

Chapter 7a

City Dairy: Alamogordo's Largest and Most Successful

© Bill Lockhart 2011

As Alamogordo's largest and most successful dairy, City Dairy deserves its own chapter. Extending from 1925 to 1977, the firm was in business for 52 years – longer than any other dairy in Otero County. For most of that period, it was owned by a single family – the McMurrays. An interview with Willie McMurry, the youngest of the four brothers, disclosed details of the business that would have been impossible to discover through documentary sources.

History

The Early Dairy

Although the exact date is currently unknown, City Dairy probably opened for business in 1925.¹ The dairy's first newspaper ad appeared on June 26 of that year. The ad claimed that City Dairy "Supplies your needs in Pure, Fresh Jersey Milk" and offered prices: "Fresh buttermilk every day with the butter in it at 10 c per quart[,] Whipping Cream at 50 c per pint [and] Coffee Cream 20 c for one-half pint." The ad also promised "two deliveries daily" (*Alamogordo Advertiser* June 26, 1930). There had been an early City Dairy in Alamogordo in 1905 (operated by E.N. Fisher) and another that was advertised as the "Old City Dairy" in 1922, but both had ceased operation prior to the opening of the final City Dairy in Alamogordo.

The final City Dairy was originally owned by Dr. Eber Devello McKinley. McKinley, a graduate from Central College of Physicians and Surgeons (Indianapolis, Illinois) in 1904, moved to Otero County for his health two years later. He practiced medicine in Cloudcroft for a few months prior to his relocation to Alamogordo, where he was active in community service as well as his medical practice until 1930. A prominent player in local politics, McKinley served as Mayor, County Commissioner, and County Health Officer as well as helping as a physician for the U.S. Army at Ft. Bliss and Camp Cody (Deming) during World War I (NMSBD 1930; Tularosa Basin Historical Society 1981:287; *Alamogordo Advertiser* May 19, 1932).

¹ An ad in the *Alamogordo News* on November 9, 1958, stated that the City Dairy was "organized in 1925."

Herb H. Riffe

Herb H. Riffe² operated City Dairy for McKinley by at least April 2, 1931, and, after McKinley’s death on May 17, 1932, ran the company for McKinley’s heirs. Riffe began a series of ads called the “Adventures of Snooky.” Snooky was a little boy who touted the praises of City Dairy amidst cartoon capers and witty sayings (Figure 7-1). The series was somewhat crude by today’s standards but featured a new ad each week – a radical departure from earlier dairy advertising in Alamogordo. One ad featured Snooky in a suit, addressing an audience. He queried “What comes first, gentlemen? I ask you that! Health, of course! Now, what one food is best for people who are tall, short, wide or narrow, young or old, well or sick? CITY DAIRY’S milk! Sure!” (*Alamogordo Advertiser* June 11, 1931). Snooky ads continued until the end of 1931.

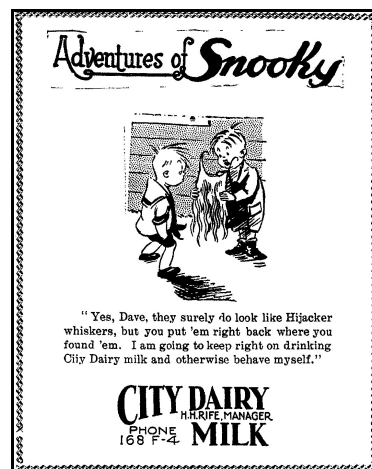


Figure 7-1 – Snooky Ad (*Alamogordo Advertiser* 1930)

Grade . . . A New Prices	
City Dairy Products	
Grade A Whole Milk,	9c Quart
Grade A Whipping Cream,	75c "
Grade A Whipping Cream,	40c Pint
Grade A Whipping Cream,	25c Half Pt.
Grade A Coffee Cream,	60c Quart
Grade A Coffee Cream,	30c Pint
Grade A Coffee Cream,	20c Half Pt.
Grade A Buttermilk,	7c Quart
Grade A Separated Milk,	5c "
Grade A Fresh Butter,	30c Pound

