterial culture used, and by the temperature in making, and especially in curing," Mrs. David explains. "Fair-sized holes indicate the best quality of cheese. We make it in wheels up to 50 pounds in weight, and in loaves and bricks of various sizes. The chain stores like to cut it up and wrap it themselves."

Each type of cheese has different requirements throughout. The culture used, size of curd, type of piling, handling, the temperature, humidity and ripening all vary. You might think it would discourage cheese-making. But instead, Homey Farm plans to go into making blue-mould cheese eventually.

They also have a by-product in butter made from the whey.

It has a very low butterfat content, about 2.7%, so that it takes a lot of separating to make any quantity," said Mr. Sauer. "We like our butter lightly salted, and sell to excess to some bakeries and to a few special restaurants. We make it up in 4-pound pats for this trade. The rest of the whey goes to the calves, pigs and chickens."

At first, Toronto was their only market. Dealing through agents is not too satisfactory, so Mrs. David makes the rounds herself. Her beat covers from Ottawa to Windsor, but she hopes before long to get men to take over that job.

The American market is a tempting one, and Homey Farms has had very favorable comments from south of the border. But the duty of this cheese (higher than for cheddar) going into the United States is 25% of the value, which makes export out of the question. Oddly enough the Canadian duty on American cheese is only about 4%. It hardly seems fair!

"Do you find much variety in Ontario cheese-eating habits?" he wondered.

"A great deal," Mrs. David answered. "And we often try to sort out the reasons behind the differences. Kitchener uses a lot of cheese, perhaps because many there are of German descent. Ottawa, too, perhaps because of the mixed background of people at the capital. And we find, too, that French clerks in stores don't need instructions about handling cheese. They just seem to know the right techniques."

Enthusiasm Pays Off

Like a busman's holiday, wherever Mr. Sauer or Mrs. David go, they order cheese for dessert. And when the cheese comes to the table in perfect condition, they know the chef is a master of his craft. For instance, one large Toronto hotel has a chef who understands that cheese must come out of the refrigerator at least half an hour before it is eaten. Cold cheese is practically tasteless.

What is more, he cuts cheese thick enough so you can taste it. Canadians and Americans are likely to have two slices of bread obliterating a thin sliver of cheese. Whereas the European is more apt to ignore the bread altogether, to get the full flavor of the cheese.

