



Felician Village

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The History of Cheese

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As a Wisconsinite, how many of us know the story of how cheese came to be? We are celebrating National Cheese Day June 4th and would like to share a little history with you. Unfortunately, there is no evidence indicating when cheese-making started. It pre-dates recorded history! It is believed to have originated in Europe, Central Asia, the Middle East, or the Sahara. According to Pliny the Elder, a Roman philosopher, cheese started in ancient Rome.

Fancy foreign cheeses were brought to Rome for the upper class. These cheeses date back to 5,500 BC and are said to be from Kujawy, Poland. Cheese-making is said to have begun as part of a preservation process in which curdled milk was pressed and salted. It is the only form in which milk can be kept in a hot climate – or a climate without modern day refrigeration.

Most of today's cheeses are recorded from the middle ages. Cheddar being the oldest around 1500CE. Parmesan was founded in 1597 and Gouda in 1697. And the first factory for industrial cheese-making opened in Switzerland in 1815.

But credit for the modern day success of cheese goes to the United States. Jesse Williams, a dairy farmer from New York, began making cheese in an assembly line fashion using milk from local farms in 1851. This gave way to mass production of cheese, making it affordable for everyone. Using a ceramic cheese dish or cheese bell was the most common way to prolong the life of the cheese until 1913 when the home refrigerator was introduced.

Today we have 89 cheese factories in Wisconsin, producing 35% of all the cheese made in the United States. Many of these are small family owned factories that specialize in many different varieties.