Highest Quality Lowest Prices

CITY DAIRY
H.H. RIFE, MANAGER
PHONE 168 F-4
MILK

Figure 7-2 – City Dairy ad with prices (*Alamogordo Advertiser* 11/8/1934)

In 1932, City Dairy’s ads included a complete price list, offering “Grade A Whole Milk, 9 c Quart[;] Grade A Whipping Cream, 75 c Quart . . . 40 c Pint . . . 25 c Half Pt.[;] Grade A Coffee Cream 60 c Quart . . . 30 c Pint . . . 20 c Half Pt.[;] Grade A Buttermilk 7 c Quart[;] Grade A Separated Milk 5 c [Quart][;] Grade A Fresh Butter 30 c Pound” (*Alamogordo Advertiser* May 19, 1932).³ Prices remained stable throughout 1933 but went up in 1934 (Figure 7-2). “A GRADE MILK” was now 40¢ a gallon, 12¢ a quart, and 7¢ a pint. Buttermilk was 30¢ a gallon, 10¢ a quart. “CREAM, WHIPPING” rose to \$1.00 a quart, 50¢ a pint, and 30¢ a half-pint, while “CREAM, COFFEE” went to 80¢ a quart, 40¢ a pint, and 25¢ a half-pint (*Alamogordo Advertiser* November 8, 1934).

² The Snooky ads (see text) consistently spelled the name as Rife – although all later references spelled it as Riffe,.

³ Sometime between May 1932 and November 1934, the *Alamogordo Adviser* finally included the cents symbol (¢) in its typeset inventory. Note the use of “c” for “¢” in the earlier ad.

An interesting part of the ad was that the “H.H. Rife, Manager” of earlier offerings was obliterated from the later ads, although slight traces of Rife’s name from the old ad can be easily discerned. Despite that, New Mexico State Business Directories (1936, 1938, and 1940) listed “H.H. Riffle” [*sic*] as proprietor of City Dairy. In the 1946 edition, the directory correctly spelled his name “H.H. Riffe” – although he was no longer with the dairy at that time. Another price raise occurred in 1936:

A GRADE MILK - 50c per gallon, 15c per quart, 8c per pint
BUTTERMILK - 12c per quart
CREAM, WHIPPING - \$1.25 per quart, 65c per pint, 35c per half pint
CREAM[,] COFFEE - 80c per quart, 40c per pint, 25c per half pint
BUTTER - 40c per pound (*Alamogordo Advertiser* April 18, 1935)

In April, City Dairy ads ceased, although the dairy continued to prosper. Finally, due to the pressures caused by World War II, Riffe told the estate he could no longer run the dairy, so McKinley’s heirs sold the entire operation to the McMurry brothers (McMurry Interview 1998).

The McMurry Family

F.E. McMurry was born in Fannin County, Texas, and migrated to Otero County in August 1934. McMurry and his wife, Virginia, had lived in Parmer County (Texas) until the “dust bowl” conditions of the early 1930s forced the move to a more hospitable area. The couple had nine children, seven of whom joined their parents in Alamogordo. Virginia died on March 13, 1941, and McMurry remarried to Kathryn McKinley later that year.⁴ The couple produced four more children. McMurry, himself, died in December 1975 (*Tularosa Basin Historical Society* 1981, 288; McMurry interview).

F.E. McMurry and his two oldest sons, George E. and William H. “Mac,” planned to buy the dairy with 50% ownership for the father and the other 50% divided between the sons. George had worked with milk cows and farming in Texas and had learned a great deal about the dairy cattle industry. After some debate and with their father’s approval, the brothers decided to

⁴ Kathryn was the daughter of Dr. Eber McKinley, the owner of City Dairy; the marriage was two years prior to the date when the McMurry brothers bought business.

purchase the entire business themselves. So, Mac quit his job at Holloman Air Force Base, and, on August 1, 1943, the McMurry brothers became half owners of City Dairy, buying the other half later that month (*Alamogordo News* 11/9/1958; Tularosa Basin Historical Society 1981:288).

