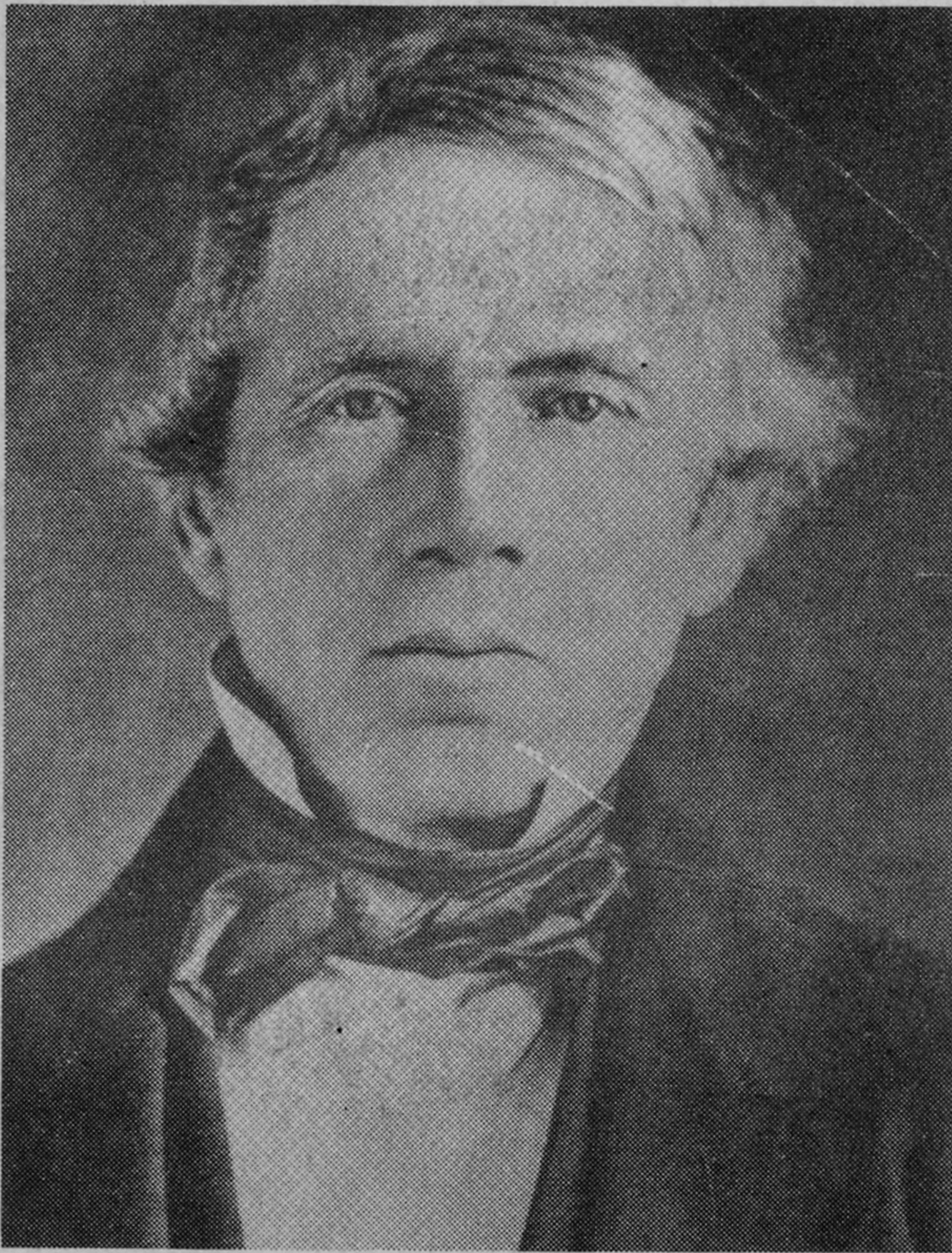


Jesse Williams Cheesemaker



FREDERICK A. RAHMER

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JESSE WILLIAMS, CHEESEMAKER

By
Frederick A. Rahmer

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1.

Commercial cheesemaking and associated dairying is forever linked with the name of Jesse Williams, a skillful farmer and cheesemaker of Rome, N.Y. On May 10, 1851, he established the first cheese factory in the United States, the first in which milk from the cow was converted directly into cheese.

Prior to that time there were some factories in operation, principally in New York and Ohio, but they were operated on a different basis. Instead of purchasing the milk and making the curd, the curd was made at the farm houses and then sold to the manufacturers to be worked up into cheese. Practically all the cheese made in this country was made on the farms where the milk was produced; it was simply an article of domestic manufacture.

Early immigrants to America brought the same cheesemaking methods which they had used in their European homelands, the cheese tub and butter ladle being as important to these early settlers as the spinning wheel and loom. With the development of dairy farms in the 1830's nearly every such farm had its own dairy house for making cheese.

As early as 1821 an Albany weekly, The Ploughboy, said "...We cannot help expressing a wish that a cheese farm of experiment might be established in the county under the patronage of the Board of Agriculture and under the management of a person well skilled in chemistry, that something like scientific principles might be discovered on which to conduct the (cheesemaking) process...."

The wish of The Ploughboy remained only that for thirty years until Jesse Williams started his cheese factory. His idea of bringing together the milk of several neighboring farms to be made into cheese by a skillful operator spread throughout the dairy states and was adopted abroad. Factories were established in New York State at the rate of three or four a year until about 1856, by 1866 there were more than 500 in operation and by 1869 the number of cheese factories in the United States had reached over 1,100. Within thirty years of the beginning of Williams' factory system, the manufacture of cheese on farms practically ceased.



Monument to Jesse Williams on the site of the original factory. Presented to the City of Rome, N.Y. by the National Cheese Institute, June 2, 1951.

Who was this man who revolutionized dairying in this country and abroad, who made dairy farms more productive, who brought added income to the farmer, who created an entire new industry the production methods of which are basically unchanged to this day? What prompted his beginning the factory system?

