

Soda Pop & Ice Cream

Soda pop and ice cream, two “vices” that many of us indulge in and enjoy were at one time products of our local economy. The Nelson Ice Cream Company and the Crystal Bottling Company served as significant producers of ice cream and soda pop products to our local region for many years.

The Nelson Ice Cream Company was established by Einer Nelson in 1923. He originally came to Fairmont from Mankato to manage the Fairmont branch of the Model Creamery. He eventually bought out the firm’s Fairmont interest and then established his own company.

In the mid-1950s, the Nelson Ice Cream Company had distribution centers in Windom, Springfield, Redwood Falls, Pipestone in Minnesota and in Storm Lake and Fort Dodge, Iowa. In 1955, the company had seventy-six full-time employees and their ice cream output totaled 1,000,000 gallons annually. This was quite a jump from the first year’s output of 70,000 gallons.

In the early years of ice cream production, their flavors were limited to vanilla, chocolate and strawberry. By the mid-1950s, Nelson’s Ice Cream Company was producing eighteen flavors of ice cream, four flavors of sherbet, and also made specialty items such as drum sticks. The plant experienced a number of expansions, used stainless steel equipment, and at 100% capacity could freeze 950 gallons of ice cream per hour.

The distribution of Nelson’s milk and ice cream products involved a fleet of thirty-three trucks. Nelson’s trucks provided home delivery routes as well as trucks distributing dairy products to area grocers, hotels, restaurants, and other outlets. In addition, Nelson provided his dealers with refrigerated cabinets for ice cream storage to ensure proper refrigeration standards. The cabinets varied in size from ten to sixty gallons and were maintained and serviced by Nelson’s serviceman.

Regarding major changes in the industry at that time, in a *Sentinel* story from June 9, 1956, Nelson cited two factors that he considered significant: The first was the pattern of consumption and demand in that the only time demand diminished was in the winter when weather stopped the trucks from getting on the road, not as a result of winter temperatures. The second was that at one time ice cream was considered a luxury item and by the mid-1950s, thanks to marketing, it was considered a nutritious food to be enjoyed the year around. He stated that family consumption of ice cream also influenced packaging in that one-half gallon containers were becoming common.

In switching from eating to drinking, Fairmont was at one time the home of the Crystal Bottling Company, calling itself a business “Built by Thirst.” The original Fairmont Bottling works was established in 1894 by C. H. Meyer. Later, in 1917, Lou C. Meyer established the first Crystal Bottling plant on 111 East Third Street. At that time the bottling of soda pop was not automated and only limited flavors of strawberry, lemon, cream, and sarsaparilla were available. They also made a nine ounce pop bottle called the “Interlaken Special” during the period in which Interlaken Park was popular. Telephone directories in the museum from the 1920s indicate that its offices were at 111 South Main Street and a 1969 telephone directory gives its address as 115 South Main Street. It was not listed in directories after 1969.

Orange Crush was popular in the 1920s and thus became the first name brand product bottled by the Crystal Bottling Company. In addition to bottling their own brand of beverages, they contracted with Dr. Pepper in 1939, Squirt in 1942, Nesbitt’s Orange Drink in 1943, and Nu-Grape in 1955. Their own brand bottled strawberry, grape, root beer, and several other flavors.

In the 1950s, Crystal beverages were distributed throughout the region from Luverne to Wells and from LeSueur to the Iowa line. That involved ten trucks distributing from warehouses in Worthington, Jackson, Mankato, and Fairmont.

A quote from then owner Lowell “Bud” Meyer in the July 28, 1956, edition of the *Sentinel* stated the following: “The bottling business is a nice business, but believe me, it’s no ‘get-rich-quick’ scheme. When you add such cost items as glass bottles, modern machinery at a cost of \$150,000, trucks at a rough cost of \$3,000 each, marketing and distribution costs, building and warehousing expenses – well, it takes a lot of thirsty people and hot weather to stay on the profit side of the ledger.” One might only wonder what Mr. Meyer would think at today’s costs of operating the same business.

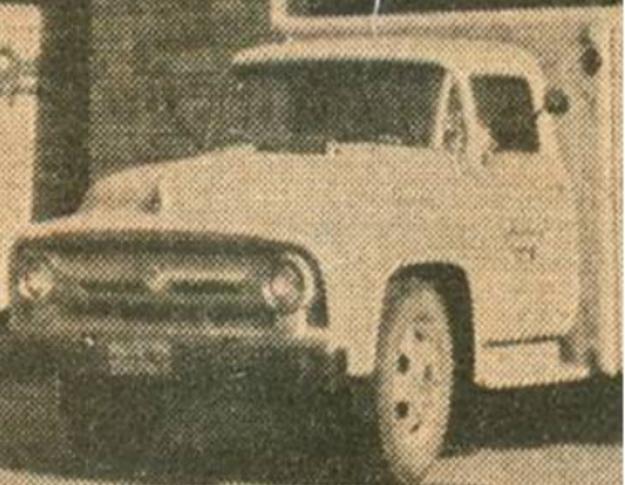
These two businesses, at one time very significant to the local economy, no longer exist. What caused their demise? More than likely a number of factors, some of which might be considered progress, resulted in their loss. Maybe there just wasn’t anyone willing to follow in the footsteps of Mr. Nelson or Mr. Meyer. In any event, although these two businesses no longer exist, their history and benefit to the county will live on.

For more information on this topic, or to become a member, visit the Pioneer Museum in Fairmont or their website at www.fairmont.org/mchs/



DR. PEPPER BOTTLING CO.

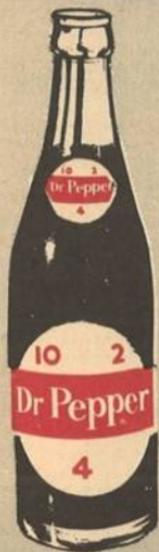
GARAGE



DR. PEPPER BOTTLING CO.

OFFICE





Something Special!

DR. PEPPER GLAZED HAM

3 cups Dr. Pepper
1½ cups brown sugar
whole cloves

Cook a tenderized ham according to the directions on the wrap. Glazes are usually applied about one or one and one-quarter hours before the ham is done. At that time, skin the ham, remove the surplus fat, score

as desired, insert the whole cloves, sprinkle and pat the brown sugar over the surface and gently pour over the Dr. Pepper. At frequent intervals in the remaining baking time, baste with the liquid in the pan. The oven temperature for baking is 325 to 350 degrees depending on browning desired.

Dr. Pepper Bottling Co.

115 So. Main St.

Dial 235-5573

Fairmont

NELSON ICE CREAM CO.

