BETTER BUTTER

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The intent in preparing this manual was to draw attention to the many facets of quality butter manufacture. You will note that there are few references cited and that was intentional. This text addresses the long known facts that ultimately aid in excellent finished products and not to address what happened to develop the best whipped butter and who was involved in the research effort. Your particular interest is how to get butter manufactured correctly and maybe someday win a blue ribbon for your dedication and expertise.
The involvement of many authors whose names you never heard of only confuse the issue in most instances. If I have emphasized a fact with a table or figure then the source is given.

I hope you find this manual helpful and useful.

Bob Bradley
A student pursuing the history of butter might be surprised to find references all the way back to biblical times. In fact, Hunziker, in the first edition of the Butter Industry, cites examples of early butter making and uses as far back as 2000 B.C. The Book of Genesis in the Bible in 18:8 refers to Abraham using butter. In Proverbs 30:33 it appears that Solomon is credited with making butter. In addition, the early Greeks and Romans made butter. However, they did not eat it, instead they used it as an emollient for skin injuries. Hunziker documented medicinal uses, citing butter as a remedy for wounded elephants and a skin treatment for Scottish and North English sheep. In the 17th century Spaniards had the benefit of butter, but again, only for external use.

Early methods to produce butter probably involved raw cream collected by gravity separation or beating fresh milk with a stick. As you might expect, these methods produced butter with undocumented off-flavors and documented rancidity. Despite the quality issues, butter was salted and stored for extended periods and highly prized as a food by the cultures that did eat it. As the centuries passed, butter became an item of commerce in spite of the fact that, by today’s standards, it was unpalatable.

In the United States, early butter was made on farms from cream separated by gravity in shallow pans and later by using a hand-cranked separator. Churns of all sizes and shapes were made of wood. The first attempts to control the flavor and quality of butter came in the middle of the 19th century when buttermakers began chilling milk during the creaming process. Rapid changes occurred from this time forward and gathering cream from farms to deliver to some form of centralized processing facility marked the start of today’s butter industry.

Wooden churns and wooden implements for making and handling butter are now collector’s items and do have some value. Collectors have saved some of these early wooden churns and implements for making, working and handling butter. Figures 1.1 to 1.10 show some of these relics and give a historical perspective particularly considering that cream was farm separated, collected in small lots, stored for a short interval to allow collection of enough cream to churn and finally a wooden churn was used to produce butter. Handling, storage, lack of adequate refrigeration, and wooden implements all contributed to a poor product with flavor and quality issues.