

RAY SIEGEL - A Retired Milkman Tells All

I was born on Whitnall Ave. right outside of Cudahy. My dad, at that time, had a milk route in Cudahy and from Whitnall Ave. moved into Cudahy itself and there had a house and a shed on Squire Ave. and a barn with 4 or 5 horses that he used on his milk route and while in Cudahy started a route in Bay View so he had 2 routes going. He had that for several years and then he sold the Bay View route and stayed with the one in Cudahy and about 1910 he sold that route and had a little farm on Penn. Ave. just North of Whitnall.

I was a regular milk route salesman and delivered milk to the customers about 1924. I put in 41 years in the milk delivery business. I was 25 years old when I took this job after working at the Federal Rubber Co. at the time and after a couple of years I hadn't been feeling well not used to being inside and a relative of mine was working for the dairy and he talked me into coming and working along in the dairy and that happened to be a small dairy by the name of Louis Sievert. They had about 25 routes going in the city and after 2 years then he combined with another dairy, The Faulkey Dairy, and from there on, in about 3 years, they went in with the Gridley-Borden Co. that had been in Wauwatosa.

All I had to do was learn the route, what streets and follow the bulk of the house numbers. We had horses then. We had to harness the horse and put it in front of the wagon. The Sievert Dairy was on Rogers St. near Burnham and from there I had to go to West Allis to deliver the route. It was a dairy plant and he did his own bottling and had a separate barn for his horses and wagons. I had a Model T Ford. I used to get to work, about a mile and a half and gas was much cheaper then. I had to have my wagon all loaded by 12:30 A.M. daily and on the route by 1:00 A.M. and finish about 6:00 A.M.. We had a daily salary and after so many dollars of sales above that, we got a commission. At that time, we had very little vacation and no paid holidays -- we did have hospitalization.

We had a few customers that wanted a bill sent out from the office and the rest the drivers did all the collections. We had, besides regular milk, buttermilk, chocolate milk, coffee cream, whipping cream and cottage cheese. After we delivered during the night or early morning hours, we had to go back and collect and then we solicited new customers at houses we knew had no milkman delivery.

This was done between 8:00 and 12:00 A.M. Customers had standing orders or used milk cards and some left notes in the neck of the empty bottles in a hallway or a milk chute or whatever. We always had to make out an order every day to be sure we had extras on the route. If we ran out we had to call the dairy and someone would bring what you needed. My route was from Muskego (North of Mitchell and Lapham) to National Ave. I had about 180 customers and always did my own route every day. Later on, when the owner sold out to Gridley, things changed. I got a different route. A relief man would take your route if you were sick so when your day came to be off and someone else would be sick you had to take his route.

The milk was delivered on the back or front porch or in the milk chute. The customers knew about when you were coming so the milk was never out very long on the porch. We carried the quarts or pint bottles in metal baskets to two or three houses at a time. The horse was told to giddy-up and he would follow down the street without the use of a rein. To stop the horse you said Ho!! When we were through delivering, we had a feed bag on the horse and we went to a restaurant for breakfast. We used the heavy weight so the horse would stay. We made out a list of what collections we had to make and went back on the route between 8:00 and noon.

The horses were not special -- wherever the owners bought the horses they were trained. I had one horse that looked just like Roy Rogers' horse - beautiful - very skittish though. I had to put the weight down - in Fall the crackling of the dry leaves would scare him and I had to have the weight down and the brake on so he wouldn't walk away. I had many different horses over the years. One beautiful horse died on me from indigestion - it happened over night and when I came to work they told me what happened. We had canvas blankets to put over the horse in bad weather. We had no tools of any kind. We worked in any weather. Sometimes in the heavy snow the horse-shoes would get clogged up and cause the horse to slip on the icy roads - then we had a tool to clean the shoes and the steel rims of the wagon wheels, many times, before getting to the route. The rims were iron until World War II. After that, they were made of rubber and the horses then had rubber shoes. They had a blacksmith at the stable who did all the shoeing - just next to the office building.

We had no provision in the summer for ice in the early days to keep the milk cold. Later they did provide a place for ice on the wagon. We got to know most of the customers if we had the route for any length of time. We would occasionally get a piece of fresh bread or pie when collecting. It was a long day from early morning till the next noon.

During the early morning hours sometimes things would happen. Once I walked along the side of a house with a long porch and I saw a man laying on the porch drunk - couldn't move - I just set the milk near the door and beat it. Another time, I came back from delivering to a couple customers and found a young woman was in my wagon. I don't know how she got in over that high step and I had an awful job getting her out. She did not want to come out and I had to pull her out and got her on the sidewalk and started her walking down the street. Another time I heard a voice - it was pitch dark - all the lights were out in that area and I had a lantern - and I heard this voice coming down the street but I couldn't see anything then but I stood by my wagon. Then pretty soon there was this woman coming down the street going like this - "can I help it, can I help it," while she was throwing and waiving her arms in the air. When she got closer so I could see her in the lantern light, I asked her "What's the matter - what can't you help?" and she said "I left my husband in the tavern and I can't do nothing about it" and said "the milkman will help me", and so I left.

