

# RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

Ramsey County Historical Society "History Close to Home"



Horse-and-Wagon Dairyman  
Henry Schroeder's Dairy  
And His 'Safe for Baby Milk'

Volume 20  
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# Horse-and-Wagon Dairyman Henry Schroeder's Dairy And His 'Safe for Baby Milk'

By Cathy Dalglish

For almost a century, the Schroeder family, like many another American family whose roots are firmly embedded in the 19th century immigrant experience, has handed down from one generation to the next a story that has become a part of their own family folklore.

It begins like this, in 1875. Henry Schroeder, who would eventually found the Schroeder Milk Company, was walking along the banks of the Mississippi River. Penniless, he was heading north on foot from Iowa. He was 21 years old and he had just had his second bad break since leaving his home and his family in Germany.

He was a short, stocky man with a narrow face and a bushy mustache. Most likely he was wearing a wide-brimmed hat, or crushing it in his strong hands. He was very much alone. He had left his past behind him — Europe, Bismarck and his wars and his growing German empire, even his father's contracting and carpentry business.

Months earlier Henry Schroeder had left Iowa with nothing but a few dollars and a red handkerchief. He had spent everything on a journey by train — and probably by stagecoach — to Seattle because he thought he could find work or some good farm land there. He found neither. That was his first piece of bad luck. Again he scraped together fare and headed back east, stopping once more in Iowa where he finally found work with a railroad that contracted with him to split ties.

In two or three months Henry had cut enough to fulfill the contract, but by the time he came out of the woods with the ties the railroad had gone bankrupt, and Henry was never paid. That was his second bit of bad luck.

Now he was following the Mississippi toward Minnesota. As he walked along he looked out over the

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water and saw a black man in a little boat rowing upstream. Henry hailed him; the man pulled over and took Henry on board. The man had a side of bacon, enough for the two of them for a few days, and he shared it. No one knows why he stopped to pick up a strange white man who spoke German instead of English. No one knows who he was, where he was going, or if he made it. He might have been one of thousands of blacks who in those difficult years were fleeing Reconstruction troubles in the South. Today the Schroeder family knows only that he and Henry rowed together to St. Paul and there they parted company.

Henry found a few part-time jobs and lived in a boarding house. Then he bought some land out on Rice Street north of St. Paul, paid for it before he saw it, and that was his third bit of bad luck. The land was a swamp. But the young man who was having such difficulty trying to find a little farm had good luck with the people who would be his new neighbors. With a horsedrawn skip they cleaned up the cattails and filled in the swamp.

BEFORE LONG Henry's younger brother, Herman, came over from Germany to join him. The two men built a house, bought a cow, and launched what would become the Schroeder Milk Company, Incorporated.

This year, 1984, marks the 100th anniversary of Henry's humble, rather shaky start. Today the company has \$20 million in sales a year, part of it from 750,000 gallons of milk a month, part of it from eggs and cottage cheese, orange juice and ice cream, and part of it from quick-stop convenience stores. All this has grown from a company that began with Henry and Herman milking one cow to put milk on their own table, then buying a few more cows and selling their extra milk to their neighbors.

Henry Schroeder and his dairy business represent an important and colorful segment of America's agricultural heritage. Farms like that of the Schroeder brothers surrounded cities throughout the country during the years after the Civil War, and until as recently as the 1930s. Today historians studying the urbanization of America call these farms "urban fringe



farms." They served as the "supply farms" that produced food for dwellers in the nearby cities.

The once-rural areas of Ramsey County — the farmland that lay, for the most part, north and east of St. Paul — at one time were thick with such farms. They represented two types of farming, the growing of fruits and vegetables (truck or market garden farms) or dairying operations that produced milk and butter for city tables.

Heman Gibbs, a distant neighbor and a contemporary of Henry Schroeder, grew vegetables on his farm in northwestern Ramsey County. Henry Schroeder operated a dairy. Both produced the perishables that required speedy distribution to nearby markets in those years before convenient refrigeration and rapid transportation.

THESE FARMERS and their farms form a unique chapter in agricultural history, as Dr. Russell Menard, professor of history at the University of Minnesota, has observed. In an agricultural research project conducted by the Ramsey County Historical Society and supported by the National Endowment for the

*Henry Schroeder poses proudly, about 1915, with some of his workmen and the first automatic milkers he bought to modernize his operation. He's the man in the middle, wearing the wide-brimmed hat. The boy with the dog is his son, Henry (Doc) Schroeder. Others, left to right, are (unknown), John Chapman, John Tschida, Mike Tschida, another Mike Tschida, Henry Schroeder, Sr., John Mollner, Sr., Oliver Hampshire, "Doc" and his dog, John Mollner, Jr., and (unknown).*

Humanities, Menard examined the agricultural censuses for Ramsey County between the 1850s and 1890s.

Ramsey County's farmers, he discovered, were sharply different from their counterparts farther out in the state, chiefly because of the proximity of the urban areas of Minneapolis and St. Paul. Ramsey County farms were smaller than those in the state's rural areas. They were more valuable, more heavily capitalized, more intensely cultivated. They produced larger yields in both land and livestock, Menard's research reveals, and they produced a narrow range of products for sale in the nearby Twin Cities.

By the turn-of-the century Heman Gibbs' son,

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Frank, was one of a growing number of Ramsey County farmers who were beginning to specialize in a single crop. Frank grew onions, and he became a noted expert at it. Henry Schroeder, on the other hand, stayed with dairying.

Their use of labor also differed sharply from their rural counterparts, Menard has observed. Truck farms and dairies were labor-intensive operations and Ramsey County farmers drew upon the plentiful supply of workers who were crowding into nearby St. Paul, rather than depending upon their own family members for help, as was more typical out in the country.

There were other differences, Menard's study revealed. Established Ramsey County farmers were generally wealthier than those in rural areas. They had acquired their farms before prices of land on the urban fringe shot up and they could anticipate high, fairly dependable income from the city markets they served. For this reason, also, Menard has observed, these farmers and their families tended to remain long-term county residents, rather than succumbing to the lure of rural regions where land was cheaper.

Thus, the story of Henry Schroeder, like that of Heman Gibbs, is very much a part of this special but little recognized aspect of agricultural history. However, the Schroeder story is unique. Most of the urban fringe farms operated by Henry's friends and neighbors are gone now and forgotten, pushed miles out into the countryside by the growing cities. Heman Gibbs' farm is now the Ramsey County Historical Society's Gibbs Farm Museum. But Henry Schroeder's dairy, virtually alone among these early farming operations, is still in business, although it has taken on a new form and substance; it is still in the family, managed, now, by his grandsons; and it is still on the same site, the former swamp that Henry acquired, sight-unseen, in the 1880s.

THE EARLY YEARS of the Schroeder Milk Company have been documented by Bruce E. Hartman, educator and historian, who has written a research paper on the company. Hartman reveals a certain closeness to his subject. He has taught the Schroeder children, he lives near the Schroeder plant, and he believes, strongly, that "Henry Schroeder would be proud of his family and how the company has grown since his first few cows."

As a historian, he abandons some distance for another reason: This is not an industry that can be separated from its people. Little corporate lore floats to the top. It is a family story and it is typical, as Menard's study also suggests, not only of other ur-



*Henry Schroeder, Sr.*

ban fringe farmers of Schroeder's day who struggled to establish themselves outside the city, but also of many other businesses founded late in the 19th century. Most of these accounts tend to be intensely personal and dominated by an individualistic founder. The Schroeder story also centers around an individualistic, hard-driving entrepreneur, and it spans four generations.