Dick Riffe (one of Herb Riffe's sons) remained at the dairy for a while to help during the transition. He then joined his brother in forming Riffe's Dairy (see section on Later Dairies). Of the younger two McMurry sons, Kenneth had joined the U.S. Navy, and W.J. "Willie" (Figure 7-3) worked part-time after school and on week-ends. Kenneth separated from the Navy about 1945 and worked for the Ford garage in Alamogordo. Willie attended New Mexico State Teachers College until the family ran short of money. He then worked for the U.S. Forest Service and continued to help with the dairy until 1953 when Kenneth and he bought into the business as full partners. Even though none of the McMurrys except George had any previous dairy experience, the senior McMurry had been a farmer, so his sons and he were inured to hard work and familiar with milking cows (Tularosa Basin Historical Society 1981:288; McMurry interview).⁵



Figure 7-3 – Willie McMurry in 1998

The business was always family run; the McMurrys hired few hands and frequently worked sixteen hours a day. If anyone became sick or injured, one of the brothers was forced to cover two jobs until the other returned. If machinery broke down, everyone pitched in to make repairs and then had to work most of the night to catch up. Because there was no one to take up the slack, work commenced the next morning as usual (McMurry Interview 1998).

During the World War II era, the McMurrys milked their herd of 50-60 cattle by hand, but, after the war, they began using milking machines that milked more than one cow at a time. The milk was channeled into buckets and poured into large dairy cans which were then lifted by hand and emptied into the cooling system to remove the body heat of the cattle. In 1960, the company built a milking parlor where milk was piped directly from cows into a stainless steel

⁵ Riffe was still listed as manager in the 1946 New Mexico State Business Directory, although that probably only means that the directory missed the change. The 1950 edition listed "William H. & George E. McMuren [*sic*]" as proprietors



Figure 7-4 – The abandoned milk shed in 1998

tank and from there into a tank truck for delivery (Figures 7-4 & 7-5). Eventually they were able to milk at the rate of 50 cows per hour. Milking began at 1:00AM and



Figure 7-5 – Remnants of the milking apparatus in 1998

continued until 7:00AM. The cycle began again at 1:00PM (McMurry Interview 1998).

After World War II

During the period after World War II, business prospered. Holloman Air Force Base was expanding, and market demands, including those for milk, increased dramatically. In 1950, City Dairy sold its herd. The McMurrys had previously bought milk from Tularosa farmers who delivered it in ten-gallon cans. With the sale of the herd, the brothers relied entirely on local producers and started making and selling ice cream (Figure 7-6). At one time, they bought from thirteen other local outlets including Trammel Dairy in Tularosa (McMurry Interview 1998).

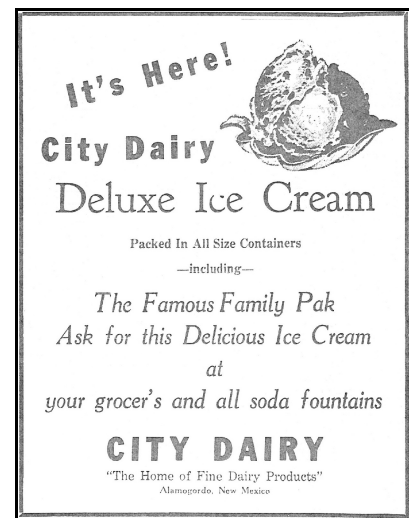


Figure 7-6 – City Dairy Ice Cream ad (*Alamogordo News* 5/19/1951)

One dairy farmer at Ancho⁶ originally shipped his milk to the McMurrys on the daily passenger train and later removed the back seat of an automobile to haul milk cans. He eventually switched to trucking as storage and shipping methods improved. Merchants in Lincoln County had been seeking improved sources for dairy service, and, in 1950, City Dairy began delivery to Lincoln County towns six days a week in refrigerator trucks (McMurry Interview 1998 – Figure 7-7).

⁶ This was probably the Mount Gold Dairy. Although I have not seen bottles marked with the dairy's name, I found two caps, one for Homogenized Milk and the other for Half and Half. Both are marked with the dairy's name and ANCHO, N. MEXICO.



Figure 7-7 – City Dairy trucks, probably ca. 1950 – note that larger trucks are refrigerated

Although City Dairy originally only bottled raw milk, about 1948, the McMurrys began to pasteurize their milk in 100-gallon and later 300-gallon vats. A year later (1949), they replaced the vat-type pasteurization with an improved method – short-time, high temperature pasteurization (Figure 7-8). They also added an important new customer about that time (McMurry Interview 1998).