2.

Jesse was the youngest son of David Williams, one of five brothers of Groton, Connecticut, who had served in the Revolutionary War. David's service record as listed on his pension application shows that he served under Captain Spicer of Col. S.H. Parson's regiment in 1775; under Captain Isaac Gallup, Parson's regiment, in 1776; in Captain Latham's Company of Col. Ledyard's regiment in 1777-8; on the Privateer Beaver, Captain William Haven, also in 1778, and on the Privateer Hancock in 1779.

David and three brothers, Stephen, John and Solomon, left Groton in 1790 according to William W. Wright of Geneva, N. Y., the son of Jesse's sister Anna who had married a David Wright of Jefferson County. Writing in the Rome Sentinel of May 8, 1877, Wright tells us that the Williams brothers first settled in Vermont and soon after moved to Pittstown, then in Albany County, N. Y. Not being satisfied with the area, David, John and Solomon pushed on to Fort Stanwix in 1792, Stephen electing to remain in Pittstown.

In a still later letter written to the Utica Observer in March, 1882, Wright states that the three brothers arrived at the historic fort in 1795. Whenever they did arrive they purchased adjoining farms of 100 acres each on land along the Mohawk River three and a half miles north of the fort in the vicinity of the present N.Y. State Fish Hatchery.

David Williams had been born in Groton, Conn., in 1752 and there married Lucy Walsworth who bore him six children, Lucy, the above mentioned Anna, Elijah and Gilbert, all born in Groton. Jesse was born in Rome, February 24, 1798, in his father's farmhouse which stood on the north side of the present Williams Road where it runs into the Fish Hatchery Road. The area where the Williams' farm stood has been called Hicks' Mills, Parker's Mills, and, more recently, Hyland's Mills.

Little is known of Jesse's early life but on February 28, 1822, he married Amanda Wells, daughter of Elijah Wells and his first wife, Jerusha Brewster, whose father William with David Ashley and their families of Groton, Mass., had moved into the area about the same time as the Williams brothers. Jerusha's genealogy traced back to

Elder Brewster of Mayflower fame. To Jesse and Amanda were born six children, George, De Witt C., Felicia H., Jerusha C., W.B., and David.

Like his father Jesse was a farmer and he must have practiced his vocation with the same Yankee perserverance and hard work as had his father and uncles for the local census of 1835 reported that Jesse had "....265 acres of improved land, 65 head of cattle, 3 horses, 72 sheep, 27 hogs, 30 yards of fulled cloth and 40 yards of flannel". In April of the same year he was also working his uncle Solomon's farm which stood north of his father's place on the west side of the plank highway between Rome and Delta Village (since covered over by the formation of Lake Delta.) On his father's death in 1837 Jesse inherited the former's farm.

Jesse and Amanda, like all their neighbors as well as farmers throughout the country, made their own cheese. As most of the early settlers of New England were of English descent the cheese made by them was similar to the English cheddar and the cheese produced by Jesse and his neighbors became known as New York cheddar. Not satisfied with the inconsistent quality of cheese being produced, Jesse and Amanda realized that by making a better cheese than their friends they could obtain a better price for their product and secure more revenue and provide a steady market for their dairy.

3.

Concerning the development of Jesse's method of making cheese, Wright, in his letter to the Utica Observer in March, 1882, wrote:

"The system was not discovered and perfected in a day, but was the result of years of thought intelligent experiment and patient industry. He conceived the idea and discussed the practicability and value of such system as early as the year 1836. He noticed the palpable advantages of manufacturing cheese from the largest dairies which existed in Central and Northern New York whose soil and productions suggested cheese making as a natural and profitable branch of farming...."

In those days cheese did not become marketable until it was seasoned, which process took all the summer months and as far into the fall as it was safe to ship by canal and avoid the danger of freezing. Wright tells us that early in his career Jesse met with a mishap which would have completely discouraged a less determined man. The cheese market was exceedingly dull one year but he finally disposed of his entire crop and delivered it on the canal late in the fall to a neighboring merchant and speculator who agreed to sell it in

the eastern market at five and a half cents per pound. The merchant sold the cheese but kept the proceeds and Jesse never received a dime for his entire season's labor. This rather expensive experience he never forgot, declaring that if John Jacob Astor or any other man wanted his cheese thereafter he would get it no faster than he paid for it.

"Gradually," wrote Wright, "Jesse added to the acres of his paternal estate, and to the number of his cows, confining himself more and more to his favorite industry and devoting less and less of his farm to the raising of grain. His conservative old father, who, in his day, ranked as one of the best of farmers, was greatly concerned at some of Jesse's 'innovations' and predicted the most disastrous consequences to him and his family financially, especially when he found that his son, instead of raising sufficient wheat for the bread of the family, went to town and purchased 'Genesee Flour' by the barrel."

Not long after this Jesse commenced the practice of purchasing the butter which he used on his own table, and then it was that those who had been in doubt before were certain that his failure was only a matter of time. But when his friends questioned him on these strange proceedings, his reasons, though odd and unsatisfactory, could not be answered easily. He demonstrated that a given number of acres of his farm, devoted to pasturage and hay, would produce a certain amount in dollars and cents in cheesemaking, and that the same acres in grain would yield a much smaller sum with as much or more labor. Then his milk made into cheese would net him a considerable percentage more than in butter. But he found it impossible to perfect himself in the science of cheesemaking upon his own farm or in his own neighborhood, according to Wright.

"Then he made another strange movement, which provoked a good deal of unfavorable comment among his hypocritical neighbors. He rented his farm and dairy for the season and taking his wife, who entered into all his schemes with a true woman's enthusiasm....toured all the largest dairy farms in Oneida, Otsego, Herkimer and Lewis counties and 'took in' all there was to be learned in the raising and treatment of dairy cows and the manufacture of cheese."

