Town Milk [1]
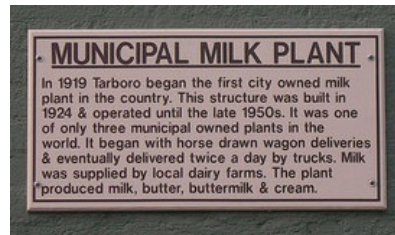
Town Milk

by Jaquelin Drane Nash, 2006

Municipal Milk Plant Marker Tarboro, North Carolina, 2010. Image courtesy of Flickr user Jimmy Emerson. [3]

The Tarboro Municipal Milk Plant [2] was established in 1918 in response to a severe outbreak of typhoid fever, dysentery, and colitis that claimed the lives of several Tarboro children and left many of all ages weak and ill. That year the town (population 6,400) had obtained its entire milk supply raw and untreated from surrounding farms. There were no large commercial dairies with refrigerated delivery anywhere nearby. Epidemics had been traced to untreated "farm milk" before, but the outbreak in 1918 was severe enough to stir the citizens to drastic action. An ordinance was passed by the town council prohibiting any

Municipal Milk Plant Tarboro, North Carolina Constructed in 1924 and operated until the 1950s. This was the first city owned milk plant in the USA, 2010. Image courtesy of Flickr user Jimmy Emerson. [4]

raw milk to be sold within the town limits. A small pasteurizing plant was set up in a section of the town water plant, and bottles and sterilizing equipment were purchased. A horse-drawn milk wagon and driver were soon delivering safe, pasteurized milk to the townspeople.

As a nonprofit venture, the new "town milk" plant was able to sell its product for a price lower than that charged for raw milk in neighboring communities. There was little or no bootlegging of unprocessed milk, and infant health in the community improved significantly. Soon a new building was erected and motorized distribution replaced the horse-drawn wagon.

At the time it was established, the venture was unique in the nation, and, as far as was known, in the world. Officials from other states and abroad came to Tarboro to investigate the methods and results of the town milk experiment. By 1938 there were similar plants in cities throughout the United States as well as in Wellington, New Zealand [5], and Rome, Italy [6].

Tarboro's townspeople were satisfied with their town milk for almost half a century, until wholesale pasteurization and distribution by large companies proved too competitive. In 1965 the plant closed its doors; according to government reports, it was again the only municipal milk plant in operation in the United States at that time.

Reference:

U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, *The Municipal Milk Distribution in Tarboro, N.C.* (1938).

Additional Resources:

Municipal milk distribution in Tarboro, North Carolina, Eastern North Carolina Digital Library, ECU: http://digital.lib.ecu.edu/historyfiction/item.aspx?id=nim [7]

Municipal milk distribution in Tarboro, North Carolina, ECU, Digital Collections:http://digital.lib.ecu.edu/17050 [8]

Image Credit:

Municipal Milk Plant Marker Tarboro, North Carolina, 2010. Image courtesy of Flickr user Jimmy Emerson. Available from https://www.flickr.com/photos/auvet/5164602730/ [3] (accessed July 25, 2012).

Municipal Milk Plant Tarboro, North Carolina Constructed in 1924 and operated until the 1950s. This was the first city owned milk plant in the USA, 2010. Image courtesy of Flickr user Jimmy Emerson. Available from https://www.flickr.com/photos/auvet/5164602732/ [4]

(accessed July 25, 2012).

Subjects:
Great Depression (1929-1941) [9]
N.C. Industrial Revolution (1900-1929) [10]
Public service [11]
Authors:
Nash, Jaquelin Drane [12]
Origin - location:
Tarboro [13]
From:
Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.[14]

1 January 2006 | Nash, Jaquelin Drane

Source URL:https://www.ncpedia.org/town-milk

Links
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