In 1948, the Board of Directors of the New Mexico School for the Visually Handicapped approved stretching the city limits to engulf the school. This only created one major problem: milk. Since its inception, the school had managed its own dairy herd to provide milk for its students, but the operation of a dairy within the city limits became impractical, especially since it was more economical to buy milk from local dairies than to produce it on the school grounds. Superintendent Neal F. Quimby recommended that the board authorize the sale of the school’s dairy cows and the purchase of milk products from City Dairy. The Board agreed (McDonald 2002:21, 47).

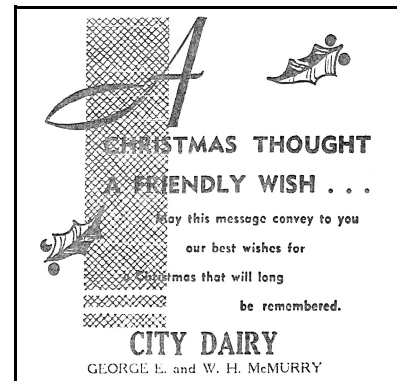


Figure 7-8 – 1949 Christmas ad (*Alamogordo News* 12/22/1949)

City Dairy originally operated a small cream separator but switched to a clarifying / standardizing machine around 1951 or 1952. The machine broke down globules of fat so that they could not reform and standardized the fat content. It was basically a larger, more efficient and complex cream separator. It used stainless steel disks spinning at 8,000 revolutions per minute to separate cream which rose to the top and removed impurities which were forced to the sides of the appliance by centrifugal action. The New Mexico minimum requirement was 3.25%

butter fat; City Dairy usually maintained its milk at 3.4-3.5%. The brothers marketed some cream locally but sold the excess to Price's Creamery in El Paso to use in producing ice cream (McMurry Interview 1998).

City Dairy took milk samples once a month and sent them to the state laboratory to be checked for bacteria, percent of butter fat, and milk solids. City Dairy, like its counterparts throughout the state, had to meet minimum standard requirements in all three areas. Fortunately, the McMurrys' milk always passed the tests (McMurry Interview 1998).

In the days before the refrigerator, ice boxes were the norm, and dairies delivered milk twice daily. After refrigeration became common, delivery was reduced to once per day. During World War II, when the McMurrys entered the dairy business, a single delivery per day had become the standard, and quart bottles were the most popular size (McMurry Interview 1998).

The Younger Brothers Join

On March 24, 1953, the four McMurry brothers, George E., William H., Paul K., and "W.J. McMurry also known as Willie McMurry," formally signed the partnership agreement that included the two younger brothers. The older brothers agreed to "convey to the second parties a one-fifth interest each⁷ in and to all assets and liabilities of the business known as 'City Dairy.'" The dairy was located on 120 acres (Figure 7-9), which the brothers purchased for

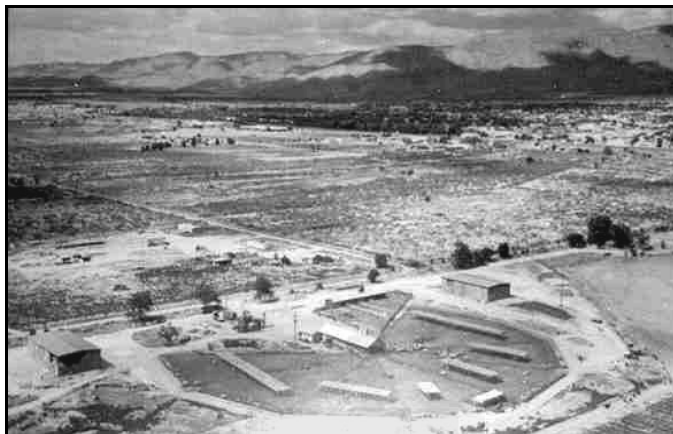


Figure 7-9 – Aerial photo of the dairy property (Courtesy of Willie McMurry)

\$20,000. Keeping it all in the family, Kathryn McMurry was the notary public who notarized the agreement (Partnership Agreement – author's collection).

