



Dairy Museum

When Gympie is mentioned historically, most people relate the area to gold-mining. However, after Nash's discovery in 1867 until the decline of mining in the late 1920's, other industries of great importance were being established. Just as mining had saved Queensland's economy in 1867, so the dairying and timber industries provided employment and stability, saving Gympie from becoming a run down or ghost town.

At first, dairying was a home- or cottage industry. Many settlers who took up land around the goldfield on small farms, kept a few milking cows for butter, milk and cream for their families, and sold the surplus. Migrant settlers from the British Isles and Europe brought their own butter-making equipment. In this exhibit you will see and handle many of the utensils used by our pioneer families. Cows were milked by hand in cow bails, and many of the animals wore a bell for they could be hard to find in the wooded country.

Milk was stored in wide shallow tin dishes within well-ventilated dairies, and the cream was skimmed off into churns using a perforated hand skimmer. Skimmed milk went to feed calves and pigs, providing a paying sideline, as well as meat, for the farmer himself. Cream was then stored in a cool place to be churned into butter. This was before the days of ice-chests or refrigeration and many farmers' wives and families had to rise early and churn in the cool air before dawn in the hot summers. There are quite a few varieties of churns on display, from the primitive splash type to glass churns. After the butter was washed and salted, it was pressed into moulds, tins or small barrels to be sold privately, or to stores and hotels.

In 1876, Yugo Dureitz, a Swedish migrant, brought the first Swedish separator to Gympie, and thus began a revolution in the industry. Cream was now separated by hand-operated separators, later machine operated, and as herds grew larger, milking machines supplanted hand milking. By mid 1890's another great change took place. Home production was slow and laborious, so a small co-operative factory was set up in 1897, but soon ran into financial difficulties and it was bought out by a Brisbane Valley firm, Silverwood. However, this firm, too, experienced financial difficulties.

In 1906 The Mayor of Gympie, Qld., Mr. G. Listen, called a meeting of farmers and citizens from Gympie and Widgee Shire to form a new co-operative. This organisation is still in existence, though butter is no longer manufactured.

Farmers quickly realised the value of this co-operative and a new industry began - cream carting. At first, the carriers used horse-drawn vehicles over shocking country roads; nevertheless, they proved a most important part of our economy delivering cream to the factory, then carrying goods to the farmers on return trips. With the growth of the motor industry the carters changed to motor transport. Subsidiary factories were set up at Kin Kin and Cooroy, then in 1835 the Gympie Co-operative claimed to be the largest, single unit in the world. You can read for yourselves the tremendous output of butter which constitutes a world record.

Dairy herds were upgraded to improve milk and cream production, and Gympie cattle and dairy products won many awards. Another change was pending, however, when the firm of Nestle's opened a milk-processing factory in Gympie. The days of separating on the farms, and the carting of cream by cream carriers were on the way out. After a time, many farmers chose to send their milk to Nestle's, who rented their giant milk tankers to the farms for the raw milk. This made the farmers' work lighter and, gradually, private cream carriers were redundant.

The Wide Bay Butter Factory received less and less cream, and by the 1970's butter production at Wide Bay factory had ceased and the factory turned to milk processing. You can see illustrations of one huge butter making equipment, and the men at work. Sadly, now, not a pound of butter is made at the factory. Many of the men who worked at Wide Bay Co-operative gave many years of service to the industry. Gympie still holds an honourable place in the dairy industry, but the swing is now to milk processing. Breeds of cattle have changed too, and the former cream-producing breeds are being replaced by heavy milk producers e.g. Friesians and Ayrshires. Huge tankers have replaced the old cream carriers and several of the valuable subsidiary industries have been abolished.