#### **Beginning: 1884-1895**

Henry Schroeder's business really began, Hartman's research reveals, with the home delivery of milk along routes in nearby St. Paul. The brothers' land north of Larpenteur Avenue, east of Rice Street and south of what is today Highway 36, was close enough to the St. Paul city limits to make the routes practical, although Henry and Herman were out in what was then the rolling countryside. Their land was in what was known at first as New Canada Township, then Little Canada, then Gladstone and, finally, Maplewood.

"Henry was an aggressive salesman and always sold more milk than his own cows could produce,"

Hartman writes. "He would buy surplus milk from his neighbors to fill orders on his city routes."

The first surplus milk was transported by horse and cart from the farm to the homes in the city. The raw milk was poured into ten gallon cans that had spigots

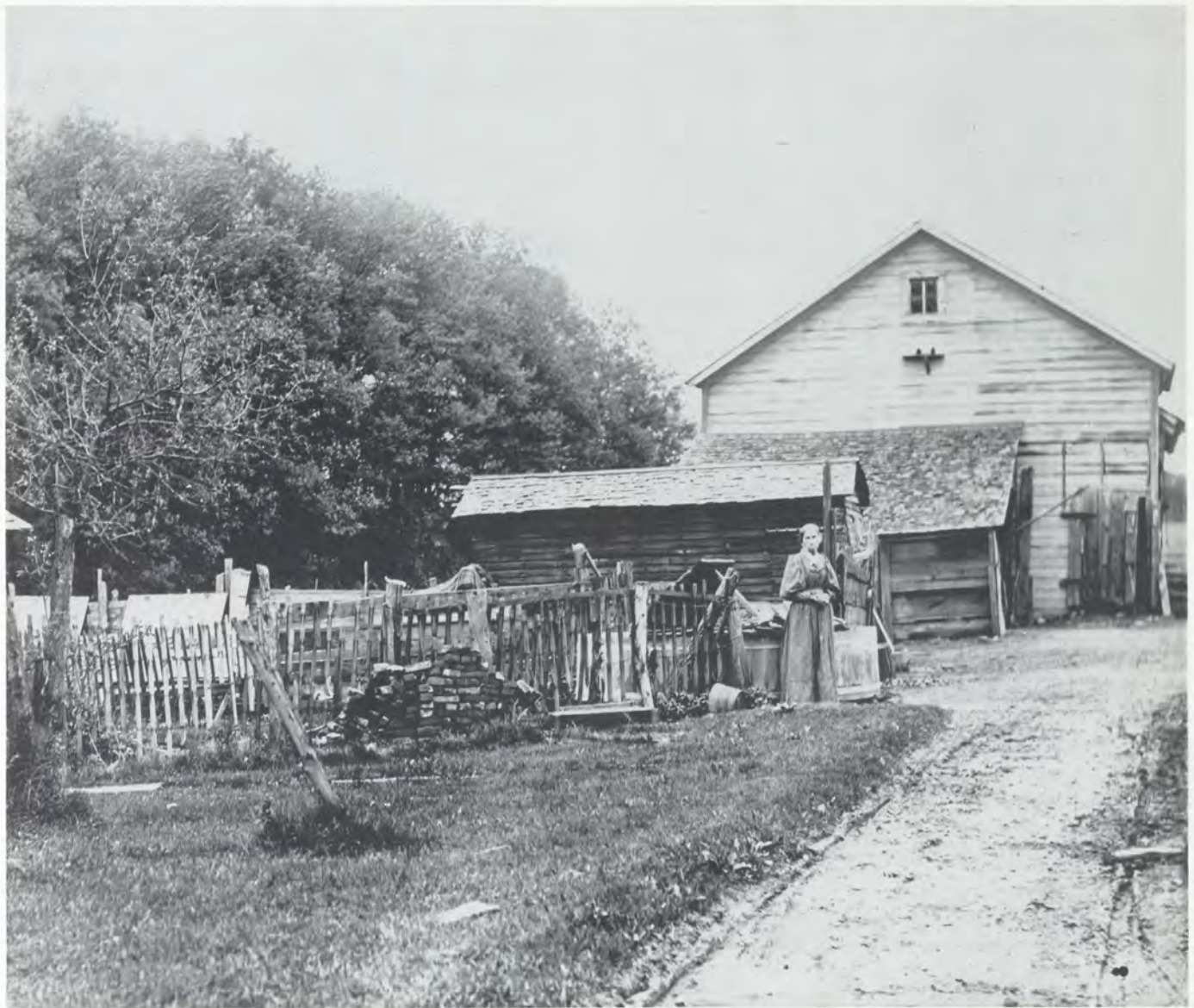


soldered into the bottom. The Schroeders went from house to house, selling milk by the bucketful, with the customers providing the buckets.

"One problem that occurred during the winter was the milk freezing in the spigot," Hartman writes. "This was solved by taking a large towel into the customer's house, soaking it with hot water, then wrapping the hot towel around the spigot to prevent freezing."

Before long Henry and Herman had bought ten more acres of land, this time dry acres, just north of their first little farm, and they began to put up barns,

*Urban fringe farms once ringed St. Paul, producing food for city tables. At left is Mike Tschida and a team of horses in a cornfield that stood at Rice and Elmer Streets, across from the Schroeder farm. Below is Mrs. Heman Gibbs in the yard of another urban fringe farm, the truck farm Heman Gibbs operated at what is now Cleveland and Larpenteur Avenues in Falcon Heights. The Gibbs farm now is the Ramsey County Historical Society's Gibbs Farm Museum.*





sheds, and silos to keep pace with the growth of their business. Henry Schroeder, in particular, was a man who seized opportunity. In 1884 he had helped build a water conduit connecting Lake Vadnais to the St. Paul Water Works. The conduit ran right behind his land. Wood planks were used as a cribbing to keep the soil back while the concrete aqueduct was poured. When the waterway was completed there was no longer any need for the wood and Henry asked for it. The state gave Henry the wooden tunnel, along with a pay check, for his work on the conduit. Henry took the lumber home to build his barns.

In 1891 Henry married the girl next door. Actually, he married the girl across Rice Street, Anna May Schwartz. Henry's great grandson, Tom Schroeder, has written about them in an essay on the family business for the Little Canada Historical Society. Now a student at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota, he is the family historian and the keeper of the family archives, the papers, notebooks, photographs, documents of land transfers and tapes of interviews with people who knew his grandparents and great grandparents.

IT WAS ONE OF those marriages, Tom Schroeder has indicated, that still draws a sigh and a shake of the head when people think about it ninety-three years later, but it also was very much a part of the

*The old bar owned by the Dean family, pictured here about 1870, was a Little Canada landmark. Henry Schroeder, Sr., used to send his son, William, down Rice Street with a quarter to fetch a bucket of whiskey for workers at the dairy. Dean's Bar still stands close to its original site on Rice Street.*

social history of that earlier era. The bride was seventeen years younger than the groom. She was 20 and a Catholic. Henry was Lutheran. They had seven children — two boys and five girls — and they made an agreement that the boys would be raised Protestant and the girls Catholic.

"In no way was this an indication of Henry's or Anna's religious enthusiasm," Tom Schroeder writes. "Indeed, Henry rarely attended services."

Anna Schroeder's family was well-known in the area and contributed at least one colorful character, her brother, Joe Schwartz, to the Rice Street lore.