Dairy farms were simple and unpretentious and the system of manufacturing cheese a family secret. Everything was done by guess, there being no order, no system, no science in conducting operations. The work was severe and incessant but one fact stood out: the dairy farmer was prosperous.

Jesse and Amanda did not content themselves with what they could gather from conversations with the farmers and dairy maids. They remained in each place until they had mastered all that could be learned of their practice and then moved on to other large establishments.

At the end of the season, every day of which was spent in this study, they returned to their home with a rich store of knowledge which they knew no one else possessed and proceeded to turn it to a use in the manufacture of cheese. Before the cheese factory was perfected or known beyond the neighborhood of Rome Jesse Williams had become by far the most skillful cheesemaker in this country and perhaps the world.

4.

The consistent quality and uniformity of Jesse's cheese was an achievement never before attained by anyone and the cheddar produced by Jesse and Amanda quickly won the praise and acclaim of their neighbors. Because it was far superior to any of the others, Williams' cheese brought the highest prices from the local merchants and a Williams cheese won first prize, \$4, at the Oneida County Fair in 1850. The census of that year reported that Williams produced 25,000 pounds of cheese between June 1, 1849, and July 1, 1850.

In the latter year occurred a relatively insignificant event which was to have everlasting effect on American dairymen and the world all out of proportion to the event itself: George Williams, eldest son of Jesse and Amanda, and himself a farmer and cheesemaker, married Anna S. Rudd.

When the cheese buyers visited Jesse early in 1851 to contract for the year's output at 7 cents a pound, Jesse, soon to become a grandfather and wanting George and Anna to succeed as he and Amanda had, asked the buyers to pay his son the same price. Unfamiliar with George's cheese, the buyers balked but under pressure from Jesse they reluctantly agreed to take George's cheese at the higher price providing that Jesse would guarantee the quality and uniformity of his son's product. George, knowing he could not match his father's product and fearing for Jesse's reputation, declined the offer.

The most popular story has it that Jesse readily resolved the matter by agreeing to combine George's milk output with that of his own cows and make one product to his own high standards. Another version is that at first it occurred to Jesse to go to George's dairy house and impart his own skill in cheesemaking to his son; but this would be a great deal of trouble and Jesse's second thought was that if he couldn't go to the milk the milk would come to him. A third account has it that George's wife, fearing to match her own skills against Jesse's and Amanda's, suggested that the milk from the two herds be combined.

The true story may lie somewhere between the three but whichever it was from the solution came the birth of the cheese factory: the milk of the two herds would be combined. The buyers then agreed to pay Jesse and George the same high price for the cheese, and Jesse soon was making his usual high quality product.

Jesse reasoned that if he could successfully make a superior cheese from the milk of two herds why not from the product of all the neighboring dairies? It cost just as much to produce poor cheese as good and the farmers who were unable to make a good cheese were always working at a disadvantage. Jesse believed that if the milk from all the dairies in the community was taken to a factory and worked up together, producing a high-class article of cheese, all would receive the good prices that they should receive just as George and he were getting.

Now fact and fancy intertwine again. The most popular accounts report that Jesse's neighbors, realizing his skill in cheesemaking, were quick to see the advantages of the factory system and, wanting to share its profits, were quick to join Jesse's venture. Less well known accounts claim that Jesse's neighbors were reluctant to join him, that he had to argue his plan, pointing out its advantages against the disadvantages of the cheesemaking methods used by his fellow dairymen.

Jesse's points were strong; in addition to less labor, the guarantee of superiority in quality and uniformity assuring higher prices, production costs would be reduced by purchasing annotta (coloring), salt, wrappings, and boxes in wholesale lots.

Here again the true story may be a variation of either or a combination of both accounts but whatever the reason Jesse was soon contracting with his friends and neighbors to supply him with the milk of 300 to 400 cows.

Taking his sons George and De Witt into partnership with him, Jesse hastily made plans for the erection of suitable buildings and the equipment for the manufacture of cheese. Selecting the site for his factory, his uncle John's farm where natural springs gushed from the banks of a stream in a fine shade, Williams constructed a frame and wood makehouse where the cheese was made and a store house, 26 feet by 84 feet and two stories high, where the cheese was cured.

5.

On May 10, 1851, cheesemaking by the factory system was begun and a new industry was born. The methods developed by Jesse were the basis for all subsequent means of making cheese in America and



Wood-cut of Williams' original factory which appeared in Harper's new monthly magazine, Vol. 51, November, 1875. The two story building on the left is the store house; the smaller building on the right is the make house.

the machinery and equipment invented by him, though vastly improved over the years, have remained the same.

Jesse's factory was a success from the outset and word of his achievement spread throughout the state. Soon dairymen were coming to Rome to see his factory and to learn his methods. Unselfishly, even happily, Jesse and Amanda, who still worked at her husband's side, told their visitors all they knew about making cheese and showed them the operation of the entire factory, keeping no secrets from them. Jesse took great pleasure in imparting his knowledge to others and, characteristic of this great man, he shared his skill with all neither seeking nor asking remuneration for use of his knowledge or inventions.

The first news of the start of Williams' factory was published in the Rome Weekly Sentinel of July 9, 1851, when the editor reported:

"A manufactory of cheese on a large scale has been commenced by Mr. Jesse Williams of this town. Mr. Williams purchases the milk from several hundred cows and makes his cheese of superior quality and uniform size. We have not visited this establishment but we shall do so in a few days and give a detailed account of it in our paper in August."

It wasn't until September 3 that the editor reported further on the operation of the Williams factory. After a lengthy preamble in the flowery and verbose reportorial style of the day including the observation that "...The drudgery of making cheese is no more to be imposed upon ladies (for we hold that farmers' wives may be ladies as well as others' and often deserve the appellation)..." and stating that butter could be made in the same method as cheese, the writer finally got around to describing the operation of the factory:

"....The whole operation of receiving the milk and making the cheese is performed in the easiest and simplest manner possible, and with the view of saving labor. The wagons containing the cans are driven to the end of the building on a plank carriage way, the faucet turned and the milk conveyed through a tin tube to the receiver inside the building. It is then gauged to ascertain the number of gallons when the turn of the faucet discharges it into the large milk vats, where it is set for cheese. The quantity is entered in a book kept for the purpose under the name of the person of whom the purchase is made, each milking by itself.

