

Shoenberg Farm: Tepper History¹

The story of the Teppers of Shoenberg Farm began with the family of Masha (Emma 1862-1958) and Yitzchak (Isaac 1860-1955) Tepper who lived in eastern Poland, in a town called Czerhonovska near Warsaw.² Their son, Jacob J. Tepper (1886-1955), was the first to



Mary Tepper

immigrate to the United States, arriving in 1903. According to family history³ Jake fled Poland when the area was invaded by the Russian Army. In New York, Tepper, who desired nothing more to be a farmer and own land, worked odd jobs and studied agriculture at Cornell University. In July 1908 the Jewish Farmer, Agriculture, and Industrial Aid Society annual published one of Tepper's articles on farming techniques. With the assistance of the Jewish Relief Society, Tepper relocated in 1905 to Denver to satisfy his dream of buying a farm. Tepper's first farm was located on West Colfax Avenue across from the Jewish Consumptive Relief Society.



Jacob Tepper

Jake married Mary Dolitzky and they had four children, Edward, Helen, Samuel, and Mildred, within seven years. Jake dedicated long strenuous hours getting his dairy farm established while Mary worked extremely hard caring for the children and performing physically demanding farm chores such as hand-scrubbing the cloth used to strain milk. Eventually the hard labor affected her health and she left Jake and the children. Jake sold the farm in 1920 in order to provide a cash divorce settlement to her.⁴

The Teppers Move to Shoenberg Farm

Jake worked for another dairy for a year until he acquired Shoenberg Farm from National Jewish Hospital (NJH) in 1921. NJH sold the farm because the costs of operating the farm were prohibitive, in part due to the distance of the farm from NJH's campus near West Colfax Avenue and Colorado Boulevard in Denver. Jake and the four children⁵ moved into the superintendent's house and the dairyman now learned how to care for a chicken farm as well. With the purchase of Shoenberg Farm, he became the owner of 1,900



chickens. He decided to keep them a year to see if it could be made profitable. Always up for a challenge, Tepper quickly educated himself on the fine art of raising poultry and electrified the hen houses. Jake discovered that by raising hens under artificial lights, they could be tricked into continuous egg-laying by regulating the length of their "day," thereby overcoming the challenge of feeding hundreds of chickens during the winter when they stop laying due to short daylight.⁶ He also equipped the henhouses with rheostats, a series of resistance coils which drop the voltage, so that the lights dimmed gradually in simulations of sunset.⁷ With the addition of light in the houses, eggs that were once seasonal production became a year-round operation with hens laying 1200 dozen per day in 1946.⁸

The shrewd businessman expanded the operations so that not only was it able to meet the dairy and poultry needs of NJH, but he was able to sell surplus wholesale to larger institutions in the Denver area. Shoenberg dairy and poultry products were delivered to restaurants, hotels, hospitals, and eventually supplied eggs and dairy products to Fitzsimmons Army Hospital and the U.S. Army during World War II and the Korean War.



Tepper Children (from Left), Helen, Ed, Millie and Sam

Originally, the Tepper business was run out of their house. A room at the back of the house became the office. The full basement became a candling operation. The kitchen and rear porch were converted into a farm kitchen and dining hall for the farm hands. Tepper hired a cook. Everyone pitched in. The children worked the farm and drove routes delivering milk and eggs. Jacob constructed more and more structures on

the property as his land holdings expanded, which eventually reached approximately 767

acres. Every phase of the business was overseen by Jacob who set high expectations and standards for himself as well as his family and employees. By 1949 Jacob Tepper's Shoenberg Farm was reportedly the largest dairy and poultry operation west of the Mississippi River.

At the same time that Jake transitioned to the Shoenberg Farm, the rest of his family immigrated to the Denver area from Poland. Jake's dad, Yitzchak, worked for A. D. Radinsky and Sons. Due to a machinery accident, Zaide (Grandpa) Tepper lost several fingers and was unable to continue with heavy physical work. He had been a scholar of Jewish studies and he became even more devoted to this pursuit after his disability. Most of the family then relocated to St. Louis, Missouri.

Dolly Madison Ice Cream Stores

When Jacob's son, Edward, took over operations, he continued his father's business plan and added a new project in 1941: Dolly Madison Ice Cream Stores. Ed Tepper eventually had 19 stores throughout the Denver metro area, which sold many flavors of ice cream, as well as eggs and other dairy products. Dolly Madison operated as both a neighborhood grocery stop as well as a soda fountain for milk shakes, ice cream cones and other treats.



After sixty years in business, the Dolly Madison stores closed in 2001 to the sorrow of its devoted customers.⁹

End of an Era

By the time Jacob died in 1955, his son Edward, now college-educated, was running the family business and moving into the modern era of wholesale dairies. No longer were the Holsteins raised on the farm, but tankers delivered milk to the newly constructed

dairy processing plant. Milk came from Utah, Nebraska, Kansas, Wyoming, and Colorado. After college, Edward's son, Jerry Tepper, joined the business with his father and continued its operation until August of 2000.

In an industry that started with the small farmer with his herd of dairy cows on a thirty to sixty acre farm, dairy farms and dairy production soon divided into the specialized businesses of supplier, processor and buyer. In 1956, there were approximately 170 dairies in Colorado with about sixty in the Denver metropolitan area. In 2005 Jerry Tepper reported that there were three large corporations who processed milk products with milk tankers arriving daily from throughout the western states. Throughout the ninety-four year history of the Shoenberg Farm, it has been a recognized landmark in northern Jefferson County and Westminster. The core of the complex is now a vacant sentinel of the history of dairy farming in northern Jefferson County.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all research was completed by historian Dawn Bunyak, on behalf of Shoenberg Farm owner Jerry Tepper (2005).

² Tepper History as prepared by Erv Shulkin (5/7/01), sent by email dated 22 Oct 2003 to Deb Tepper.

³ Memoirs of Mildred Pilot Tepper, dated August 1998 (cassette tape provided by Jerry J. Tepper).

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Jake raised the children and never remarried. In Millie Tepper's memoirs, she said that the stigma of not having a mother was greater than the distinction of being the only Jewish child in the Harris School at West 72nd Avenue and Lowell Boulevard. *Id.*

⁶ B. Caldwell, "The Egg and Mr. Tepper," *Rocky Mountain News*, p. 25 (Sept 8, 1946).

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

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Ice cream lovers in the Denver area are mourning the closing of six of the eight remaining Dolly Madison ice cream stores. The Denver Post reported on February 24 that the 60-year-old chain at one point had 19 stores, but that competition from grocers and chain ice cream shops squeezed the company financially, forcing the closings. The Post notes that the stores, decorated with wood paneling, were "a throwback to a time when soda fountains were community gathering places and a cone cost a nickel."

The decision to close the stores came after the brands patriarch, Ed Tepper, died last week at age 89. The store in the East 48th Avenue Dolly Madison plant in Denver will remain open. So, too, will one other store, on West 38th Avenue, at least temporarily. Fans of the stores, old and young alike, have been flocking in to say good-bye to the stores, as well as to take advantage of their going-out-of-business 2-for-the-price-of-one sales.

The stores, renowned for their featured ice cream flavors like butter brickle, rum raisin, and tin roof sundae, still were selling milk and eggs along with the ice cream, just as they had since the 1930s. Ken Simon, one of the store owners, told The Post, "You look at this store and it's still 1950. It's a fun business. I'm just sorry to see it go."

Denver's landmark Dolly Madison stores close. AllBusiness.com, March 20, 2001.