

The Cox and Gossner Family Histories

Utah Studies: Changes and Challenges, A Century of Utah Agriculture

Cox Family Story Narrative, Slides 1-4

On the first of July 1911, 33-year-old William M. Cox drove a sheep wagon with his 22-year-old wife Eliza Olive onto their new farm. With them were their daughters; Zola 4, Lila 1, and baby Etna. They settled on a lot in the small town of Alton in Kane County, Utah. They called their new home Oak Grove Farm. On their arrival, Will and Eliza set up housekeeping in a tent under some large oak trees on the property; later they built a small frame house. Will made a living by surveying and herding sheep. Will and Eliza eventually had a total of 11 children, 10 of whom lived to adulthood.

The Coxes started their farm during one of the great growth periods of Utah agriculture. How did agriculture in Utah change during the years their family was being raised? What did these changes mean for the Cox family? Think about these questions as you learn more about The Cox Family of Alton, Utah.

The Cox family in Alton, Utah was an example of the optimism young families had for farming and ranching in Utah in the early 1900s. They raised sheep for cash money, herding hundreds of them each summer in the rugged canyon lands of Kane County. William Cox also did surveying work. The family had some dry farm acreage to raise wheat for flour and to raise other grains to feed their animals during the winter. The Coxes also grew potatoes, onions, sweet corn, squash, peas, beans, raspberries, and carrots in their garden for food. They raised chickens for meat and eggs and sold any extra eggs to stores in nearby towns. Before the 1920s the Cox family even had water piped to their property and could use a pay telephone in town.

The economic crises of the 1920s and 30s had less effect on the Cox family living in remote southern Utah than on many others. The family did become ill during the Spanish influenza epidemic of 1919, though none died from the disease. In 1928, and again in 1933, William Cox was actually able to acquire more federal lands through homestead claims. In 1929 the Cox family bought a milk separator to separate the cream from their milk. They then sold the surplus milk. This was the only money the family had during these difficult times, except when they sold an animal or Will Cox did some surveying work. In 1934 Will bought the family's first car, a used 1927 coupe. In 1935 Allen Cox, the oldest boy, went to work with the Civilian Conservation Corp. He later said that this was the first time in his life he had ten dollars in his pocket.

William M. Cox died in September 1943. He is buried in the Alton Cemetery. His wife Eliza Olive did not want to face winter alone on the farm and moved to St. George, Utah. The next summer she sold Oak Grove Farm to her son Allen and moved to nearby Orderville, where she and her husband had always hoped to retire since it was Will's birthplace. Eliza Olive died in Orem, Utah in November 1975. After she died her family took her body to Alton and buried her next to her husband. In about 1950, Allen Cox sold the farm to the Heaton Livestock Company. This was a fitting end, since William Cox had purchased the family's first lot from Jonathan Heaton.

The Cox family saw Utah agriculture go from boom to bust to boom again in their years on their farm in Utah. At Williams' death, his wife Olive sold the farm. If your Grandfather or Grandmother owned a farm in Utah today and passed away would you sell their farm? If you would, why, and to whom would you sell it? If not, why not, and what would you do with it?



*Eliza and William Cox
circa 1937*

Gossner Family Story (The Gossner history program)

Edwin Gossner Sr. was born in 1909. He came from the eastern region of Edliswiel-Waldkirch, Switzerland where five generations of his family had lived as farmers. Today, the seventh generation of Gossners carry on the family tradition and continue to maintain the same homestead that has been a part of the family heritage for all these years.



Due to a declining European economy and limited prospects for the future, Edwin Gossner decided to seek a new life in America. He immigrated to the United States in 1930, scarcely speaking a word of English, and immediately went to work for his older brother Ernest in Wisconsin. Ernest had preceded Edwin seven years earlier to the U.S. after graduating from the Swiss Cheesemaking School of Switzerland and now owned his own cheese factory. For the next three years Edwin Gossner served his own apprenticeship and learned the art making fine Swiss cheese following the traditional methods of the old country. In 1933, Edwin married Josephine Oechslein of Darlington, Wisconsin and she was to be a major influence on him all their married life. Two children, Edwin, Jr. and Dolores, soon followed.

It was also in 1933 that his brother got an offer elsewhere and Edwin was asked to take over as Cheesemaker at the Burke factory. He held this position until 1937 when the factory burned down. Edwin then moved on to California where he accepted a position with the Rumiano family making cheese.

While there he converted the plant from a Monterey Jack to a Swiss cheese facility. This was to be an invaluable experience as he was able to improve upon his knowledge of making Swiss cheese utilizing milk from cows fed on fermented feeds (silage) instead of fresh feed. The traditional method of making Swiss cheese did not allow for the use of milk from cows fed on silage, but he proved that it could be done. This was an important new concept that Gossner would later successfully employ in Cache Valley.

In the ensuing years Gossner was the guiding force in upgrading Cache Valley milk production to Grade A market status. He brought sustained benefits to the dairymen by opening new markets for them and increasing their overall profits. Gossner also made important innovations such as introducing to the area the means of making processed cheese and a more efficient recovery method of whey by-products.

