

*Garvin*

## History of Garvin's Jersey Farms, Inc.

Marshall County, West Virginia

Written by Calvin C. Garvin & submitted to the  
Marshall County WVGenWeb.

The history of Garvin's Dairy dates back to the year 1889. It was started by Daniel M. Garvin and his wife Margaret "Ret" Kemple Garvin. At that time they had their own herd of Holstein cows. Their first location was near the Washington Farms on the G.C. & P. Road just east of Greggsville, Ohio County, WV. Delivery was made from house to house using 10 gallon cans. The housewife would come out for her milk which would be measured into a pitcher or other container brought out by her.



Margaret "Ret" Kemple Garvin



Garvin Homestead, 121 Garvin's Lane

In 1891 they moved the dairy what was then known as the Reyman's Farm, to an area now called Chapel Hill. In 1900 the dairy was moved to its final location, which was then known as "Ret Garvin's Homestead", the property having been in the family for over 100 years. Before this time, milk was delivered by a horse and wagon. There were no bottles in those days, which made it difficult to handle. The sale price of a quart of milk was approximately 4 cents. In 1898 the first bottles were introduced into the dairy. Some of these bottles still exist and are in the possession of Garvin family members. The bottle had a tin cap attached to the neck. The sanitary facilities of those days were very crude by modern standards, as the culture of the day thought little of sanitation. The bottles were hand washed in the kitchen sink and filled by hand on the kitchen table. Their refrigeration was a spring house just outside the kitchen door.

In 1913 John Lemuel Garvin, Sr., the 2<sup>nd</sup> of 5 children, took over the business at the young age of 23. He constructed a small tile 10' X 10' building near what was then the family homestead. At this time, the equipment was a crude wooden tank that held approximately fifty gallons of milk. The coddler was what they called an Aerator that

had to be hand operated by filling with cold water for each batch of milk and still used a hand operated bottle filler.

In 1924 a family relative, Frank Talbert, came into the organization. The business was formed into a partnership called Garvin's and Talbert. They progressed from the horse and wagon type of delivery to a Model T Panel Truck. Business increased to the point where they had a 2 route dairy. As business progressed, more trucks were added and a larger and more modern building was necessary. In 1927, construction of the much larger plant was begun, and the dairy evolved into what was then known as the Garvin's Dairy Plant. The plant was remodeled several times. Ultimately, a new much bigger plant was built next to the older one, and the building that was started in 1924 became the ice cream operations location.



Garvin's Dairy Bottle

J.L. Garvin, Sr.

Paul, Don, Jack, and Wayne Garvin with "Capt. Video"  
Approximate mid 1950s advertising Henny Penny Egg Nog

In 1934, the four sons of John L. Garvin, Sr., J.L. "Jack" Jr., Don, H. Paul, Sr., and Wayne Garvin, took over running the dairy. Jack stayed behind to keep running the dairy while his 3 younger brothers, Don, H. Paul, and Wayne, went off to war during WWII immediately after Pearl Harbor was attacked. By this time, 1941, there were a total of 13 routes.

In 1942, the dairy's barn burnt down. The decision was made to sell off all the Jersey Cows, and begin buying milk from the surrounding farmers in the area. After the war, the brothers, Don, Paul, and Wayne, returned from their military service and took part in the active management and growth of Garvin's Dairy.

In 1946, Garvin's Dairy merged with Marshall Dairy, in Moundsville, West Virginia. That operation was across from what was then the State of West Virginia's Maximum Security Penitentiary and the Hopewell/Adena Indian Burial Mound. Later, they also bought Purity Dairy of Moundsville, which took in a lot of territory with routes south of Moundsville. At this point, the business became known as Garvin's Jersey Farms, Inc., Isabel Marsh Garvin, a relative, took care of the accounting at this time. Plant production was managed by Ben H. Flowers, who held that position until the late 1970s.

In 1951, having already completed homogenization and pasteurization milk processing, the dairy installed its first Pure-Pak machine, which used a paper milk container bottler, a rather new concept in the dairy business at that time. It wasn't too long after that, they added several more milk bottling machines just to keep up with the

business which had grown rather large by that time. That same year they bought their first refrigerated truck. Up until this point, the drivers, after loading milk into their trucks, would use shovels of crushed ice, from the "ice house" to chill the trucks and their loads of processed/packaged milk and dairy products. By 1958, the dairy's truck fleet was 100% refrigerated.

By 1953, the plant was equipped with the latest modern equipment available for dairies at that time. With this, and the dairy's modern laboratory, it made the dairy one of the finest and most modern dairies in the Ohio Valley. This was also the year that Garvin's Dairy expanded to the Clarksburg, Fairmont, and Morgantown area, with a distribution location in Fairmont, WV. The routes numbered in the mid 30's, these now being mostly wholesale in nature, with deliveries to supermarkets, stores and restaurants. Home delivery continued to be very popular at this time too.

By 1955, Garvin's Jersey Farms, Inc., was credited with another first for dairies in the tri-state area. They were the first to use stainless steel farm bulk cooling tanks for further control of the quality of the raw milk that was received from the farm producers. By December 1957, Garvin's had completed transition from 10 gallon milk cans to bulk tanker trucks and at that time was the only dairy in the area to receive 100% of its raw milk in this manner.

In 1962, a newer, much larger plant was built and new dairy processing equipment was brought in on train flat cars. One of the pieces of equipment was a 10,000 gallon refrigerated milk holding tank, making it the largest in the state at that time. At the time the new plant was built, it was the only producing dairy in the United States that had an electronically filtered air system, which was made in Canada. The steel, piping, and duct work was all made by local steel manufacturing companies. Construction was done by local contractors. It included the largest "Cold Room" for storage for its day which could hold all the milk produced in the area, as well as loading docks with powered forklifts for loading wholesale trucks and tractor trailers.

Garvin's Dairy evolved into one of the largest full process producing dairies in the tri-state area. It made not only milk, but cottage cheese, sour cream, ice cream, butter, buttermilk, and a full line of other dairy products. Its area of distribution ran from north of East Liverpool, Ohio; south to near Charleston, WV; east into Pittsburgh, PA and Oakland, MD; and west into Columbus, OH. Garvin's Dairy had bought Deed's Dairy of Columbus, OH, as a distribution center. Truck and tractor trailer loads of milk were going out from Garvin's Lane, 24 hours a day, 6 days a week. At its height, the dairy employed 300+ people with three major distribution points: Wheeling, WV, Fairmont, WV, and Lancaster/Columbus, OH.

In June 1984, it was decided to close Garvin's Dairy after 95 years of operation. The cost of operations had become very cost prohibitive because of governmental regulations in conjunction to being located far out in the country, and the cost of relocating because of low profit margins, took that option out of the question. It became obvious that they could no longer be competitive and stay in business. This was during a time in U.S. economic history when inflation was running rampant and the price of gasoline was going way up. Garvin's Dairy had become so large that it took 3 other major dairies to buy the business, thus closing down a Marshall County landmark business/operation.

Note from H. Paul Garvin: He left out the purchase of Wiseman Dairy in Crooksville, Ohio in 1971, and Greiner's Dairy of Zanesville, Ohio at a later date. Other than that, this is remarkably well written and basically accurate.