

# Herkimer County was once the cheese-making center of the U.S.

By PAULINE KLIMACEK WALKER

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**LITTLE FALLS** — In the 1800s, Herkimer County was the cheese-making center of the United States. The art of cheese-making was brought to this country by the Palatine Germans, many of whom settled in Newville and the town of Danube. One of the Newville Palatines was Phillip Baum, whose father had come to America in 1748.

Henry Baum was the son of Phillip Baum. Henry purchased land in the town of Schuyler. His farm grew and he had a herd of 30 cows and also a flock of sheep. Baum made cheese and sold it to distributors in Herkimer and Utica. In 1851, one of his buyers asked Henry if he could enter some of his cheese in the Crystal Palace Exhibition in London, England. He gave his permission and in a few weeks, word came back that Baum's cheese had won first place! My husband's grandfather Baum was born and brought up on the Schuyler farm, as was the grandfather of Louis Baum Sr., Neil Baum Sr. and Ruamy Spraker.

Everywhere the Palatines settled, cheese factories are recorded on the old maps. I have a copy of an old map, of what was then called Minden, in

1811 Towards Our Bicentennial 2011



BUILT IN 1801  
Little Falls Historical Society

Herkimer County. Among the cheese factories recorded on this map, the largest was managed by Andrew G. Weatherwax. The statistics show that, from 1870 to 1877, 2,001,131 pounds of cheese was produced in his factory.

In 1865, the Danube Spring Cheese Co. was started in the vicinity of the Stafford neighborhood in Newville. In 1871, the Elm Grove Cheese Co. was erected on the farm of Henry Mesick. Other factories were the Valley Cheese Co. on the farm of Mrs. Van Allen and the Finks Basin Cheese factory on the canal. Each factory produced upwards of 50,000 pounds of cheese a year.

This was to name only a few of the many cheese factories located in the Herkimer County area. The cheese was made manually. In 1891, according to the Little Falls Historical Society, David Burrell began making cheese by machine. The Burrells a resourceful fam-

ily, shipped 10,000 pounds of cheese to England.

From 1864 to 1870 Little Falls was the largest cheese market in the world. The National Dairy Board of Trade was established here. Buyers came from all over on market day. The cheese makers would bring their products

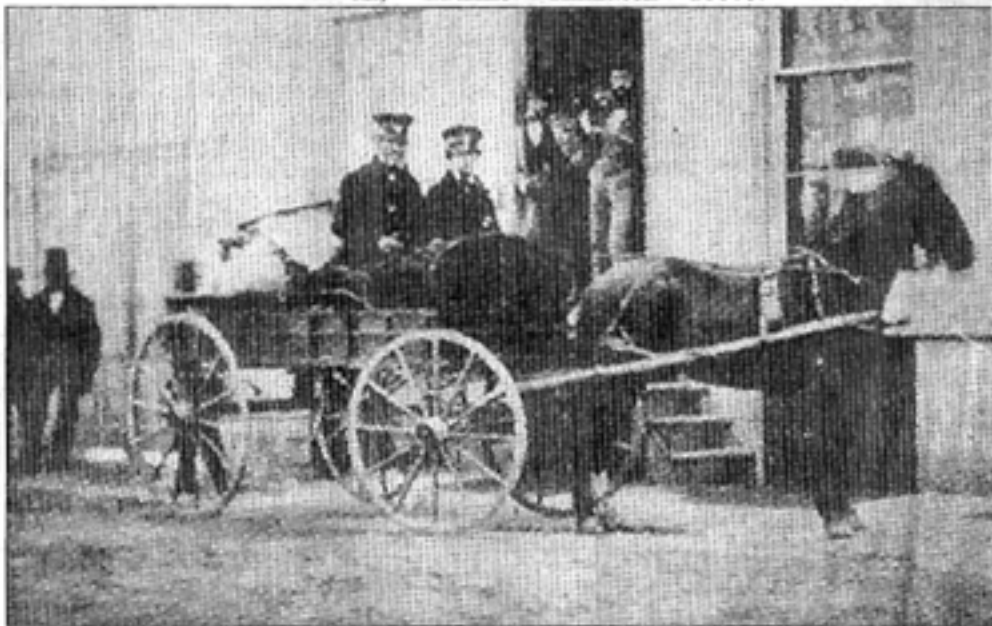
and assemble at the corner of Albany and Ann streets, the present site of the Little Falls Historical Society Museum. Once sold the cheese was delivered to the Little Falls Railroad Station for shipment. In an average season, 25 to 30 million pounds of cheese was sold in Little Falls, and then shipped all over the world. The practice continued into the 1900s. My mother's uncle, John Brndjar, owned and operated the old hotel behind the railroad depot. He did a thriving business until 1915.

To the best of my knowledge, today, no one is making cheese in Herkimer County.

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An early Baum historian, Pauline Klimacek

Walker was born and raised in Little Falls and graduated from Little Falls High School in 1945. She has resided in Skaneateles for the past 41 years.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This is the eleventh in an ongoing series of articles to draw attention to the 2011 bicentennial of the City of Little Falls. Sponsored by the Little Falls Historical Society, any individual or group wishing to submit pieces of work for consideration of publication as part of the "Towards Our Bicentennial" series should do so by contacting either President Terry Tippin or Vice President Louie Baum at the Little Falls Historical Society at 319 S Ann St., Little Falls, NY 13365.



**PICTURED IS ONE OF THE HORSE-DRIVEN** wagons used to haul cheese from one of the many factories once located in Herkimer County. From 1864 to 1870 Little Falls was the largest cheese market in the world. (Photo submitted)