⁷ Maybe my math is rusty, but, if each brother received one-fifth, and there are four brothers, who owned the other fifth? The father?

A month later, on April 24, 1953, the McMurrys revised the property deeds to reflect the joint ownership that included the younger brothers (Figures 7-10 & 7-11). Like the partnership agreement, each received one-fifth interest in the real estate. Once again, the notary was Kathryn McMurry (Warrenty Deed, author's collection).

The brothers added refrigerated trucks in 1953 and delivered frozen foods to Ruidoso. Eventually, home delivery was again reduced to three days a week. One route would be delivered Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, the other, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. By this time the half-gallon size had become the most popular. City Dairy continued making home deliveries until the late 1960s (Figures 7-12 & 7-13), when supermarket shopping and improved preservation methods eliminated the need for residential service (McMurry Interview 1998).

In 1954, City Dairy joined a popular trend. A sales ploy at that time was to offer S&H Green Stamps. Sperry & Hutchinson began their stamp program in 1896, although the actual use of Green Stamps was most popular from the 1930s to the 1980s. Merchants, such as City Dairy, purchased the stamps from Sperry & Hutchinson and gave them to customers as a type of retail loyalty program. Each merchant determined the number of stamps it would give out per amount of purchase, and customers filled stamp books that contained 24 pages. Each stamp was assigned a point value, and customers could redeem the books for merchandise offered in the S&H catalogs. City Dairy offered the stamps on "home delivery purchases" (Figure 7-14), but I have not determined how long the firm remained in the Green Stamp program (*Alamogordo News* September 21, 1954).

66656

WARRANTY DEED
STATUTORY FORM
 (CHAPTER 205, SESSION LAWS OF 1947)

✓ George E. McMurry et al

TO

Paul K. McMurry and W. J. McMurry, also known as Willie McMurry

STATE OF NEW MEXICO, }
 County of Otero } ss.

I hereby certify that this instrument was filed for record on the 24 day of April, A. D. 1953 at 10:00 o'clock A. M., and duly recorded in Book 169 Page 148 of Records of Deeds of said county.

LUCILLE ALEXANDER County Clerk.
 By *Kathryn McMurry* Deputy.

Fees, \$

Figure 7-10 – Cover of Warrenty Deed for City Dairy

WARRANTY DEED STATUTORY FORM (CHAPTER 203, SESSION LAWS OF 1947)

George E. McMurry and Eileen McMurry, his wife, and William H. McMurry and Ada Belle McMurry, his wife,
for consideration paid, grant to Paul K. McMurry and W. J. McMurry, also known as Willie McMurry,

the following described real estate in Otero County, New Mexico:

To each an undivided one-fifth interest in and to SE $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$, SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$, SE $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 25, Township 16 South, Range 9 East, NMPM



with warranty covenants.

WITNESS: Our hand s and seal s this 17 day of March 19 53 .
William H. McMurry (SEAL) George E. McMurry (SEAL)
Ada Belle McMurry (SEAL) Eileen McMurry (SEAL)

STATE OF NEW MEXICO, }
County of Otero } ss.

On this 17 day of March, 19 53, before me personally appeared George E. McMurry and Eileen McMurry, his wife, and William H. McMurry and Ada Belle McMurry, his wife,
to me known to be the person s described in and who executed the foregoing instrument, and acknowledged that they executed the same as their free act and deed.

Witness my hand and seal on this the day and year last above written.
My Commission expires 4-13-56 Kathryn McMurry Notary Public

STATE OF NEW MEXICO, }
County of } ss.

On this day of , 19 , before me personally appeared

Figure 7-11 – Warranty Deed for City Dairy

**MILK
ICE
CREAM
DAIRY
PRODUCTS
At Their
BEST
from**

**CITY
DAIRY**

**At Your
DOOR
or
At Your
STORE
DIAL
HE 7-4200
FOR
HOME
DELIVERY
SERVICE
ALAMOGORDO
HOLLOMAN
TULAROSA
THE BEST
of
BOTTLED
MILK
Home
Owned
and
Operated
By
McMURRY
BROS.**

Figure 7-12 – Ad including home delivery area (Alamogordo City Directory 1957)



Figure 7-13 – Delivery truck, probably 1950s (Courtesy of the Tularosa Basin Historical Society)

Announcing ...