In 1966 Edwin Gossner and his family began anew by starting Gossner Foods. Again the focus was placed on making Swiss cheese. They started with a half vat of milk (12,500 lbs.) every other day and Ed was quoted as saying that he would be happy if he could make up to two vats (50,000 lbs.) every other day. Today, over 25 years later, Gossner Foods uses over a half million pounds of milk a day for cheese production. In 1967 Gossners began packaging a line of cheeses starting with Swiss, Cheddar and Monterey Jack. Eventually Muenster and others were added so that in time over 30 varieties carried the Gossner name.

Edwin Gossner had his eye on the future. In 1973 he helped establish Swiss Village, a cheese manufacturing plant in Nampa, Idaho and in 1982 he brought out a new fluid milk product that utilized ultra high temperature packaging technology. Rather than compete with the existing Grade A milk market, this new technology allowed Gossners to open up new marketing avenues. Gossner Milk can be kept unrefrigerated at room temperature for months, and as such has proved to be highly desirable to the military community and others. Today, Gossner Milk travels all over the world with our troops, and it is sold in places as diverse as Puerto Rico and Panama where milk supplies and refrigeration are limited.

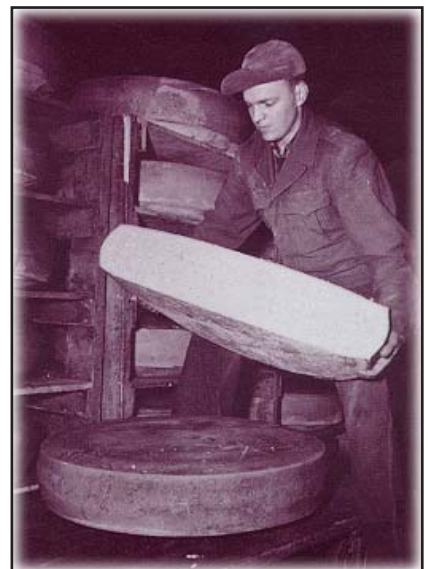
The mainstay of Gossner Foods continues to be Swiss cheese. It is made using the same formula that Edwin Gossner developed years ago. The Gossner Swiss cheese is a specialty cheese that has a milder flavor and softer body than other Swiss cheeses, yet it remains distinctly Swiss. Gossner Foods now utilizes state-of-the-art equipment for aseptic packaging and cheesemaking and is currently exploring new ideas to expand its product line.

When Edwin Gossner died in 1987 he left behind as part of his legacy a well-oiled machine that consisted of a corps of caring, knowledgeable, and well-trained employees. It is duly noted that were it not for these dedicated people, Gossner Foods would not be what it is today—a successful family business.

Three of the original four members of the Gossner family that came to the Valley in 1941 are no longer with us. During their lifetimes, Edwin, Josephine, and Edwin Jr. were greatly respected in the community and received numerous civic awards in recognition of their involvement and contributions. That tradition of service to the community continues to this day at Gossner's.



*Edwin Gossner
circa 1935*



*Edwin Gossner
circa 1955*

Name _____

Two 20th Century Agricultural Families

After viewing the family history of the Cox and Gossner families, answer the following questions.

1. In 1910 more than 45 percent of all Utahns lived in urban areas like Salt Lake City and Ogden. Why might Will and Eliza Cox have chosen a farming life for their family instead of moving to a city? How appealing might life on a farm or ranch be for a family in Utah today?

2. Wilma Cox (daughter of Will and Eliza) tells in her own words what it was like to herd sheep as a girl in southern Utah. What was her job like? What parts of her job seem fun? What parts seem hard? Read her story and then ask yourself how you would like to live the life that Wilma did.

3. When Edwin Gossner traveled through Cache Valley in 1948, he said it reminded him of Switzerland. Why did he want to move his family west to Cache Valley? Do you think he was taking a risk? Why do you think the Gossner company has endured?

over . . .

4. If your grandfather or grandmother owned a farm in Utah today and passed away, would you sell their farm? If you would, why, and to whom would you sell it? If not, why not, and what would you do with it?

5. Mark the historical events that affected each family by placing a C for the Cox family and a G for the Gossner family next to each event the family would have encountered. If both families were affected by the event, place a C and G on the space provided.

_____ Traveled by car to a new farm location.

_____ Herded sheep.

_____ Farmed during WWII.

_____ Sold milk to troops overseas.

_____ Purchased their family's first car in 1935.

_____ Had a garden.

_____ Acquired land through homestead claims.

_____ Sold products out of state.

_____ Farmed with livestock but also had other income.

_____ Passed the farm business down to other family members.

_____ Family took a summer vacation.

_____ Had a larger family.

_____ Farmed for self-sufficiency.

_____ Employed more than family members.

_____ Owned cows and sold milk.

_____ Milked cows by hand.

_____ Had a variety of farm animals.

_____ EPA rules affected this family.

_____ Started two cheese companies.

_____ Lived in a tent for a short time.

_____ Lived in a region where the population was growing.

_____ Operated their Utah farm during the depression of the 1930s.