"All of Rice Street could tell you stories about him" said Ray Haas, in a recent interview. Haas started working for the Schroeders as a young man in 1936 and retired a few years ago. Joe Schwartz worked at Dean's Greenhouse, another old neighborhood business. Joe Mollner, who started working for Henry Schroeder back in 1917, milking cows and delivering milk along the city milk routes, also remembers Joe Schwartz and the night Schwartz and a friend of his tried to steal one of Henry Schroeder's cows.



"They were just going to take it out in the back of the farm when Henry Schroeder came out and caught them," Mollner remembers. "Henry used to check everything on the farm before going to bed."

Mollner remembers Joe Schwartz partly because he remembers how Henry Schroeder kept trying to help him, trying to get him to work, but Joe would fall off the wagon.



Henry Schroeder married Anna Schwartz, the girl across Rice Street. Anna, far left, and Henry are pictured here on the porch of their first farmhouse with four of their daughters, Emma, Ida, Minnie, and Martha. This is the only picture the Schroeder family has of Anna Schwartz Schroeder. Below, left, are Minnie (on the left) and Martha, Henry's daughters, about 1914, not long before Martha drowned when she and a friend fell through a hole in McCarron's Lake. The hole was there because ice was routinely harvested from McCarron's for farmers and dairymen. Above are two other Schroeder daughters, Emma, left, and Ida.

Liquor flows in and out of the stories of those early days. It was part of a camaraderie among people who worked very hard, had few opportunities to relax and little variety in their social lives. The Dean family, who owned the greenhouse, also owned a bar that was a Little Canada landmark.

"THE BAR PROVIDED the companionship the local dignitaries desired," Tom Schroeder wrote in his essay. "Henry used to send his oldest son, William, down Rice Street the few hundred feet with a quarter to fetch a bucket of whiskey for the workers at the dairy."

Not long after he married Anna Schwartz, Henry sent money back to Germany so his mother could





join him in America. His father was dead and his mother died shortly after she arrived. She is buried in Roselawn Cemetery, not far from company headquarters.

### **Thriving; 1895-1921**

Herman Schroeder did not remain in business with his brother for very long. Apparently dissatisfied with the wholesale dairy business, he sold his share of the company to Henry and moved into St. Paul. Tom Schroeder describes what happened to his great, great uncle:

"He opened up a grocery store at 740 Selby Avenue in St. Paul, which was also a bakery and made ice cream. According to a 1918 St. Paul Inspections booklet, the grocery store was in a single-story brick building employing eighteen workers who were not provided cuspidors, but spitting on the floors was not permitted anyway!"

For Henry, that period between 1895 and 1920 was one of success after success. Where the swamp

*The Schroeders rented a second story room in McCarron's Lake Buffet, across from McCarron's Lake beach, after a fire destroyed the farmhouse and all other buildings in 1921.*

had been in 1880, he had put up twenty buildings. In the 1890s he had a silo built by craftsmen at a huge price. It held 200 tons of silage. But when he discovered he needed a second silo, he decided he would save money by building it himself and building it square. It was easy, it was cheaper, and it held 140 tons, but the corn rotted in the corners and Henry learned he could not save money by making silos square instead of round.

However, he was doing so much building at this time that he hired a ship's carpenter to work fulltime as a builder. In his research paper on the Schroeder Company, Bruce Hartman says that the carpenter built all the stanchions for the dairy cattle out of oak. "Henry considered him to be an artist with wood," he adds.

ONE OF THE FINEST buildings on the site was a three-tiered structure that housed a garage, an ice

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house, and on the top floor, a bunkhouse for the German immigrant dairy workers that Henry Schroeder employed. "Austrians, most of them," Joe Mollner remembers. "They talked the Austrian language. That's where I really learned it. They only got paid about fifteen dollars a month, but they saved."

Bob Schroeder, who is now president of Schroeder Milk Company, remembers his father talking about the men who lived in the bunkhouse. "My father said some of those fellows would literally not spend a nickel on themselves. They would not even buy shoes. They would find cast-off shoes and in winter they'd tie wrappings around them. They had come from a very poor background, so this seemed to be the appropriate way to do it. They would save every dime they made and eventually some of these men took their stake back to Germany and bought a little business or a little store."

EVERYONE IN THE DAIRY business at that time worked hard and long. They would begin milking at five in the morning. In the early days, they milked by hand. But when the first automatic milkers came on the market, Henry Schroeder bought them to modernize his operation. Joe Mollner remembers when some of the Schroeder cows were still milked by hand, some by machine. There were more than a hundred cows at the time, in two barns, and Mollner and his brother used to race against the machines.

"We could milk thirty cows by hand faster than they could with the two milking machines. I milked a lot of cows by hand, but the most I milked was forty-five in one day. I used to milk twelve to thirteen cows in an hour," he remembers.

Mollner was only 16 when he started work in 1917. He was there for five years and he did everything. Right after milking and breakfast, he and the other workers would bottle the milk while it was still warm. By eight o'clock they would be out on the routes. H. Schroeder Dairy had eight to ten different delivery routes in St. Paul. The most prized was the Summit Avenue route which catered to St. Paul's well-to-do, including James J. Hill.

Henry's oldest son, William, used to tell about the day he went to the Hill mansion. "He told me," his son, Bob, says, "that he was in the kitchen and the cook allowed him to peak through the door and President McKinley was there."

The route was called "the hill trade," not after the family but because of the location. "The hill trade," meant an extra route in the summer to bring milk out to the wealthy customers who summered in Dellwood and White Bear Lake.

JOE MOLLNER REMEMBERS another important customer, Dr. Walter Ramsey, a founder of St. Paul's

Childrens Hospital. Dr. Ramsey would tell the mothers of his patients about Schroeder Dairy, recommend it for its cleanliness and health standards, and Schroeder would have another family on the route.

In 1911 Henry Schroeder bought his first truck. It was white, Mollner recalls, but Schroeder continued to use open wagons drawn by horses even after Mollner started at the dairy in 1917. Mollner would load twenty-six cases of milk, with twelve bottles to a case, onto the wagon. Milk sold for about seven cents a quart, but people bought coupon booklets — a dollar book, a five-dollar book — so they really were paying for milk in bulk. Mollner would carry the cream to his customers in a galvanized tank.

In the summer the open wagons had canvas awnings to keep the sun off the milk. Mollner remembers that the men would chip ice and throw it on top of the glass bottles in the crates. They had plenty of ice because they kept huge 400-pound chunks in an ice house all summer long. The enormous cubes of ice were packed in sawdust to keep them from melting. The Citizen's Ice Company harvested the ice from McCarron's Lake, just down Rice Street from Schroeder's farm.

"Father would talk about how the farmers would go down there with their wagons and pick up the blocks of ice," Bob Schroeder recalls. "Ice is a troublesome material to haul and occasionally they'd lose a whole load when they'd go up the hill from the lake. He said Rice Street would detour around that ice all winter. Sometimes three and four loads of ice would be dumped on Rice Street and the road would 'S' turn around those loads until they melted in the spring."

That was a light-hearted memory, but Bob Schroeder's father told him a sad story, too, a tragic story about Henry Schroeder's 16-year-old daughter, Martha, and a boy from St. Paul named August Pedersen.

"DAD TALKED about that. They were sitting at the dinner table in the evening on the farm. . . in the winter. One of Martha's girlfriends came in and said, 'Hey, we're going skating at McCarron's' and Martha grabbed her skates and ran out. An hour or so later a neighbor kid dashed in and said Martha had skated into the open water where they had harvested the ice."

