

From cows to consumers: Daily milk delivery in bottles

By Bill Baab



A bit more than 100 years ago, Augustans began enjoying daily delivery of milk in sanitized bottles, a far cry from how it was made available earlier.

Back in the 19th century, milk was sold from delivery wagons out of open containers and poured into anything the public could provide. It was not sanitary. So during the first quarter of the 20th century, health officials knew things had to get better and it did with the development of the milk bottle and the dairy industry.

That the delivery service existed was due to the national social experiment called Prohibition. Georgia went dry in 1906, became drier in 1908 and by 1919 the whole country had “dried out.”

The Georgia-Carolina Dairy Products was organized in 1915 by members of the Sancken family and others and an editorial in The Augusta Chronicle had this to say: “John Sancken had a vision. He knew the passing of the bone-dry (liquor) law in Georgia would close up the saloons and that ice cream had great possibilities. Practically the only milk produced in this vicinity at that time came from small herds owned by dairymen living close to the city and who supplied milk in bottles door-to-door.”

And so the collecting of early milk bottles joined the antique bottle collecting ranks. One of the first organizations to promote it was M.O.O. (Milk Bottles Only Organization) whose leader (the Head Holstein) was the late Fred Rawlinson. The writer has a signed copy of Fred’s 1970 book, “Make Mine Milk.” The soft-bound book has been out of print, but copies can still be located at online sources.

The current organization is the National Association of Milk Bottle Collectors (NAMBC) which produces an informative

newsletter called “The Milk Route.”

Meanwhile, among early 20th century dairies in Augusta were Walton’s Dairy, Turpin Hill Dairy, El Dorado Dairy and Haskell’s Dairy, the latter in North Augusta, South Carolina across the Savannah River.

As the century progressed, more than 30 dairies existed in Aiken County, South Carolina and Richmond and Columbia counties in Georgia and all sold their milks in bottles. Some of the containers were embossed (El Dorado’s bottles had an outline of a cow), while others were identified by applied color labels which were developed in the 1930s.

The Georgia-Carolina Dairy Products Company evolved into Sancken’s Dairy and its bottles – quarts, pints, half-pints and even a fruit drink – are all collectible today. During WW II, the dairy joined others across the country by bottling its milks in patriotic bottles. While some dairies used war slogans (Keep ‘Em Flying!), Sancken’s bottles were red, white and blue – the “white” being the milk.

Prohibition even forced the Augusta Brewing Company to change its name to the Augusta Ice & Beverage Company and sell chocolate milk and other non-alcoholic products to stay solvent. The Imperial Chocolate Milk was sold in round, half-pint embossed bottles (no larger sizes are known to exist) and those little bottles are highly collectible today.

Many of the local milks will be on display during the Federation of Historical Bottle Collectors 50th National Show and Expo Aug. 1-3 in Augusta.

