

# Tillamook Cheddar Cheese

*By Wesley Andrews*

This undated photograph shows various sizes of Tillamook cheddar cheese on display. It was taken by Portland photographer Wesley Andrews, perhaps in the 1940s.

Henry Wilson is generally credited with bringing the first dairy cows into the Tillamook Valley in the early 1850s. Early settlers considered the Tillamook Valley prime grazing ground for cattle, as the climate was mild and the grass green year-round. The Tillamook Valley was isolated from the main settlements in the Willamette Valley, however, making it difficult to transport dairy products to market. As a result, early dairy farmers focused on making butter, which lasted longer than fresh milk. Settlers in the Tillamook Valley also experimented with cheese making, but it was not until 1889 that Merriman Folen and Bob Richards made the first attempt at commercial cheese production. The result was inedible. But they continued experimenting and within a few years they had developed a small but successful cheese-making operation.

Cheese-making was a minor part of Tillamook County's dairy industry until 1894, when cheesemakers Harry Ogden and T.S. Townsend induced Canadian immigrant Peter McIntosh to settle in Tillamook County. McIntosh had learned the art of cheese-making in his home province of Ontario. Most dairy farmers in Tillamook County focused on butter production, but McIntosh convinced them that the isolation of the valley made cheese a more viable product, as it withstood transportation delays better than butter. McIntosh told reporter Dean Collins in the early 1930s: "You could store your cheese and wait for the boat without any danger of losing out through your product spoiling, as butter might spoil—for remember there weren't the cold storage facilities in those days that there are now."

McIntosh's cheese-making methods proved to be the catalyst for Tillamook's cheese industry. By the turn of the century there were over three dozen cheese factories operating in Tillamook County. In 1909 ten of the factories joined together in a co-operative association in order to establish a standard based on McIntosh's method of producing cheddar cheese. By 1915 the association had grown to twenty-five factories that agreed to consolidate buying and selling under a single authority. The improvement of roads during this period further facilitated consolidation.

In 1918 the Tillamook County Creamery Association began advertising nationally, which led to a notable expansion of demand for their product. By the early 1930s the association was selling more than 7 million pounds of their award-winning cheese throughout the western United States and Alaska.

**Further Reading:** Collins, Dean. *The Cheddar Box in Two Volumes: Volume 1, Cheese Cheddar*. Portland, Oreg., 1933.

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