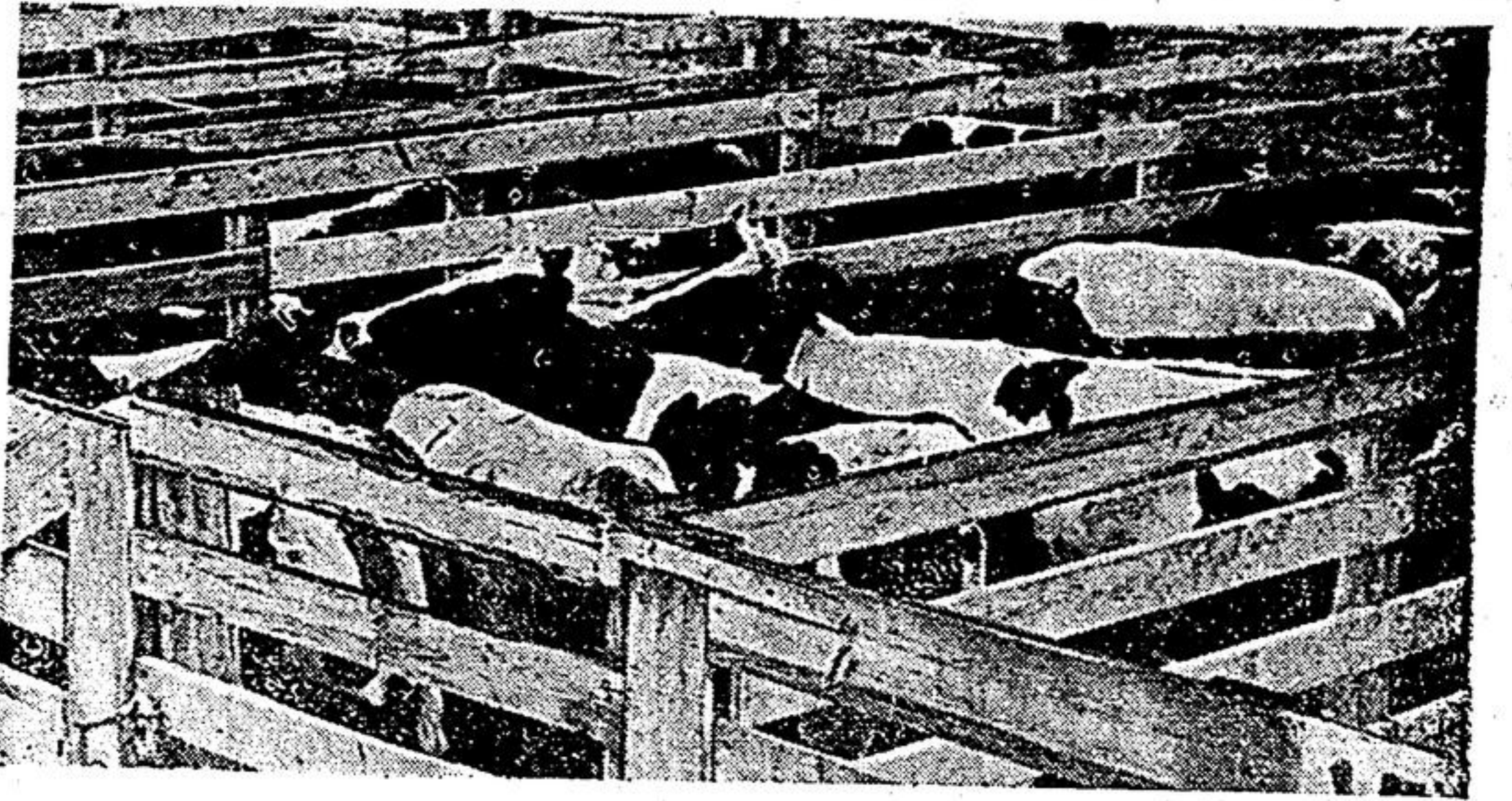
"Cheese is not a luxury," says Mrs. David earnestly. "So many people feel that it is. And, of course, where the public insists upon buying in small quantity, it does cost more than buying a whole wheel, for instance."

But cheese with a little fresh fruit, say grapes or an apple, can be a most satisfying and inexpensive dessert. Spread soft cheese on crackers, with maybe a touch of jelly, and you've a mouth-watering dessert which takes no time to prepare. And it does give a sophisticated finale to a meal!

Mr. Sauer and Mrs. David laughingly agree that farming is a peaceful occupation compared with launching a new cheese. But they have found that their enthusiasm pays off, in spite of some headaches.

"Our cheese making is partly a hobby—partly an obsession," Mrs. David admits with a cheerful smile.

STOCKYARDS SETTING NEW BUSINESS RECORDS



Canada's stockyards are expected to set a record in value of livestock handled this year. Prices are the highest on record and, experts predict, there will be no diminishing in demand.

For Farmers Planning To Construct Farm Ponds

Many farmers in southern Ontario are planning construction of farm ponds, not only for the purpose of watering cattle but also to provide recreation and good fishing, according to officials of the Ontario Department of Lands and Forests. Such ponds will also serve to irrigate land during dry weather, improve the appearance and value of the property and provide a source of water in case of fire.

Basic requirements for a good fish pond, the officials say, are: ample size, at least one acre; pure and abundant water; shallows for spawning fish and deeper portions for hiding and wintering; food in plenty and variety; shade and shelter from the glaring sun and a means of draining the pond completely.

A new pond should be allowed to lie fallow for three or four months in the spring until the newness has worn off and insect and minnow life have become established. These may be introduced originally by procuring a tubful of water and aquatic weeds from some other farm pond which has already become established with a known insect and minnow population.

"Question of proper food is all important," the officials say. "Many people believe this requirement will take care of itself. Such is not the case. Food must be present in volume enough to raise the fish. An acre of water will produce just so many pounds of fish each year according to the food supply. Another mistake is that of planting too many fish in the beginning. Small numbers of fish planted result in less competition for food. This provides a faster rate of growth and much larger fish."

District foresters, it was stated, will gladly supply neighborhood farmers with information on the creation of farm ponds.



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