It was Sunday, February 10. There were about a dozen people in the party. They screamed at Martha but she went under. August Pedersen dove in to try to save her. The next day the headline in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* read:

"Boy Tries to Save  
Girl Skater; Both  
Drown Under Ice"

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The skaters had formed a human chain to try to reach the two teen-agers and at one point someone said they had hold of Martha, but the water was too cold. Martha's body was found the next day, but August's body was not found for another twenty-four hours.

Years later, in the 1930s and 1940s Schroeder Dairy was able to install an ammonia compressor for refrigeration in the ice house and replace the old trucks and the ice trays with refrigerated vehicles. But in 1921, the ice house was part of the three-decker bunkhouse Henry Schroeder had built.

The business had grown slowly and painfully since the 1880s but it was finally thriving — until July 5, 1921, when it was destroyed in an hour-and-a-half. Schroeder's younger son, Henry, Jr., was sitting in a barber shop when someone ran in shouting, "Your dairy's on fire!" He ran up Rice Street, seeing huge plumes of smoke and men struggling with furniture, wagons and animals, trying to save what could be saved.

His older brother, William, told the family later that he was getting off the streetcar on Rice and Ivy and

*In the 1890s, Henry Schroeder had a silo built by craftsmen, at what he thought was a huge price. So when he needed a second silo, he decided he'd save time and money by building it square. It was cheaper, but corn rotted in the corners and Henry found out you can't save money by building silos square. Henry is pictured here, second from the left. His son, William, is the boy on the left with his hand on the wheel of the engine — one of many engines that were to dominate William's life.*

carrying a heavy engine part for a small gas engine. He had it hanging over his shoulder on a big piece of wire. He got part way back to the farm before he saw the smoke. He knew the farm was on fire and that they would have no more need for the engine part, so he threw it into the ditch and ran for the fire.

All twenty buildings — the farmhouse, power plant, ice house, silos and barns — were burned to the ground, but no one in the family and none of the laborers was hurt and no animals were lost. All 130 cows and eighteen horses were saved. So was Henry's 1918 touring car and two trucks. But the rest was gone. The St. Paul Dispatch estimated a \$100,000 loss. Bruce Hartman's history of the business suggests a cause:

"Speculation was that one of the farm workers who



lived in a bunkhouse over the ice house had been careless smoking. The bunkhouse burned first, and because of their close proximity all of the other buildings burned as well. With no pressure hydrants in those days there was no way to fight the fire."

Fire trucks did rush to the farm from St. Paul, but they had to draw water from wells nearby and they could not halt the flames. The family had little insurance. Neighbors helped out, and for a while the family rented a room in the second story of the McCarron's Lake Buffet, across from McCarron's Lake Beach.

#### **Rebuilding: 1921-1929**

Henry Schroeder had to put things back together — quickly. No longer a young man, he had been trying to build a dairy business for forty years and now he had children who were older than he was when he came to Minnesota. His oldest son, William, had been an airplane mechanic during the first World War. His youngest daughter, Martha, had drowned in McCarron's Lake, but he and Anna had had another child since then, another little girl, Helen. So there he was in 1921 with a hundred thousand dollar loss, very little insurance and starting all over again — his business and his family. And Schroeder was in his mid-sixties.

He had better land this time, however — twenty-

five-and-a-half acres further up the hill on a street called Broadway that was to become County Road B. He set up temporary sheds at the site of the fire to house the cattle until he could build a new set of buildings. Then he went to work on a new house and a complete set of double barns.

By 1922 they were completed. Then disaster hit again. Tom Schroeder's essay tells the story:

"SHORTLY AFTER COMPLETION of the two cow barns and one horse barn, in the winter of 1922, fire struck again. This time, however, it was no accident. A neighbor boy with a history of mental problems soaked some rags in kerosene and started the blaze. St. Paul fire trucks were rushed out again, using a low well for its water supply. They ran out of water to fight the blaze, but wouldn't use the pond water behind the barns, as Henry suggested. They scoffed at the tiny body of water, saying you couldn't put out a cigar with it. Henry convinced them to try drawing water from it, but only after most of the damage had been done. The pond provided spray to wet the cinders for two hours. It was spring-fed.

"As for the boy who started the blaze, his body was found between two mattresses in the attic of a McCarron's Lake boarding house. He had shot himself in the head."

However, no one could really prove that the boy



had started the fire or shot himself. Bob Schroeder describes him as a "ne'er do well. No one knew if he was impulsive or simply not quite right. Apparently he drank a lot and worked only occasionally . . . an odd person people were afraid of and I just accepted unquestionably that he committed suicide."

Joe Mollner, however, did not.

"I think somebody else shot him. He was in all kinds of trouble." But the boy's death was simply set aside in the Rice Street of the 1920s. He had lived a troubled life and no one seems to have wondered that he died as he did.

At the Schroeder farm the building began again. This time, insurance covered the loss, and H. Schroeder Dairy was constructed for the third time. A large farmhouse was completed on April 11, 1922, with the luxury of maple and oak floors, a sun parlor, a sleeping porch, and French doors. The house is still standing, although it has been moved off the Schroeder property to a lot on County Road B east of Rice Street and converted to a dental clinic.

Bruce Hartman describes the rest of the new Schroeder operation as including, ". . . a U-shaped wooden barn with two extensions, each 34 feet by 110 feet, two silos, a horse barn 76 feet by 38 feet, a chicken coop, a milk house, an ice house, and a garage 36 feet by 70 feet."

*H. Schroeder Dairy as it looked in the spring of 1928, with Henry's big new farmhouse on the left.*

H. SCHROEDER DAIRY was back in business just in time to face an industry crisis. For years there had been talk in St. Paul of illness carried in milk. In 1915 the *St. Paul Medical Journal* reported that there had been four milk-borne epidemics — two of diphtheria and two of typhoid fever — in the space of two years. By the 1920s the battle to stop the sale of raw milk had begun again. Joe Mollner remembers that 175 dairymen formed an organization called the St. Paul Raw Milk Producers Association and successfully fought off government efforts to stop the selling of raw milk. Eventually, however, they had to abandon the fight. It simply was costing too much. Mollner, however, has never lost his taste for raw milk.

"If I had a cow, I'd still drink it today. I used to drink three quarts a day." He also remembers how long raw milk could last.

"I had a customer who lived up on Goodrich. Once they were gone for two weeks. When they came back their milk was still sweet even though they had just an ice box, not a refrigerator."

In 1928 and 1929 the state of Minnesota passed two laws. One required the pasteurization of milk and the other prohibited the purchasing of milk from other farms. It was a bad time for many dairymen, but it was a good time, according to Bruce Hartman, for



*The first surplus milk was transported by horse and cart from the farm to homes in St. Paul. At left, Joe Mollner and Bill Augsburg head down Rice Street in 1916. Above, Mike Tschida with a team at the Schroeder farm about 1920. This is the barn Henry Schroeder built from planks left over from the Lake Vadnais water conduit he helped construct in 1884. The barns held more than 100 cows and eighteen horses, all saved from the fire in 1921.*

Henry Schroeder.

"Many raw milk dealers were put out of business because they could not afford the costly new equipment nor could they supply enough milk to their customers without buying milk from other farms," Hartman said. "It was at this time that the Schroeder Farm had its largest dairy herd of more than a hundred cows. This was the largest dairy in the St. Paul area and it was extremely profitable, since Henry Schroeder was an aggressive and shrewd businessman."