WE GIVE *S. & H.* GREEN STAMPS

ON HOME DELIVERY PURCHASES
JUST CALL 23

CITY DAIRY

Your Home-Owned Dairy, Producing Local Dairy Products. Located West of Town.

**FOR PROMPT DELIVERY
OF FRESH, PURE**

MILK, CREAM, CHEESE, BUTTERMILK, EGGS.
Ask Your Driver About Our New Green Spot Orange Drink, Non-Carbonated, No Preservative.

ALSO AT YOUR FOOD STORE

Figure 7-14 – Ad for S&H Green Stamps (Alamogordo News 9/21/1954)



Figure 7-15 – Ad Plate for 1958 Anniversary spread (Courtesy of Ryal McMurry)

YOUR HOME-OWNED AND OPERATED CITY DAIRY NEIGHBORS ON THEIR JOBS SERVING DAIRY QUALITY PRODUCTS—CLOSER TO PRODUCER AND CONSUMER! WE INVITE YOU TO KNOW THE FOLKS THAT SERVE YOU BETTER . . .

1925

33rd ANNIVERSARY YEAR
City Dairy
ORGANIZED in 1925

MEET and KNOW THE FOLKS SERVING YOU UNDER OUR TRADE MARK of QUALITY DAIRY PRODUCTS
"HOME FRESH" NEARER PRODUCTION and CONSUMER.

McMurray Brothers

1958

Mac McMURRAY

Willie McMURRAY

George McMURRAY

Henry McMURRAY

Presenting the 33rd Year History of Your City Dairy

The City Dairy is the oldest producer and distributor of dairy products in the Tularosa Basin, having been organized in 1925, named the City Dairy at that time, and is the Basin's only home-owned and home-operated dairy products distributor.

The McMurray Brothers entered the scene of City Dairy history when Mac and George McMurray purchased half interest in the firm on Aug. 1, 1943. They later purchased the remainder of the firm's interest during that same month, and since that time it has been owned and operated by the McMurray family. Knny and Willie McMurray entered the partnership in 1950 and all are now active in the operation of the big firm.

The City Dairy daily serves Alamogordo, Tularosa, Holloman and La Luz with home delivery, and their wholesale routes extend beyond Alamogordo and Tularosa to Carrizozo, Ruidoso and Mesquero.

City Dairy handles all products of the dairy line, including Ice Cream, Cottage Cheese, Fresh Eggs, Butter, Rocket-Freeze, Sherbet, Chocolate Milk and Deluxe Ice Cream. Their growth has been constant, and today, they operate a big fleet of trucks, both in purchase and distribution of their high quality products. The McMurray Brothers feel that their operation, being home-owned and home-operated, leaves them much closer to the producer and the consumer, and they can therefore keep themselves much better informed and abreast of the consumer's demand.

My Job — Partner, With the City Dairy since Aug. 1, 1943.



Born April 10, 1917 at Elgin, Texas. Married Ada Belle on May 26, 1940. Children are Bonnie and Ruby and May Belle. Member of the Presbyterian Church, Young League and the Chapter of Commerce.

My Job — Partner, With the City Dairy since Aug. 1, 1943.



Born July 4, 1915 at Elgin, Texas. Married Ellen on Dec. 19, 1936. Children are Charles, Joe and Mike. Member of the Methodist Church, Chamber of Commerce, Marine Hotel and the Farm Bureau.

My Job — Bookkeeper with the City Dairy since May 10, 1934.



Born Oct. 7 at Crossroads, N. M. Children are Ellen and Mertha. Member of Grace Methodist Church, M.M.S., 1939. Hobbies: city sitting with grandchildren. Children, Joe and Mike McMurray.

My Job — Partner, With the City Dairy since Jan. 1, 1948.



Born Dec. 25, 1928 at Bliss, Texas. Married Ruby on May 13, 1951. Children are Terrence, Ted, J., Terrell, Ezelle and Pat. Member of the Presbyterian Church, Chapter of Commerce.

My Job — Partner, With the City Dairy since Feb. 1, 1939.