"A simple contrivance furnishes a constant current of cold spring water for circulation around the metallic vats during the night, and in the morning, after the milk is brought in and discharged into the vats in the same manner, the whole is brought to the proper heat, regulated by the thermometer and the curd made after a process which we shall publish in a future number, having the promise of the process in detail from Mr. W. The curd being ready it is placed in tin hoops and pressed in a simple screw press, until done and then placed in a cheese house, a few feet distant, each cheese being weighed and the green weight distinctly marked on the side.

"Four cheese are now made per day averaging over 150 lbs. each. The aggregate weight enables Mr. W. to easily determine how much each man is entitled to credit for, as the quantity of milk brought by each has already been entered. The whey is conducted by means of a syphon to the outside of the building where the cheese is made and then pumped (by hand at present, but soon to be done by water power), to a sufficient elevation to be carried in troughs across the creek which runs nearby, to the fields where the hogs, 84 in number, are fed upon it.

"The whole operation from first to last requires care and good attention with which we are persuaded it must be a paying business....Mr. Williams pays 5½ cts. per lb., for the cheese made from the milk purchased and has sold the whole by contract to Messrs. Parker and Mudge of this village, for a round price not less we suppose than 7½ cents. It must be remembered however, that one uniform dairy like this, the cheeses nearly of the same size (for they are so made through the season, any excess in the best part of the season being put into a small cheese rather than destroy the uniformity of the whole) and made in the very best manner will sell in market 25 percent above the average price.

"The quantity made up to the 12th of August was about 68,000 lbs. and will exceed 100,000 lbs. for the season. The pork from 84 hogs will not be a small item in the account."

"....This enterprise is new in this State. In Ohio cheese manufacturies are not uncommon but they are constructed on a

different plan....Instead of purchasing the milk and making the curd, the curd is made at the farm houses and then sold to the manufacturers who work it up into cheese....generally of small size from 10 to 25 lbs. for market. This system is liable to the objection of having a great many curds and less uniformity in quality of cheese. We earnestly hope that Mr. Williams may be successful in his undertaking....to bring out an article which shall command a good price in the market and do credit to the establishment."

It will be noted from the above that at this time, 1851, by his own statement, Williams was selling the factory's entire output to the local firm of Parker and Mudge and not to out of town buyers as most accounts state.

The record kept at the Williams' homestead and later summed up by a grand nephew, George H. Williams, many years ago give a more explicit description of Jesse's factory operation as well as the process by which the cheese was actually made. In part, his account says:

"The make house of Uncle Jesse was a beehive of industry throughout the cheesemaking season from May to November. Into this simple building came the milk of over 300 cows and soon the number rose to 600. The milk, cooled by the icy clear water of the spring beside the building, was placed in large vats of wood and tin and heated with steam pipes from a wood burning boiler. Then was added annotta (coloring made from the pulp of a tropical plant) and rennet, the ingredient that formed the curd.

"When the curd had formed, large knives were used to cut it into cubes, and it was then worked by hand while more heat was applied. On reaching the right consistency it was removed from the vats to a sink furnished with a rack and strainer to drain off the liquid whey. While still warm it was salted and placed in wooden hoops and allowed to drain while gentle pressure was applied with jack screws. After an hour of pressing, the "bandage" was applied, a wrapping of thin calico, whence comes our modern 'cheesecloth'. Then the huge cylinders of cheese, weighing 150 pounds each were returned to the presses where they remained for another 24 to 36 hours under steadily increasing pressure. Removed, trimmed and greased with whey butter they were then transferred to the dryhouse. Here on racks allowing circulation of air, they were turned every day except Sunday during the process of curing."

6.

Specimens of Jesse's cheese were shown at the State Fair at Rochester and dairymen came to Rome from all over the United States and Canada to study his methods. Buyers from the big cheese



The Make House as it looked when photographed in 1892. The Dry House appears in the background. (Hodges' photograph courtesy Mrs. E. Frank Evans, Rome, N.Y.)

houses in New York and Philadelphia beat a path to Jesse's door. Writing in the Rome Sentinel of June 1, 1951, Roland Sutherland noted that "it appears likely that this revolution in cheese making received quicker attention and acclaim than almost any other revolution that ever took place."

So great was Williams' success that his neighbors perhaps thought that he, George and De Witt were making too big a profit on their milk. As noted above, when starting the factory Williams originally paid the dairymen a fixed price for the milk but dissatisfaction over the amount paid soon led some farmers to take their payment in commission, each patron decided at the opening of the season which method of payment he preferred.

For some unknown reason, in 1853 De Witt C. Williams left the company, moving to Fox Lake, Wisconsin, where he settled on a farm to raise cattle. His departure left the business in the hands of Jesse, Amanda and George.

In the Rome Sentinel in May, 1935, John Albert Scott, Rome historian and author, mentions that while four 150 pound cheese were made each day in the beginning the size was later reduced to 100 pounds. Subsequently the size was again reduced to a more or less standard 40-60 pound "wheel". Scott also reported seeing an old account book of Jesse's in which the contributors of fluid milk to

the factory in 1854 were listed, including among others J. and G. G. Williams (most likely Jesse and George), B. W. Williams, John West, Peter Bowman, T. Crosby, A. Huntington, Joseph Wilcox, Daniel Crowell and a man named Johnson. Among the shipments of cheese listed, 2,039 pounds were shipped to Edward Partridge, a wholesaler and retailer of premium cheese of Philadelphia, Pa., on August 29, 1855, and 5,342 pounds to the same account on September 20.