It was at this point that, according to Hartman, Schroeder converted one of his new buildings to a pasteurization plant. Henry chose the building that had been constructed in 1927 of steel and concrete. The building also became a packaging plant, warehouse and management office. Then he was ready to begin advertising his "Safe for Baby Milk."

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The dairy bought a two-page ad in the *St. Paul Daily News* to announce the changes. Henry Schroeder always had been ready to try out machines that would modernize dairy farming. The dairy had used some of the first vacuum milkers and had installed bottle washers and bottling machines, and pasteurization laws were not going to put the company out of business.

It was typical of that era in rural Ramsey County that much of a family's social life evolved about the education of their children and centered around schools. For the Schroeders the school was McCarron's Lake School. Henry Schroeder had helped dig the foundation for the school back in 1883. His daughters and daughters-in-law became leaders in what was known then as the "Mother's Club," a precursor to the P.T.A. There were teachers in that school who had taught both Henry's children and his grandchildren. One of them, Bob Schroeder remembers, belonged to the Dean family, owners of the greenhouse and the bar. Alice Dean taught Bob's father in the 1890s and Bob, himself, in the 1930s. Bob Schroeder also recalls the Mother's Club "as a big part of their social life. It was 'the sticks' out there, and the club put on suppers and other get-togethers."

Joe Mollner remembers that the men entertained themselves by playing horseshoes or kitten ball, but he does not remember that Henry Schroeder played any games at all.

"Henry was always working, even the day he got married. He got married before noon and he went back to work. He had to do that. A good farmer could never take a vacation. If you had good cows you couldn't trust them with anyone else, anyway."

Over the years Henry Schroeder had developed a reputation as a knowledgeable cattleman who knew how to keep a good dairy herd. He bought his cows directly from a concern at the South St. Paul Stockyards that specialized in selling milkers. Both Mollner and Ray Haas remember walking the cows from South St. Paul back to the Schroeder farm.

"Some of the cows came from Texas, some from here and there," Mollner recalls, "as long as they were good milkers. Some were kickers. When you're milking kickers you have to be careful. There goes your milk pail and, besides, you might get hurt."

When the cows stopped being good milkers — when their production dropped to about a gallon a day — they were no longer paying for themselves and they would be taken back to the stockyards and sold for beef.

Like many other dairymen, Henry Schroeder kept an eye on his cows himself. Joe Mollner remembers him out in the barns with a cigar in his mouth milk-

ing his cows. Ray Haas remembers a much older Henry Schroeder, but still, a man who had good cows and did not want to trust them entirely to someone else.

"He'd go through the barns and look the cattle over," Haas says. "Sometimes during the day he'd come out and brush the cattle, especially in the winter when the cows were in the barns all the time. He had a way with cattle that nobody else had. Some cows we could hardly get close to, but Henry wasn't afraid. He'd walk right in there, and they never even kicked him. Some were wild but he could tame them like nobody's business."

But another major change was coming in the dairy business, a change that would be hard on an old cattleman like Henry Schroeder. The big successful city dairies were going to have to get rid of their cows.

### Surviving: 1930-1942

The stock market crashed in 1929 and the Depression closed in. Even so, Henry Schroeder was still doing well, but he was nearly 80 years old and it was time for him to entrust his operation to somebody else. He had begun at a time when he used a windmill and waited for storms to provide enough power to drive the mill to grind feed for his cattle. Later, he had converted the dairy to other types of power. In 1907 he bought a 15-horsepower International Harvester single cylinder engine. He had a 15-year-old son, William, who started working with that engine, helping his father make it drive the augers used to blow feed into the silos.

THEN THE TWO started working with a steam engine. They had an incredible idea that conservationists today would have loved them for: use the steam generated by the engine to heat all of the out-buildings. That notion never worked, however. Coal became too costly and the engine was inefficient. The next engine was a semi-diesel, but the most efficient of them all, and used the longest, was a 40-horsepower Fairbanks-Norris diesel that was used twenty-four hours a day. Northern States Power did not run lines of electricity out to that section of Rice Street until the 1940s, so the house, the barns, the entire operation had to run off the Schroeders' own generators.

"Without that engine, nothing worked . . . everything was hooked together," Bob Schroeder recalls. "Furnaces didn't work, wells didn't work . . . My father's life was dictated by that engine because it ran twenty-four hours a day."

William Schroeder, who was Bob Schroeder's father, seemed to have the same respect for engines that his father, Henry, had for cattle. Joe Mollner

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remembers how the dairy had trouble while William was away during World War I because the engine stopped and nobody else knew how to start it again. While Mollner and Henry Schroeder and all the other German men who worked for him and lived in the bunkhouse were worrying about how to get the engine operating and the dairy going, William was learning about airplane engines. He was an airplane mechanic. After he came home, William designed his own airplane engine and patented the plans, and he flew his own plane.

Ray Haas remembers a story about William crash-landing a plane in a cabbage field. As he crawled out of the wreckage he noticed a man in the crowd taking up a collection for the family of the "dead" pilot. But William was so embarrassed that he had crashed at all that he pulled off his pilot's helmet and sheepishly hid the soft leather hat under his jacket until he could get away from the scene of the crash.

"The worst part," Ray Haas says, "was when William found out he was going to have to pay for the cabbage."

William kept up his flirtation with airplanes. He kept a plane in a hangar at the Minnesota State Fairgrounds in St. Paul. The fascination ended only when the hangar burned down, with William's plane inside.

HIS SISTERS AND their husbands sometimes worked in the dairy. Helen married Holger Jensen, a butter-maker, but the Schroeder Dairy stopped making butter after 1932. Another sister, Ida, was bookkeeper for a while. Her brother, Henry, bought her a 1929 car. Tragically, her chest was crushed when she crashed that car and although she recovered from the accident, she died shortly afterward of a cancer the family said she developed because of the crash. Emma, who was younger than William, married a druggist. Their son worked in the plant occasionally, and when her husband died Emma moved back into the big farmhouse at the dairy. Minnie worked at the dairy longer than any of the other girls. She became the bookkeeper after Ida died.

Henry Schroeder, Jr., was almost ten years younger than his brother, William. He had grown up with a father who people said never learned to play any kind of game. His son apparently did not make the same mistake. He has been described as a fun-loving young man with a smile on his face and always somewhere to go. He liked new cars. With nothing much to do on Rice Street but go to the dinners and socials planned by the women in the school's Mother's Club, Henry would leave the "sticks" and drive his friends down to Chicago.

Anna May Schwartz Schroeder died in 1934 when

times had toughened for Henry Schroeder. Almost through default he handed over the day-to-day operation of his dairy to his younger son, Henry. His older son, William, was occupied full-time simply repairing and maintaining milk trucks for the Schroeder Dairy and another dairy, City Dairy. Schroeder had stock in City Dairy, so it was more than just a job for William. More indeed. William was inventing again. This time he patented the stand drive — the mechanism that allows drivers in milk trucks to either stand or sit while they maneuver through traffic. A system like that is still used in delivery trucks. Unless the generators were down, however, William had little to do with the plant.

By 1936 H. Schroeder Dairy was still hanging on, sometimes, it seemed, by a thread. That is the year Ray Haas went to work for Schroeder. He was about 20 and he idolized old Henry. Henry, Jr., however, was running the business.