There were a couple of women we had during the war that delivered milk. I had the route in West Allis and they closed the West Rogers St. and moved way out on 76th - North of North Ave. We had to load up there and go to West Allis to our routes. I had to drive from Bay View to Wauwatosa - now I had a '31 Chevrolet in the early 30's and it took me an hour to get to the route with the horse where I started deliveries. One night I was coming down Wauwatosa Ave. and I got even with the County buildings when a Model A Ford came towards me coming sideways back and forth and I moved as far as I could but he hit my horse head-on and the horse slid right over the hood of the car - broke the car windshield with his head and then slid off to the side. There were two people - a man and lady in the front seat and there was a couple in the rumble seat. They had just come from State Fair Park - drunk. The first thing the guy said to me was "What are you doing on the wrong side of the road?" I got the harness loose from the horse which was laying on the concrete and did get him up. Some neighbors called the police and they got there and took the two couples to the police station. The police checked me over - I had a scratch on my forehead - so they took me to the County Hospital even though I said I was O.K. I waited a half hour before anyone came to look at me and all they could find was a little scratch so they took me back to my wagon-- the company brought out another ^{HORSE} and took mine back to the barn.

I asked for a transfer because I didn't care to drive to work that far - I was given an apartment house route - Wis. Ave. and Kilbourn --22nd to 17th. After some time I got a route in Town of Lake - Howard Ave. to the lake - 4th St. to Iowa and Layton. I finally got a reliefman job for one year. Then they made me a route foreman - a job consisting of time in the office to keep track of books and records and help train drivers on their routes at a small salary increase. I retired in 1966 at age 65 but the boss asked why I wanted to retire. He said I was too active yet - but I said I worked long enough - 41 years. Social Security was very low and pensions were just being started - first men to retire got 50¢ per year of service - when I retired it wasn't very much more.

Some other dairies were Sealtest, Gehl, Cedarberg and Blochowiak. Golden Guernsey came into West Allis in 1955 with a union started which bargained for better wages, etc. but with company resistance, so the men pulled a strike at Borden's, the largest dairy in the city at that time. So that's how Golden Guernsey came into Milwaukee. Town of Lake didn't belong to the city of Milwaukee at that time and didn't have to sell pasteurized milk. They could sell unpasteurized milk in Town of Lake and Cedarburg Dairy came in and was the first one to bottle milk in gallons - glass bottles and then built stores, one on Howell Ave. and Howard and sold raw milk cheaper in gallon bottles and we had a fight on our hands to keep our customers. When this section was annexed to Milwaukee, they had to pasteurize their milk. We had customers next door to other dairies. They also had horse drawn wagons and we crossed paths often. Just before the war the dairies started to motorize - they sold the horses and wagons to people out of town who used the wagons for play houses for the children. Then when the war started they had to buy back the horses and wagons -- all the city routes had to be horse drawn. Routes in Cudahy and South Milwaukee and Hales corners kept the trucks. After the war, we went back to trucks. After we had the trucks awhile, they wanted us to carry more things like ice cream, eggs, etc. so they put in small freezers to keep everything cool. The dairies kept using glass in gallons and 1/2 gallons for many years and finally waxed cardboard containers came into use.

Once my horse, which was skittish, on a winter day we started delivering at 6:00. I was on 76th St. near National when a city truck with chains on its tires came rattling by and my horse took off all the way back to the barn by himself and the wagon. A fellow saw me standing with my carrier and offered me a lift to go after the horse. We chased

after the horse by car but couldn't get ahead of him until quite a ways. Finally the horse slowed down but the wagon was a mess of bottles with both doors open. We picked up the bottles that were not broken and the city cleaned up the rest.

Once a year the city would get all the horses used to pull wagons and other vehicles on 6th & Wis. Then they marched down with their drivers and wagons to Haymarket Square for a review. Everybody loved my horse - golden mane and a prancer - a beautiful horse. The barn man went with me because we had to crossover the 6th St. viaduct and we didn't know that my horse would do, so he thought he'd better go along with me. So after everyone was lined up at Haymarket Square - maybe they were going to give out prizes or something - I didn't know. The barn man was holding the horse by the bridle next to the wagon and I was inside. Then all of a sudden my horse give a jerk and breaks loose from the barn man's hand and takes off. We went out of the Haymarket on to State St. There were cops on the corner directing traffic and a cop put up his hands to stop but there was no way he could stop the horse. All I did was pull on the right line to make him go ~~right~~^{RIGHT} and went down the street as far as Michigan and up Michigan and that horse never stopped galloping. So all I did was try to pull him so he would go the right way home. I got up to 6th St. and went across that viaduct in one solid gallop all the way to Rogers St. barn. I had an empty wagon - just a milk case to sit on. That was some ride!

I put in 41 years in the dairy business. I'm living alone since my wife died after a stroke nine years ago. I have a tenant living upstairs. I have lived here since 1929. Now, after 92 years, I'm a member of the Bay View Historical Society.

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