Regarding the Partridge firm, the Rome Sentinel of June 1, 1951, published what was then a recently uncovered letter written to Williams by Partridge under date of July 17, 1857. The letter read:

“Mr. Jesse Williams,

“Your letter of July 15th was received. You having refused my offer of 11 cents, I do not consider myself bound for that bargain (sic). I will receive the shipment of 15 boxes at your price 11 cents & will agree to give 10½ for the balance of the dairy. You certainly cannot think a bargain good which you have refused to except (sic). You are aware of the low price for cheese in New York & you must know how difficult it is for me to sell at such high prices. I have considerable cheese on hand owing to the high price they cost. Cheese can be bought here very best at 10½ cents. Should you except my offer of 10½ for the balance of the dairy you can send 20 to 30 cheese per week, if not you may send amt at highest market price through the season. You are welcome to accomodate Mr. Huntington with 2 large cheese & you can send them by Rail Road to N.Y. thence by Raritan Canal. Please let me hear from you by return mail. Respectfully,

Edward Partridge.”

While the outcome of the above negotiations are not known, it is worthy to note that regardless of the glutted market, Mr. Partridge was agreeable to pay Williams the highest market price for his cheese and that even though the very best cheese was available for 10½ cents per pound Partridge was willing to pay Jesse 11 cents per pound for 15 boxes.

By 1860 the fame of Williams' cheese had traveled so widely that he was shipping cheese as far west as Iowa and a large percentage of the factory output was shipped to England and Europe. Many accounts of the early Williams factory mention a 1000 pound cheese purportedly made to order for Sir Thomas Lipton, famed Scottish merchant, yachtsman and philanthropist. It makes a fanciful tale but is hardly possible as Lipton wasn't born until 1850, didn't open his first grocery store in Glasgow until 1871 and it wasn't until 1881 that he ordered the first of his celebrated cheeses from America. It could be that the 1881 cheese was purchased from the Rome Cheese

Manufacturing Association but the Lipton Company has no record of such a purchase.

Business was brisk in the Williams factory and the whole family was involved in the lucrative operation. In addition, George, having been elected to the State Legislature on the Republican ticket in 1859, had become the proprietor of a cheese factory in Whitesboro, N.Y.

7.

In 1863, while the business was booming and it was producing 100,000 pounds of cheese per season, all patrons now being paid on the commission basis, the Williams family sold the factory. It was incorporated into the Rome Cheese Manufacturing Association, Jesse becoming superintendent and treasurer with David remaining active in the management.

In addition to the shares held by Jesse and other members of his family, the stockholders were: Noah Wilson, 8 shares; J. H. Wilcox, 6; D. M. Crowell, 6; H. L. Adams, 4; and Joel S. Williams, 6.

J. J. Thomas, associate editor of the *Cultivator and Country Gentleman*, escorted by George Williams, visited the dairy farms of Herkimer and Oneida Counties in June, 1863. Concerning the Williams factory, Thomas wrote:

"The Rome Cheese Manufacturing Association, of which Mr. Jesse Williams, the pioneer in the factory system, is superintendent, we also visited. This is a new organization taking the place of Mr. W's old private factory. Some of the statistics of the previous years are of interest here. In the season of 1860, 98,801 pounds of cheese were made and sold, netting after deducting the cost of rennet, annotta, salt, bandages and boxes, chargeable to the contributors, \$10,654, an average of \$10.80 per hundred pounds for the net return of the factory—or 9.8 cents per pound to the farmer after deducting 1 cent for the factory. In 1859 the price netted the farmer was 9.9 cents a pound. The cheese has been sold for seven years past at an average price of from 10 to 10.5 cents per pound."

Thomas also informs us that Jesse, as superintendent, was paid a salary. Other expenses, together with such a percentage on the capital investment as would pay for repairs, as well as interest to the stockholders, were deducted before a division was made of the return in proportion to the amount of milk contributed by each. The charge of 15 percent was deemed sufficient to cover both interest and repairs.

By 1864 Rome had become the largest cheese market in the world and the Hon. George Williams, acting under a suggestion of his friend, General R. U. Sherman, called a meeting in Rome of the cheese manufacturers of central New York. The convention convened in the Rome Court House on the morning of January 6.

William H. Comstock of Utica who compiled the minutes of the meeting called it "the first of its kind ever held in the United States and probably the world." Comstock related that the room was nearly filled "with the intelligent and practical men interested in the proceedings" while the Rome Weekly Sentinel of January 12, reported, "We have seldom seen a finer body of men assembled in council than that which convened in the Court House, this village, on Wednesday of last week. The court room was well filled and we noticed a sprinkling of ladies in the crowd."