Haas started at \$55 a month. Helen Schroeder Jensen, the youngest of old Henry's children, offered Haas a room with board in the farmhouse for \$30. The old bunkhouse was long gone, having never been replaced after the first fire. Haas declined the offer. He found he could live more cheaply, even later when he married, in a little house he built himself. He remembers that groceries cost him only \$17 a month for both himself and his wife.

OF HIS JOB DESCRIPTION, Haas says, "I did everything. I started out working in the barns, milking cows, keeping up the barn work. I was down in the plant pasteurizing. I was even delivering the milk."

In the mid-1930s, Schroeder Dairy was still doing home deliveries and Haas was put on one of the routes as a trouble-shooter. The company had been losing money on some city deliveries. Haas found out why. Some drivers were allowed to work on a percentage based on the amount of milk they delivered. They took their pay in cash at the end of the day. They had big routes, with customers who were allowed, even encouraged, to buy milk on credit. Many did, but because of the Depression many never paid for the milk. Schroeder Dairy had to take the loss.

Like many another dairying operation among the urban fringe farms ringing the cities of the nation, the Schroeder Milk Company had been built around the idea of having a farm with plenty of good milking cows close enough to the city to bring milk into the city people. But by the late 1930s times were changing. St. Paul was spreading out, the farm acreage beyond its limits gobbled up by new suburban dwellers who could travel to jobs in town along the network created by the streetcar system. Land values were rising. Grow-





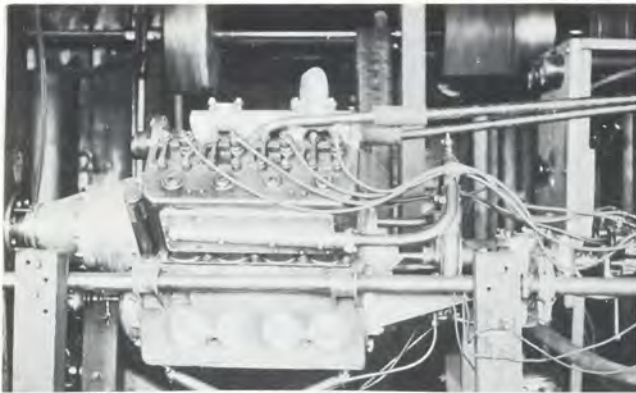
*Social life was not one of Rice Street's strong points. There was McCarron's Lake beach, pictured above about 1930, and there was the Mothers' Club of McCarron's Lake School, a precursor to the P.T.A. Gertrude Schroeder, William's wife, was very involved in the club and its suppers and get-togethers. She is shown (left foreground) with family and friends in the snapshot at right.*

ing union activity among Depression-scarred workers was putting upward pressure on wages. Young Henry began to have problems with some of his drivers who wanted to unionize. Henry was against it.

"So they dumped his trucks," Ray Haas remembers.

Bob Schroeder recalls some of the same events. "They did have difficulty," he says. "It was a troubled period. There were some trucks dumped, some confrontations. But that wasn't the only prob-





When William Schroeder was discharged from the army after World War I, his discharge papers listed his "knowledge of any vocation" as auto and aero mechanic. He designed the airplane motor, above, in 1917. He flew an airplane and kept one in a hangar at the Minnesota State Fairgrounds.

lem so I don't look on the labor trouble as a major factor at all. It was almost incidental to the economic grinding down. The cost of producing milk wholesale was growing. We were becoming an urban area. Real estate taxes were going up. With the threat of war in Europe, the defense plants began gearing up about that time and that forced up the cost of labor. Finally, it just became impossible to make any money producing milk."

Still, the Schroeders continued to hold on — until a night in 1939. Lightning struck the farm about 2 a.m. on a summer morning and destroyed the milk house and the garage. State and federal regulations required that milk be bottled in one building and pasteurized in another. Though the old creamery that had been converted to a pasteurizing plant still stood, the bottling house was gone.

H. Schroeder Dairy officially sold all its home delivery routes to City Dairy. Since they already owned part of City Dairy, they sold City their raw milk and were able to continue with part of their herd. They rented out their pasteurization plant to a national orange juice distributor and for a while it was orange juice that went into the bottles at Schroeder's. Henry Schroeder was still alive to witness the end of Schroeder's home delivery routes.

"IT TURNED OUT to be to our advantage," Bob Schroeder says. "Some of the very large companies, such as Ewalds, Northland, and Minnesota, tried to continue. A classic example is Ewald's. They had a good name and a hundred routes in the Twin Cities area but they simply found it impossible to continue."

What made it impossible was the fact the consumers were beginning to buy their milk in a completely different fashion. Instead of staying at home and waiting for the milkman, they were buying milk in little stores specializing in dairy products. It was cheaper and



more convenient. Young Henry started looking for stores and soon the Schroeder company was delivering again, not to houses but to milk stores, some of which they owned themselves and others they had encouraged people to buy.

The company had weathered a very tough time. At one point Schroeders had only a few employees, one of whom was Ray Haas. Two others were part-time and very young. They were William Schroeder's 12-year-old twin sons, Bob and Bill.