Born Nov. 30, 1922 at Elgin, Texas. Married Louise on Dec. 1, 1945. Children are Carl, Paula, Billy and Melburn. Member of the Presbyterian Church and the Chapter of Commerce.

My Job — Retail Route Man with the City Dairy since June 1, 1957.



Born March 30 at Hawley, Texas. Married Marie on May 18, 1947. Children are Arnie, Mae, Ethel, Regina. Member of the Baptist Church.

SERVING OUR NEIGHBORS

"HOME FRESH" Closer to Producer and Consumer

DAIRY PRODUCTS including

ICE CREAM FRESH EGGS
COTTAGE CHEESE BUTTER
ROCKET-FREEZE SHERBET
CHOCOLATE MILK DELUXE ICE CREAM

P. O. Box 1090 Dial HE 7-4200

My Job — Retail Route Salesman with the City Dairy since March 1, 1956.



Born Feb. 3, 1920 at Athens, Texas. Married Mary on Dec. 29, 1944. Children are Virginia and Martin. Member of B.P.O.C. Club.

My Job — Retail Route Salesman with the City Dairy since Jan. 20, 1957.



Born Aug. 14, 1931 at Dighton, Mich. Married Jerry on Nov. 5, 1955. Children are Lawrence Jay, Marjory Ann.

My Job — Salesman with the City Dairy since Feb. 1, 1957.



Born April 17, 1930 at Tularosa, N. M. Married Molly on Feb. 8, 1954. Children: Elizabeth, Eddie and Blaine. Member of the Catholic Church. Chapter of Commerce; G.I. Forum.

My Job — Retail Freshman with the City Dairy since May 1, 1958.



Born Jan. 23, 1929 at Huntington, Ark. Married Paula on July 26, 1947. Children are Jack, Judy, Mary, Shirley, George, and Anita. Member of the First Baptist Church.

My Job — Salesman with the City Dairy since Sept. 15, 1956.



Born Dec. 10, 1924 at Mesquite, Ark. Married Dorothy on Dec. 2, 1946. Children are Kathy, Virginia, Nancy and James. Member of the County of Christ, Alamogordo Volunteer Fire Dept.

My Job — Salesman with the City Dairy since Oct. 31, 1956.



Born June 9, 1927 at Honeygrove, Texas. Married Lavonia on June 1950. Children are Lillian, Reva and James.

My Job — Salesman with the City Dairy since Oct. 23, 1955.



Born Nov. 31, 1912 at Springville, Ark. Married Mary on Oct. 4, 1934. Children are Lawrence Jr., Mary Elan.

Figure 7-16 – 33rd Anniversary ad (Alamogordo News 11/9/1958)

The McMurrys celebrated the 33rd Anniversary of City Dairy (tracing its roots to the first McKinley operation in 1925) on November 9, 1958, with a full-page newspaper advertisement. The ad plate for the top drawings is still in the possession of Ryal McMurry (Figure 7-15). The ad included line drawings of the faces of the four McMurry brothers and of most (possibly all) of the dairy staff and route men (Figure 7-16). The ad included information about the business, brief blurbs on each person, and a list of products (*Alamogordo News* 11/9/1958).

The Rise of the Supermarkets

The rise of the supermarket produced external problems for local dairies. Shortly after World War II, City Dairy had relatively little non-local competition. With sales divided between home delivery and small family grocery stores with limited storage space, a local base of operations was necessary. The increased capacity of the supermarket allowed a dairy to introduce large quantities of milk at a time, and improved processing and storage life allowed deliveries to become less frequent. Outside competition in the form of the giant dairies entered the picture (McMurry Interview 1998 – also see the last few entries in Chapter 6).

To survive the heavy outside competition, the McMurrys began dealing with external sources. A farmer’s cooperative was started in Portales, New Mexico, and City Dairy became the distributor in Alamogordo for its Grand Champion Jersey Milk (Figure 7-17). Clardy’s Dairy in Roswell shipped paper cartons of milk to Alamogordo to be sold under City Dairy’s brand name. In a deal with Farmer’s Dairy in El Paso, the McMurrys distributed bulk milk and canned milk in Alamogordo (McMurry Interview 1998).