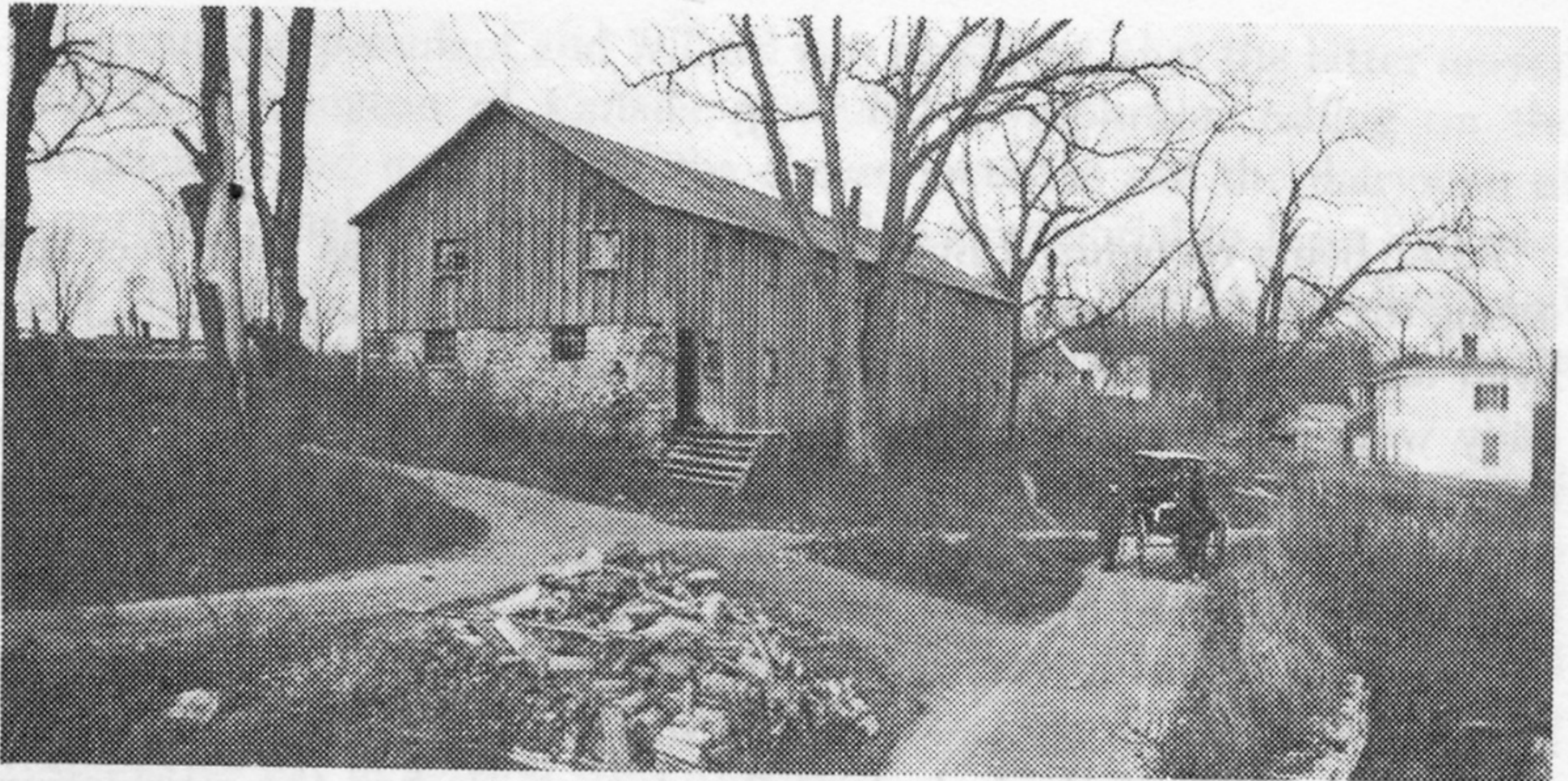
Present were representatives of 69 cheese factories using the milk from 36,752 cows. Oneida County accounted for 32 factories, the remainder being made up of factories from Madison, Herkimer, Lewis, Chautauqua, Chenango, Cortland, Oswego, Fulton, Erie, Montgomery and Jefferson Counties, N.Y. One factory from Warren, Mass. was represented. It is further reported in the minutes that "a large number of gentlemen were present, also from private cheese dairies from this and other states. One who took a prominent part in the proceedings was from Ohio."

The convention was called to order by George Williams, on whose motion, Col. Seth Williams of Constableville, Lewis County, was appointed temporary chairman. Then the meeting was recessed until two o'clock that afternoon.

The afternoon session was even more heavily attended than the first, many people being unable to find seats. The committee on Permanent Organization reported the following officers who were unanimously adopted: Jesse Williams, President; Vice Presidents, Lyman R. Lyon, Lewis Co.; L. Warner, Ontario; Daniel Smith, Montgomery; A. L. Fish, Herkimer; Alonzo Peck, Madison; D. W. Mapels, Cortland; M. R. Stocker, Otsego; George C. Morn, Erie; D. H. Goulding, Chautauqua; A. D. Stanley, Jefferson; Alfred Buck, Oneida; Dwight Ellis, Massachusetts, and A. Bartlett, Ohio. B. F. Stevens and George W. Pixley were elected secretaries.

Jesse Williams headed a committee of five to "report to the convention the details of cheesemaking by the factory system and matters pertaining thereto." The intelligence and foresight of those assembled was displayed when among the first business transacted by the convention was the drafting of a petition to the State Legislature to "pass a law inflicting severe penalties upon all persons who sell or furnish milk to factories who shall dilute with water, adulterate or in any way impair the quality and value of the milk so sold or furnished." The Rome Sentinel of Tuesday, February 9, 1864, reported that a bill prohibiting the adulteration of milk had been introduced in the Assembly.

During the afternoon session Jacob Ellison of Herkimer said that the factories represented by the men present had greatly increased the value of American cheese in the European market. Their cheese had sold



*The original store or dry house as it appeared around 1894.
(Photo courtesy Chester Williams, Rome, N.Y.)*

during the previous season for one and two cents a pound more than the cheese of single dairies.

That Ellison was correct was attested to later by the Encyclopedia Britannica, 1878 edition, which under the heading of "Cheese" remarks: "Of foreign cheese imported into Great Britain, the most important in point of quantity and value is American and, since the introduction of the factory system of cheesemaking in the United States, this has greatly improved in quality and become an important and extensive article of commerce."

Prior to that time, Ex-Governor Horatio Seymour had written to a friend, Herman J. Redfield, in 1870:

"Two thirds (of the cheese) made in this state is sold in England, there are but a few middle men between the maker and consumer. It is a common thing to see a London cheese buyer at our factories."

Thursday morning, January 7, 1864, saw the birth of the New York State Cheese Manufacturing Association "for mutual improvement in the science of cheesemaking and more efficient action in promoting the general interest of the dairying community." Jesse Williams was elected president of the Association but humbly and graciously declined the honor and his son George was elected to the top post, a position he held until 1870 when the organization became the American Dairymen's Association.