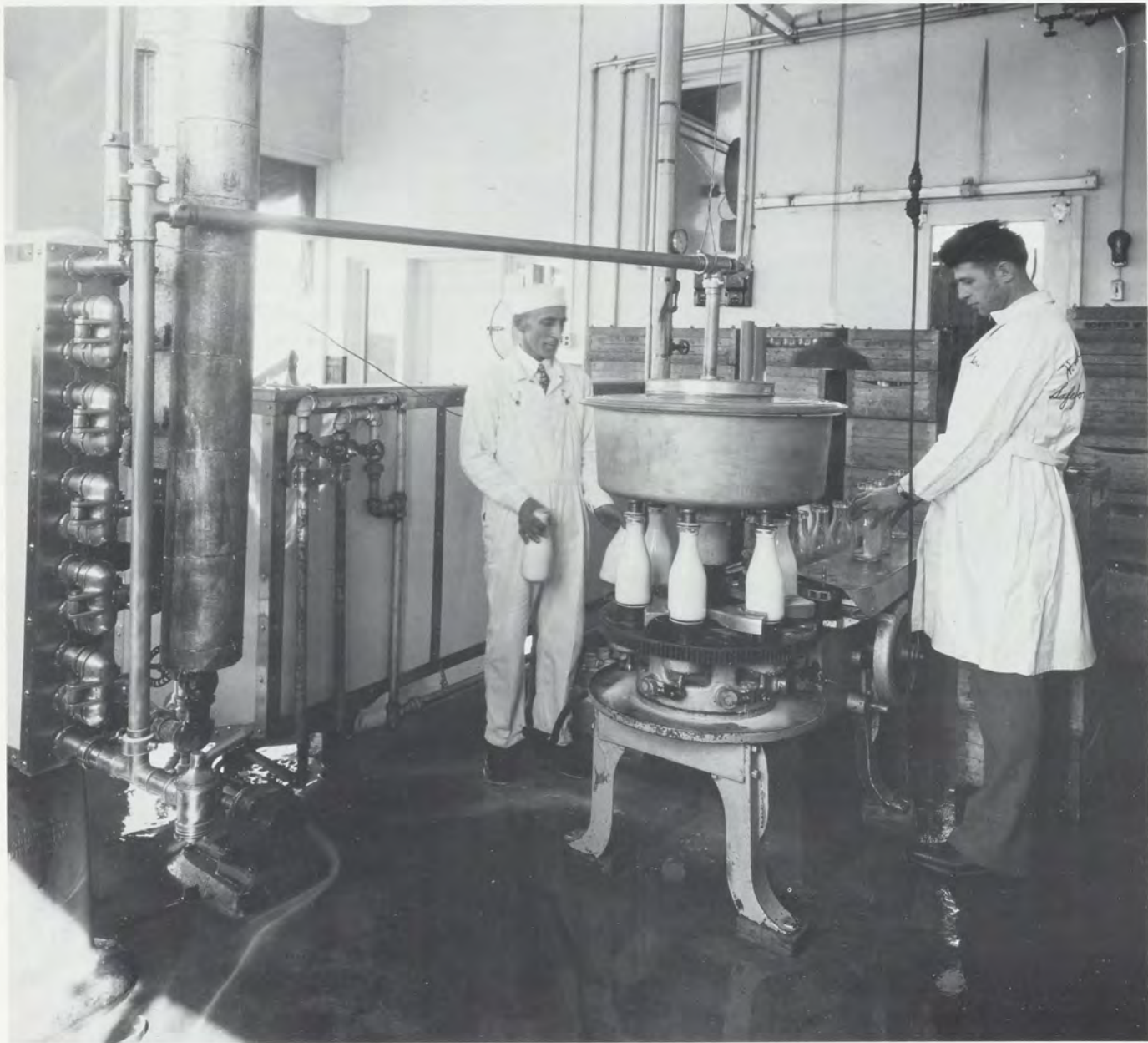
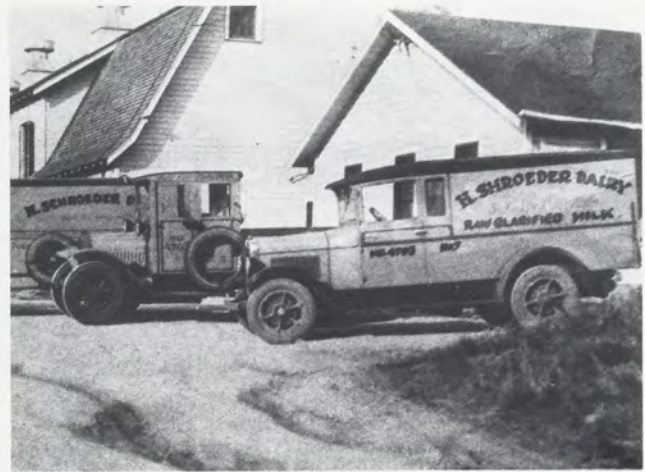
"I used to call down to William's house and try to catch the twins after school," Haas remembers. "Kids are kids. If they could possibly get out of some work, they did." Then came the day before Christmas, about 1941. It was early in the morning and two men who were supposed to work with Ray Haas did not show up. Haas called William's house and asked for the twins. By the end of that day the three had pasteurized thirteen vats of milk.

"Bill and Bob were in there helping, but they were afraid to pasteurize, afraid they'd get the milk too hot and burn it," Ray recalls. "So I set it up for them. I had the vat pasteurizing while they loaded a small load of milk for me. Then I delivered to two or three

small stores. By 11 o'clock we were finished." It seems to Bob, however, that they worked non-stop until midnight that Christmas eve.

"It was very late and for some reason there was a bottle of Gilbey's gin in the freezer. I don't know whose it was or where it came from but it was that square bottle with the clear glass side. It was about midnight and it somehow seemed appropriate to pass that bottle around so everyone could take a little sip."

*There were bottle fillers in the pasteurization plant that Schroeder built. The plant cost about \$11,000 and was essential at a time when dairymen were going out of business because of the new health laws. Pictured below are Bill Leibel, left, and Ted Laber. At right are some Schroeder trucks as they appeared in the St. Paul Daily News on December 15, 1929.*



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Although he and his brother were still so young, the camaraderie, the celebration of a job well-done, a crisis surmounted was still important to them. The three of them — Ray Haas and the boys — had struggled through a long, hard day. The next day was Christmas and, as Bob recalls, it was the first full day he and his brother had off that year.

### Modernizing: 1943-1984

One day late in April, 1943, Ray Haas was down in the pasteurizing plant. He was alone and he was busy. Henry R. Schroeder was 89 years old. Ray Haas had been a young man when he started working for Schroeder and to him, old Henry was a real hero. Sometimes on Sundays Haas would drive Henry to church, and he would see the little packages of milk and cream that Schroeder put together for the pastor. When they came home, they would stop at Laber's, a grocery store and tavern just outside St. Paul on Rice Street. They would go inside and Henry Schroeder would buy his little cigars, "Little Toms" they were called, and he would have the glass of beer he could buy at Labers on Sunday afternoons. Then they would go home. Haas would go back to work because he had a seven-day-a-week job and old Henry would go back to the house where he lived with his two daughters, Helen and Emma. Haas and Henry Schroeder were good friends.

On April 23, Henry Schroeder sent his daughter down to the plant to tell Haas to come up to the house. Haas remembers what happened:

"HE SAID TO HIS daughter. . . 'Get Ray, and tell him I want to talk to him. And then if he says he hasn't got time, tell him to take time.' I went up and talked to him. It was around noon. He just wanted to know how everything was going. He looked the same as always. He had a little mustache and gray hair. He was a skinny man. And he said 'I suppose you're pretty busy,' and I said 'Yes, I am. I'm real busy today because I'm there alone.' And he said, 'Well, I don't think I should keep you too long.' And I left and about 2 o'clock I saw the hearse go up to the house to pick him up. I guess he must have known that he was going. At least I had a chance to say 'Goodbye' when I left and nobody knew that it was going to happen, that it would be the last 'Goodbye'."

Henry Schroeder died without a will. Business had not been profitable for some time. The family had a fair amount of land and buildings but little cash and property is difficult to divide. However, as part of the distribution of the estate, Helen and Emma received some land, buildings, and the big farmhouse. William, young Henry, and their sister, Minnie, the company

bookkeeper, took the plant, some land and the old farmhouse. William took over management of the company. Young Henry (who was also known as "Doc") managed one of the dairy stores for a while but eventually came back into the plant to work alongside Ray Haas.

"It was a tough time for my uncle to be in business," Bob Schroeder explains. "We were just coming out of the Depression. It was very difficult. But he really didn't like running the business, so when things got tough he was delighted to take a more passive role."

Young Henry's brother, William, was not much happier at the helm of the corporation. "He was more interested in the mechanical aspect of the dairy industry than he was in the business side of it," Bob recalls. "The business side of it was necessary, he realized that, but the mechanical side was fun."

