

The Little Falls Cheese History Trail

Stage 1: DOWNTOWN

Enjoy this short walk, which takes you through the area where cheese was once bought and sold in such volume that the price of cheese here influenced the price of cheese as far away as Europe.

Start the walk at the pocket park on the corner of Ann and Main Streets. Across the road, opposite Berkshire Bank, is the Snyder Apartments building. It was originally a hotel, replacing an earlier hotel on the same site. Buyers from as far away as Philadelphia and New York City would stay there for the weekly cheese market. Their horses were stabled in a building roughly where today's Festival's entertainment tent now stands.

Look down the hill towards the Mohawk River and the Erie Canal. This is the narrowest part of the Mohawk valley, and in 1855 the river, the canal, a railway, a road, and the buildings of Little Falls all squeezed into this bottleneck.

Right on the corner of the park is a display board, showing Main Street as it once was. Note the dirt surface and the tall buildings.

The building directly below you is now the Little Falls Museum. On the way down to it, you can pause to read two more display boards. One tells of some of our historic buildings, and the other carries the start of the cheese story. Outside the museum, look for a plaque on a small boulder, reminding us that Little Falls is the former Cheese Capital of the USA. This building was originally a bank and was central to the cheese market. Step inside to see the cheese history display created by the Little Falls Historical Society.

After that, return to the porch and look back up to Main Street. Imagine it as in the picture on that first display board--dusty, as wide as it is now, and hemmed in by buildings. Horse-drawn wagons trundle in from east and west, laden with round boxes of cheese such as you've just seen in the museum. Buyers, dressed in the finery of the day, throng the area, seeking the best quality and the lowest prices. Sample cores are drawn out of the cheeses to determine quality, deals are negotiated, and

bargains are struck. On hot summer days the mix of horses, sweating laborers, scented merchants, and ripening cheese must have created a heady aroma! The prices here were telegraphed to markets elsewhere, including Europe. Here was the first Board of Trade for the cheese market.

Cross Albany Street (with due care) and scan yet two more display boards on the way down towards busy Route 5, which runs parallel to Main Street. The first relates the story of Cheddar cheese, and the second gives insight into the history of packaging cheese. Feldmeier Equipment, Inc., today's Festival's major sponsor, has its origins in making cheese boxes; nowadays, it makes stainless steel tanks for dairy farms, microbreweries, and more.

From here you can return to the Festival, or continue down Ann Street to Stage 2 of the Cheese Trail.