

H.H. Roe & Company
Manufacturers of Cheese Vats
Madison, Ohio

Some time in 1954 I received a letter from Walter Jack, as follows; "Do you know anything about the Roe Cheese Vat, made at Madison Ohio, it was used nation wide."

For more than a month I have questioned everyone I could think of, received the same answer, "Never heard of it."

I called Mr. A.J. Bollard who is 91 years old, he told me where it was located, and advised me to see Dr. J.V. and Mrs. Winans, who are 89 and 90 years old. Some of the men who worked in the Roe factory roomed and boarded with Mrs. Mertie Winans' aunt.

In 1857 Henry Roe made a contract with Madison Woolen Mills for a factory site in Madison Village. The property was deeded to H.H. Roe and Co. September 4th 1865. Roe sold the plant to Mr. Teachout in 1870. This proves that Henry Roe made cheese vats for the farmers before cheese factories were built.

(Writers note) It is nearly 10 years since the Roe factory was built, and this history was picked up an item at a time and pieced together. I need the Village Plat Book to make a sketch of the lot and buildings, but cannot find them.

The Roe Vat was a leader among Farmers and Factories. The three-story brick building built and occupied by H.H. Roe and Co. still stands and is in good condition, it is known as #18 Eagle St. The Roe Co. occupied the 1st and 2nd stories, the 3rd story by a man who made window blinds for dwelling houses; his name I have not learned.

The Roe family lived in the first house north of their factory. Henry Roe had two sons, Herbert and Henry Jr. who were associated in business with their father. When they opened the factory and when they moved to Chicago, I have not learned. The business was probably at its height in Madison in 1880.

The standard vat for large factories had a capacity of 5000 lbs. of milk. This vat was about 10' long, 4' wide, and 44" high, the milk (or top vat) was made of tin. The tin was fastened, held in place and supported by a board about 6" wide, the board on the outside of the tin. The tin was kept well painted on the outside with Venetian Red and linseed oil. The lower, or water vat was made of wood, and was painted on the inside with Venetian Red and linseed oil. There was an opening between the upper and lower vats of about 3" in which steam pipe was laid.

Later the water vat was lined with galvanized iron. The galvanizing was done in the Roe factory by a Mr. Williams in the following manner; the black iron sheet was cleaned by a bath of diluted muriatic acid, the sheet was heated and plunged into a bath of melted zinc and sal ammoniac, this solution was stirred until the sheet became well coated with zinc. The sheet was then allowed to cool; it was then rubbed with corn meal to absorb the acid.

The number of men employed and the selling price of the vats I have not learned. Dr. Winans, a man who was born and raised in Chicago near the Kraft Cheese Company's plant, and I met, and decided that the H.H. Roe property in Chicago is now occupied by the Kraft Cheese Co.

I next contacted Norm Wood, who has been in Madison all his life, and old enough to vote. He gave me the name of Wm. Hammond's daughter, Mr. Hammond was employed by the Roe Co. and went to Chicago with them. Following is a list of questions answered by Aimee Estelle Hammond Waite, of Geneva Ohio.

Q. Can you describe the Farmer cheese vat, how was the water in the water vat heated?

A. I think along the line you described, Farmer's cheese vats were heated by an iron heater built at the Genung Foundry, Middle Ridge, in Madison, assembled by my father Wm. Hammond. The cheese vats were assembled and set up by him through the country, he also went with D. Herbert Roe to Chicago. Herbert Roe took the factory after his father Henry J. died. As I remember Henry J. never worked in the factory, he was not well, and stumbled in walking.

Q. In what year did H.H. Roe and Co. commence making cheese vats?

A. I think Roe's always made cheese vats, made tin ware, furnished lumber from farm finished in planing mill attached to factory.

Q. How many people did they employ?

A. Thirty or more, too young to remember while playing in the shop.

Q. Can you name any of the people employed by them?

A. Wm. Hammond, Milton Frisbie, Daniel Roe, brother of H.H. Roe, Geo. Martin, Emory Blair, John Blair, Mr. Newcomb, Mr. Sprague and son George.

Q. How many vats did they make per year?

A. Cannot tell how many, must have been plenty. Also had material for making cheese.

Q. They evidently left Madison in 1870?

A. I am uncertain when D.H. Roe went to Chicago. I was born in 1864 – had finished School, later went to Art school in Cleveland, oil painting one year, later mechanical drawing. Sent drawing to father in Chicago.

Q. When was the gristmill built on back end of Roe lot? Did Teachout build and operate the gristmill?

A. I am thinking the gristmill was nearly as old as the factory. Do not remember Teachout building and running gristmill.

Aimee Estelle Hammond Waite
Born in Madison, Ohio 3/16/84
As of Dec. 31, 1955 living at 166 Eagle St., Geneva, Ohio.

Alvan James Waite
Born 1852, Waite Hill, Willoughby, Ohio
Died May 16, 1932

On February 10th, 1954, I picked up the following: H.H. Roe and Co. only sold a part of the factory site to Mr. Teachout in 1870, they sold the east end of the lot to Mr. Teachout, who built a stone building N.E. of the brick building, in this building Mr. Teachout installed a grist mill. This proves that H.H. Roe and Co. did not leave Madison in 1870.