Seth Miller, A. L. Fish, David Hamlin, Jefferson County; George E. Morse, Madison County, and Moses Kinney, Cortland County were elected vice presidents. Comstock was elected secretary and Lyman R. Lyon, treasurer. Within a few hours over a hundred men paid their dues as members and appropriately the first name on the list was "Mr. Jesse Williams of Rome, the originator of the factory system."

After being recognized by his fellow cheesemakers as their peer and seeing the establishment of the Cheese Manufacturing Association, Jesse lived less than a year. In his usual good health and while engaged in his daily work in his barnyard on Saturday, December 17, 1864, Jesse was stricken with paralysis which was probably a stroke. After lingering in a partially or wholly unconscious state until Tuesday morning, the 20th, he died at the age of 67 years.

Thus ended the life of one of the greatest men in the history of agriculture, if not in all American industry. He was certainly one of the foremost leaders of the Industrial Revolution. He had the satisfaction of living to see his efforts grow from a tiny makehouse to a world-wide enterprise; he had perfected an art that secured an increased income for the dairy farmer.

The high regard in which Jesse was held by his contemporaries was reflected in the newspaper accounts of his passing. The Utica Morning Herald of December 21 wrote, "...Within the sphere of his personal acquaintances he was esteemed as a man of strict integrity and firmness of purpose and was ever ready to assist in any enterprise the tendency of which was to alleviate suffering, or promotive of the general good. ..."

The Rome Sentinel, then a weekly, of Tuesday, December 27, repeated almost verbatim the same report as had appeared in the Rome Citizen of December 23. After announcing his death and the scanty details thereof and noting his founding of the cheese factory system, the Sentinel added, "He was a man of unblemished reputation, and was universally respected by all who knew him."

Jesse's contribution to the dairying industry was not forgotten with his passing. Quite to the contrary, he was remembered with increasing warmth and gratitude as the vast industry which he so faithfully and successfully had nursed in its infancy spread throughout America and the world.

At the second annual meeting of the Association in Utica in 1865 Prof. X.A. Willard of Herkimer County extolled Jesse's achievements, declaring that it would be fitting for the Association to establish a living memorial in his honor. Willard believed that such a memorial for the education of poor but worthy young men would be more laudable, longer lasting and more meaningful than any memorial of bronze or marble. He suggested that a scholarship fund in Jesse's name be established at either Hamilton College in Williams' home county of Oneida, or at Cornell University.

However it wasn't until the annual meeting of the American Dairymen's Association in Utica in 1873, while ex-Governor Horatio

Seymour was president and Willard vice president, that the latter moved and H. Farrington of Canada seconded a resolution calling on the proprietors and managers of the cheese factories and the dairymen of America to make up a fund of \$10,000 as a memorial to Jesse Williams. The fund was "to be paid over to the trustees of Hamilton College, and by them to be permanently invested in such a way as may best promote the object of this society."

Inquiries of both Hamilton and Cornell elicited the information that neither school has any record of a scholarship fund in Williams' name. The assistant to the president of Hamilton College informed the writer that while no fund exists identified with Williams it is possible that these funds may have been received and incorporated into other receipts for use in general endowment.

It is regrettable that neither school has a scholarship fund in Jesse's name for poor but deserving youths who wish to further their education. As Willard had stated so eloquently, no finer memorial could have been established to Jesse's memory. Nothing would have pleased Jesse more.

Williams' cheese factory was given national publicity in a comprehensive article in Harper's New Monthly Magazine, Vol. 51, 1875, by Edward J. Wickson. As well as a detailed description of dairy farms, the manufacture of cheese, and the cheese markets, Wickson's article is profusely illustrated with several excellent wood cuts, the one of the original cheese factory being one of the best existing and t h a t most widely reprinted.

Not only was Jesse's contribution to the cheese industry not forgotten but the assistance of his loving partner and helpmate was also remembered. In reporting Amanda's death on May 15, 1892, the Rome Sentinel noted "...With Jesse Williams...originated the idea of associated dairying, so that he came to be called the father of the American cheese factory system. If her husband was the father, she was equally the mother of the system, for to her skill gathered from nearly 20 years experience in the management of their private dairy is to be accorded whatever of success attended the early growth of the system in popular favor. For several years rarely did a day's product of the original factory escape her diligent care."

9.

It is rather ironic that progress in the form of Williams' factory which had increased the income of dairymen of Oneida County and made Rome the cheese capital of the world should in turn be the cause of the decline of the industry in the county and the demise of Rome as a cheese producing center. At one time entire boat and train loads of cheese were sent daily to the New York, Philadelphia and

foreign markets from Rome. However with the growing need for fresh whole milk in the New York metropolitan area and the development of ice-cooled cars, to be followed by refrigerator cars, increasingly less cheese was manufactured in Oneida County and central New York.

Unfortunately nothing remains of the Williams factory today. Some twenty years after its organization the entire stock of the Rome Cheese Manufacturing Association was acquired by Dyer H. Crowell and H.L. Annis who proceeded to operate the factory privately. After the former's death, Mrs. Crowell and Annis, on January 14, 1909, conveyed the historic site to Edward Hurlbut who planned on using it for the manufacture of limburger cheese. After still further transfers of title much of the land went to the Rome Fish and Game Association for a fish hatchery which ultimately was acquired by the State Conservation Department in 1932.

Although Jesse's original factory has disappeared and the land has passed out of the hands of the Williams family, Jesse's original contribution to the cheese industry was not forgotten. On Sunday, November 8, 1936, the National Cheese Institute presented the city of Rome a memorial to Williams on the site of his factory just south of Williams Road where it runs into Fish Hatchery Road.

Mr. George L. Mooney of Chicago made the presentation and more than fifteen members of Jesse's family including his great-grandson, Chester A. Williams, were among the more than 2500 who braved rain and cold to witness the unvailing in a colorful ceremony.

