

## **Tillamook's First Cheese Factories**

The author is unknown.

*(This article was written many years ago . . . date unknown, and it has been edited for spelling errors, grammar errors and clarity by Dean Bones in April, 2021.)*

To create a cheese factory story one must recognize the government agriculture census of 1885 which says Tillamook County had 500 legal voters (Women could not vote at that time.), 3,848 acres of cultivated land, 4,430 head of cattle (How many were milkers we do not know), and 98,168 pounds of butter and cheese were made. 98,108 pounds equals 49 tons!

The only method of shipping was by boat, though some did go to the Willamette valley by wagon, horseback and oxen. The weather told the boat captains and farmers what they could or could not do. When a boat came into any of the four bays it was "hustle and bustle" with horses, oxen and wagons plus a few mud sleds to get products including fish on board the ship.

When visiting with second and third generation Tillamook people one invariable hears, "My grandfather had the first cheese vat in Tillamook County." All of these people cannot be right, but each farmer who had enough milk to make butter and cheese had a vat of his own. Sometimes it was only a copper wash boiler or one he had made elsewhere and brought in by horseback or boat. Each farmer had his idiosyncrasy in trying to create the best product. If he wanted a little extra milk he paid \$.50 a hundred for it. Yes, I said fifty cents a hundred.

Butter is a perishable product and it was a problem to get it to market in an edible state. Hence the desire by reason of necessity to make cheese.

Now Merriman Foland enters the picture. Mr. Foland was born in New York in 1846. He served four years as a union soldier (Co. F - 12th NY Infantry). Wounded, he was captured by confederates and spent some time in the infamous Libby Prison at Richmond, VA, before being exchanged.

After the war he and his wife went to California where they learned to make cheese. They worked on a 400 cow dairy. Their share of the milking was 40 cows which were milked by hand morning and night. Yes, you heard me. I said, "Their share."

In 1878 the Folands, the Stephen Besters and the Erastus McKinleys came from California to Tillamook with horse-drawn California wagons. California wagons were wider than our Trask River road at the time, and it was a severe task to maneuver the wagons between trees and stumps. It took ten weeks to make the trip camping out all the way. They were looking for government land.

The Folands settled on Perkins Hill two miles east of Lincoln. Tillamook did not acquire its present name until 1885. Before Lincoln it was called Houquarton which is an Indian word meaning The Landing.

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In 1880 They bought homestead rights in the Beaver area ( about a half a mile east of Beaver) for \$100 dollars. With two cows they started to prove up on the place they wanted to call home. By 1893 between milking cows and trapping and pelting beaver they had \$40 dollars they could call their own.

Mr. Foland made his first cheese of skim milk in a wash boiler. Cheese was not made of whole milk. The cream was made into butter, packed into firkins and kept in a cool place usually buried in the ground. When cool fall weather came it was dug up and hauled to the boats that came up the Nestucca River as far as Cloverdale. That was the loading point for the transportation of butter, cheese and fish packed in barrels. Note that there were roads and grades along the Nestucca River but no bridges.

Mr. Foland was a bit more ambitious than his neighbors, and he devised an advanced method, for those days, of making his cheese. He had his problems and was chided about his balloon cheeses that rolled off the shelf. But in 1891 he instituted a co-operative creamery and cheese factory. He had faith in himself and his fellow men. Beaver had the first cheese factory, and don't you forget it.

His vat held 110 gallons, a wee bit more than 880 pounds. The vat was made of meetal, of course, with an outer jacket of wood. For cooking the curd hot water was used. The water lay between the wooden jacket and the metal lining and was heated by a wood buring stove at one corner of the vat.

By 1893 Foland, Bixbee, Farmer, Saling, Kinnamon, Bunn and others whose names have been forgotten were well on their way to a very successful venture when fate stepped in and took their number one cheesemaker. Merriman Foland died June 18, 1893. Friends said Mr. Foland died because he was so fond of work that he "wouldn't take time for anything else" and so fell victim to his enthusiastic industry.

At the time of Mr. Foland's death a neighbor driving a team of horssees pulling a wagon drove to Tillamook to procure a casket and found the town in a smoldering ruins. No casket. Tillamook had had its 1893 historic fire.

The driver returned to Beaver, and a casket was created. He was buried in a well-marked area overlooking the little hamlet of Beaver. The cemetery is land donated by Mary Foland to the United Brethren Church. (He and Mary, his wife, and other members of the family lay in what is now known as Beaver Cemetery.)

With Foland gone the co-op ran into difficulties. The vat was sold to Jasper Smith of Cloverdale. But the friends would not give up.

Peter McIntosh now entered the picture along with Harry Ogden and T.S. Townsend. Ogden and Townsend are not very well remembered.

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Peter McIntosh, a doughty Scot had won himself a good reputation at Woodland, Washington. In 1894 a group of Tillamook County farmers invited him to come and show them how to improve their cheddar cheese. The two farmers who wrote him explained rather apologetically that the local product, despite repeated experiments and recipe changes could not come up with success.

Foland's cheese may have had its problems, but people all over the Northwest were buying it, and now that he was gone something had to be done to make use of the milk Tillamook's wonderful grass produced.

Mr. McIntosh was born in Ontario, Canada, where cheese factories were a way of life. Just why he "drifted out west" has not been explained, but he accepted the Tillamook challenge to follow in Merriman Foland's footsteps.

Note that Webster's dictionary says, "Cheddar cheese, a smooth textured pressed cheese, was originally made in Cheddar, England."