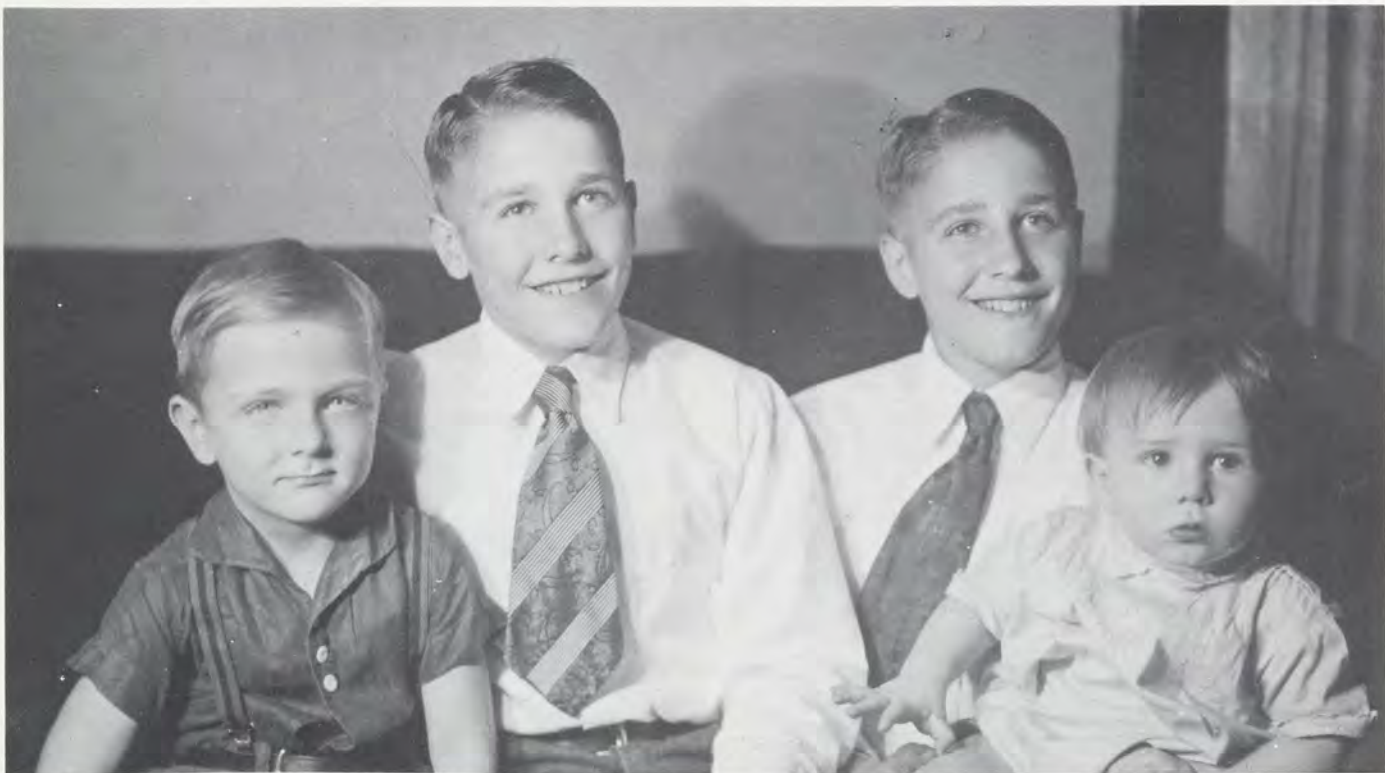
William's twin sons had been working part-time in the dairy for several years. Now, they were freshmen in high school. William told them he was having problems getting help.

"If you're not going to be a doctor, it's a waste of time going to school," Bob Schroeder remembers his father telling them. So they quit high school and started working full-time for Schroeder Dairy, finishing high school by attending classes at night. College, except for specific courses like bacteriology, economics, speech, was out of the question. It was an arduous life for a pair of teenagers, but it had an incredible effect on the milk company. Schroeder's had been run for years by two reluctant managers, William and young Henry. Now, finally, there were two young, strong Schroeders in the plant who were determined to make the business thrive.

"We really didn't run the business until we were about 18," Bob Schroeder says. "That's when we had pretty much unchallenged authority — unchallenged except for my father. By then my uncle had taken a less active role. He liked the way things were going, and we were ambitious and aggressive about it. If we were *not* going to get an education and *not* do anything, well, we wanted *this* to be something. And so when we were about 18 we were pretty much in control."

HIS FATHER ALSO BECAME less and less active in the management. When the twins wanted to spend money for a truck or an engine, he was delighted. On the other hand, when they spent money to open a new store or pay for advertising, William was not happy. Stores and advertising were not tangible investments as far as the master mechanic of the family was concerned.

Bob remembers that "another old settler once ask-



*Bob and Bill Schroeder, William's twin sons, quit high school when they were about 14 to work full-time at the dairy. Now all four Schroeder brothers run the business. They are shown here about the time the twins made milking their career. Left to right are Carl, Bob, Bill, and Ernie. At right is Bob Schroeder (on the left) with Ray Haas.*

ed my father, 'Well, Bill, how does it feel to have two sons that are taking the business over?' And my father said, with a grin, 'Well, they've got the throttle, but I still have the brake.' That was his mechanical background."

Before he died, William transferred the operation entirely to his children and took a pension. Bob and Bill and their brothers, Carl and Ernest, bought out their sister Gertrude's interest in the dairy. The four brothers still run Schroeder Milk Company with Bob as president, Ernest as vice president, Bill as secretary, and Carl as treasurer.

They definitely have made something of the firm. Schroeder Milk Company still has its offices on Rice Street in the building that once was the creamery and pasteurizing plant. The cows are gone, however, and the farmhouse has been moved. Today the company purchases milk from the Kraft Company farms in Melrose, Minnesota, and Ellsworth Cooperative Creamery in Ellsworth, Wisconsin. Huge tank trucks haul it in along the interstate highways to the Schroeder plant in St. Paul — a dramatic demonstration of the vast changes in the dairy industry in the past twenty-five and more years.

The company supplies Cub stores, "Q" stores,



some Red Owl Country Stores, grocery warehouses, and their own convenience stores in the Twin Cities. The stores are called "Speedy Markets." Not all Schroeder milk is labeled with the Schroeder name or the picture of the barn that has become the company logo. The firm does a certain amount of private

label business.

There is one label the company is proud of, for more than one reason. This is the milk sold at the SuperAmerica stores in a returnable four-pack with a carrier that makes it easy for you to feel like your own milk man. Four of these half-gallon plastic bottles can be carried home in the carrier and the bottles returned to the company. It is good for the environment and it is also an attractive package that consumers seem to enjoy, but Bob Schroeder says they "died a little" in putting it on the market. The shock came from the need to label, clean off and re-label the bottles so they could be cleaned and refilled with 1 percent, 2 percent or whole milk or any of the variety of milks dairies provide today.

"Now, being clever people — professional people in the dairy business — we came up with a machine to take the labels off," Bob Schroeder says, in discussing his most recent marketing problem. "But it wouldn't take the labels off so we had to remove them by hand. We had four people sitting back there with little knives, peeling them off as they came back. We were desperately trying to solve the machine problem." Solve it they eventually did, not by fixing the machine, but by turning to plastic sleeves that are used

*The cows are gone and the house has been moved, but the Schroeder logo, on the carton at right, still harks back to the farm on Rice Street, shown below as it appeared in the December 15, 1929, edition of the St. Paul Daily News.*

on cans of oil for automobiles.

"It was a fine solution, but it came about six months after we'd been peeling," Bob Schroeder adds.

Henry Schroeder might be surprised at his grandsons' newest product — ice cream, just like his brother, Herman, sold when they split up Schroeder Brother's Dairy before the turn-of-the-century. This time the dessert will come packaged in a hot pink cylinder that makes you hungry for Spumoni no matter what flavor you go out to buy. And these Schroeder brothers are not about to split up. They are too busy.



Henry Schroeder, Sr., founder of the Schroeder Milk Company, Inc. Page 5



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McCarron's Lake Buffet, where the Schroeder family rented a room after the first fire. Page 9



Henry Schroeder's two silos. Page 11



Horses and carts delivered Henry Schroeder's first surplus milk to homes in St. Paul. Page 14

The Gibbs Farm Museum, owned by the Ramsey County Historical Society, at Cleveland and Larpenteur in Falcon Heights.



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