The memorial consists of a five foot rough hewn granite stone bearing a 32 by 31 inch bronze tablet. At the top of the tablet is a picture in relief of the old factory beside a stream. The inscription beneath the picture reads:

1851-----1936

UPON THIS SPOT IN THE YEAR 1851

JESSE WILLIAMS

A DAIRY FARMER OF THIS COMMUNITY, SET UP THE FIRST CHEESE FACTORY IN AMERICA. THIS PIONEER STEP LED TO THE INAUGURATION OF THE MODERN CHEESE FACTORY SYSTEM IN THIS COUNTRY PREVIOUS TO THAT TIME, CHEESE IN AMERICA HAD BEEN PRODUCED ONLY AS A HOME FARM OPERATION JESSE WILLIAMS FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN DAIRYING, CONVERTED SWEET MILK FROM SURROUNDING DAIRIES INTO CHEESE AT A CENTRAL PLANT HE INVENTED CHEESE MAKING MACHINERY WHICH HE DID NOT PATENT BUT GAVE TO POSTERITY, AIDED IN THE ERECTION OF OTHER FACTORIES AND TRAINED NUMEROUS CHEESEMAKERS WHO CARRIED THE ARTS OF CHEESE*

MAKING THROUGHOUT AMERICA. HE ORGANIZED THE NEW YORK STATE CHEESE MANUFACTURING ASSOCIATION.

This Memorial Perpetuating the Name of Jesse Williams is Presented to the City of Rome, this year, 1936, By the National Cheese Institute.

In 1951 the city of Rome held a mammoth celebration in observing the centennial anniversary of Jesse's factory. On Saturday, June 2, cheese and dairy dignitaries from throughout the United States gathered in Rome to climax the week long event. Festivities started at 1.00 p.m. at the site of the original factory with Arthur W. Sigmund, president of the National Cheese Institute, rededicating the monument which the Institute had erected fifteen years before. Following the brief ceremony, the entire entourage moved to the Rome Free Academy Stadium where the Rome Theater Guild presented a short dramatization of Williams' founding of the factory. Ten descendants of Jesse's led by Chester A. Williams and Mrs. Frank Sitterly, his great great granddaughter, were introduced to those present.

That evening John H. Kraft, president of Kraft Foods Co., was the principal speaker at a reception and banquet at the Elks Club at which more than 200 persons attended. Mr. Kraft outlined the background of Williams' discovery and its future importance to the dairying industry, describing Jesse as a man "with enough 'git up and git' to keep on until he got to be just about the best cheesemaker in the country." Kraft added, "Thank God we of this industry can claim such a man as the founder of the factory system. For Jesse Williams established...the ideal which has made possible the amazing growth of that system...the ideal of service to man."

The growth of the American cheese industry has been phenomenal since Williams started his first factory in 1851. You'll recall that Jesse, using the milk of from 300 to 400 cows, produced about 100,000 pounds of cheese that first year. In 1969, the latest year for which complete statistics are available according to the Economic Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 12.7 million cows produced 116.3 billion pounds of milk and for the sixth consecutive year milk used for cheese production set a record high of 17.6 billion pounds. Cheese absorbed 30 percent of all milk used in manufactured dairy products and the per capita cheese consumption rose to 10.9 pounds.

Excluding full-skim American and cottage cheese, 997 factories produced 1,986 million pounds of cheese in 1969. Wisconsin, with 507 factories, produced 867 million pounds, 44 percent of the national output and, with New York, Minnesota, Iowa and Missouri, accounted for two-thirds of the total. New York produced 146 million pounds from 1,986 million pounds of whole milk in 66 factories.

B. N. Huntington Esq.

Bot. of J Williams

One chum 119^{lbs} 13½¢ \$15.06

Sent by Express to J. C. Sheldon Seneca

One chum 120^{lbs} 13½¢ \$16.20

Sent by Express to Geo. Sedgwick Syracuse

One chum 113^{lbs} 13½¢ \$15.25

Sent by Express to Hon. C. C. Stuart Kalamazoo Mich.

One chum 120^{lbs} 13½¢ \$16.20

Sent to Wm. W. Smith Prairie Creek, by Express
to Dubuque Iowa

One chum 115^{lbs} 13½¢ \$15.52

Sent by R.R. to Joseph Wright Waterloo

One chum 117^{lbs} - 13½¢ \$15.79

Sent by Express to H. B. Fargo Express Agent
Dubuque Iowa

Recd. payment \$95.02

Done Dec. 13, 1863

J. Williams

Photograph made from the original of a bill from Williams to Benjamin N. Huntington for cheeses shipped to various gentlemen in different parts of the country. Williams' signed receipt appears at the bottom, dated Dec. 13, 1863. (Courtesy Mrs. E. Frank Evans)

While he lived and since his death over one hundred years ago, Jesse Williams has received many justly deserved honors and acclaim. But John H. Kraft, writing editorially in the Producers Edition of the Kraftsman, house organ of the Kraft Foods Company, issue of May-June, 1951, perhaps has paid Williams his highest accolade:

"From Pioneers like Jesse Williams, who founded the factory system of processing dairy products in large volume, came the ideas and tools that have made America great.....Jesse Williams exemplified the spirit which has helped to make the dairy industry the largest agricultural industry in America.....Where would Jesse have been in his history-making development had he said "I can't do it that way because that isn't the way my father did it?" Then Mr. Kraft asks, "Where would our nation be had not pioneers such as Jesse dared to do things differently?"

Where indeed?

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As the title implies this is short account of the heroic Revolutionary War for that never surrendered. Built by the British in 1758, occupied by the Colonials in 1776, while under command of Col. Peter J. Gansevoort, Jr., in August, 1777, it withstood a 24 day siege by a British force commanded by Col. Barry St. Leger.

It was here that the Stars and Stripes were first flown before an enemy on August 3, 1777. Gansevoort's refusal to surrender the fort and St. Leger's subsequent withdrawal to Canada ultimately led to the defeat of the British at Saratoga the following October.

The National Park Service is now reconstructing Fort Stanwix on the original site which will be the center of a National Monument encompassing 18 acres in the heart of present day Rome, N.Y.

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