Price’s Dairy was the first to arrive in Alamogordo from El Paso and was later followed by Farmers Dairy and Wholesome Dairy (trucking their products from El Paso) and The Borden Co. (which opened a distribution point in Alamogordo). Creamland shipped in ice cream from Albuquerque. Competition was intense. During the 1960s, a milk price war broke out in Alamogordo. The large companies began cutting prices,



Figure 7-17 – Champion Milk ad (*Alamogordo News* 2-9-1950)

and everyone was forced to radically reduce rates or face greatly diminished sales. At one point, the retail price of milk dropped to 38¢ per half-gallon, about the amount it cost to produce it. The McMurrys struggled just to stay in business (McMurry Interview 1998).

In 1960 or 1961, City Dairy changed to Breed Milk, the use of only one breed of cattle for milking stock, although they continued to sell regular milk as well. They chose Jersey cattle because they felt they needed an edge to compete with larger dairies (Figure 7-18). Price's Dairy (El Paso) already had Golden Guernsey milk, and it was considered bad taste to have two of the same breed milk types in a single delivery area. Jersey cattle had been used in the area in the past and were an ideal choice (McMurry Interview 1998).

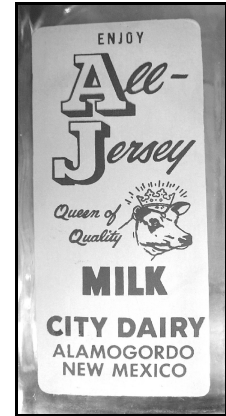


Figure 7-18 – Pyroglazed front of the half-gallon bottle with All-Jersey milk



Figure 7-19 – City Dairy brand card (Courtesy of Ryal McMurry)

Eventually, City Dairy only bought milk from local producers who would run Jersey cows, and some of their old producers sought other markets. Others made the switch to Jerseys and continued to be a part of the operation. The brothers bought a new herd that consisted entirely of Jerseys in 1963 (Figure 7-19). Most of their producers sold their remaining cattle to the McMurrys who only used their own herd for milking stock after that. Finally the herd swelled to 500 head, allowing the brothers to milk 320 cows per day while the others were in their recovery period (McMurry Interview 1998).

Despite the outside competition, business was better than ever during the 1970s (Figure 7-20). By 1976, however, George and Mac were in their 60s, and the long, 16-hour days were beginning to take their toll. In addition, because of the nature of milking hours, it was getting more difficult to find help outside the family, and the McMurry brothers decided to offer the dairy for sale in the latter part of the year. Even though several potential buyers were interested, none of them could raise the large down-payment (the price of the entire herd) required by the McMurrys (Tularosa Basin Historical Society 1981:288).



Figure 7-20 – 1972 ad (Alamogordo City Directory 1972)

The brothers finally shut down operations in July, 1977, and began selling off the stock and machinery (Figures 7-21 & 7-22).⁸ Because the herd was composed of good producers, the cattle sold rapidly, and the McMurrays marketed the raw milk to dairies in El Paso until the last cow was sold. The brothers sold their paper carton machine to Price's Dairy in El Paso and the remaining machinery to various New Mexico dairies and a few in Mexico. City Dairy was Alamogordo's last locally owned dairy. An era had come to an end (Tularosa Basin Historical Society 1981:288).



Figure 7-21 – Former City Dairy office area



Figure 7-22 – Hay or storage shed, still used in 2011

⁸ The office, milk shed, and two hay and machinery storage sheds remain visible near the intersection of First St. and the Bypass in 2011 – although the office buildings and milk shed are rapidly deteriorating.

Sources

Primary Sources

Newspapers

Alamogordo Advertiser

Alamogordo News

[NMSBD] New Mexico State Business Directories - 1930-1946

McMurry, W. J. "Willie," interview, March 20, 27, 1998.

Secondary Sources

McDonald, Barbara

2002 *Weavers of a Tapestry of Time: 1903 to 2003: One Hundred Years at the New Mexico School for the Visually Handicapped*. Privately published, Alamogordo.

Tularosa Basin Historical Society

1981 *Otero County Pioneer Family Histories, Vol. I*. Tularosa Basin Historical Society, Alamogordo.

