



# A Walk Through History

The Westerville Public Library  
Local History Resource Center Newsletter  
September 2007

## Westerville Creamery

On September 13, 1900, W. B. Johnston and Mr. Carey started the Westerville Creamery. W. B. Johnston's father, Robert R., ran a bakery and catering business and realized that large supplies of cream were necessary so decided to branch out with assistance from his son. Milk from local dairy farmers was brought to the business on E. College Ave. The cream was separated from the skim milk. The skim milk was given back to the farmers and the cream was sent to Columbus. Shipped by railroad car and trolley car, it was sold to butter producers.

The Public Opinion described the creamery equipment in an article that was published shortly after the plant opened as "the latest improved mechanism." It also stated that the company had a pasteurizer "which removes the bacteria from the cream and thus prevents scorching." In 1907 a milk condensing plant was installed in Westerville and in 1912 a capping machine for bottling milk. In the years after the plant was opened here, branch operations were opened in other communities. Before 1925 the creamery supplied dairy products and ice cream to manufacturers. In 1926 the company installed glass bottling equipment and sold milk to Kroger. They were also one of the first companies to supply milk in a paper carton.

By 1942 the Westerville Creamery had 33,000 customers both retail and wholesale. During World War II 60% of the company's milk was sold to the army and shipped to soldiers around the globe. Local soldiers sent letters back to the local plant saying that seeing the Westerville Creamery name on a can of milk in their hands was a welcome bit of home for homesick soldiers and sailors serving their country.



In 1987 the Westerville plant closed. It had left the Johnston family's hands and ended up in the hands of the Borden Company who decided to move operations to their plant in Columbus. The closure brought the end of an era. The Westerville Creamery when owned by the Johnston family had grown to an impressive operation with several plants and was able to lay claim to the title of the largest family-owned evaporated milk company in the United States.

# The Johnston Family



**William B. Johnston**

Robert R. Johnston, the youngest of a family of eight children, was born near Newark, Ohio in 1848 and lost his mother when he was a youngster. Two of his brothers fought in the Civil War – one died and one was wounded. After leaving school, Robert learned the candy-making trade. He operated a bakery and catering business in Columbus from the 1870s until 1906 when he moved to Westerville to help his only son, W. B., with the Westerville Creamery. Upon his death in 1936 W. B. became president of the company.

William B., or W. B. as he was called, spent most of his adult life in Westerville. Born in 1872 he came to the village in 1900 to start his very successful business. He was married in 1895 to Ethel Mason who died in 1905 leaving him a widower with two young daughters – Laura and Roberta. He remarried and had two sons, W. Lawson and Russell K. and another daughter Dorothy.

Not only did W. B. run the creamery, but he also devoted time to many civic causes and organizations. He was a founding member of the Westerville Lions Club and a director of Goodwill Industries. He also was on the Westerville School Board for 20 years serving as president of the board for several years. When the banks failed and the Bank of Westerville closed its doors during the Depression, he helped organize Citizens Bank in 1932 to assist local citizens and businesses with their banking needs. W. B. Johnston died in 1951 at the age of 78.

W. B. Johnston's children and grandchildren were involved with the operation of the Westerville Creamery during his lifetime and after he passed away.



**W. B. Johnston and family members.**

# Dewey Parker - Local Milkman



## Driver in Familiar Setting

Dewey Parker is in a familiar setting here — beside his milk truck. Parker will retire today after 48 years of service to the Westerville community. It was back in 1918 when Parker first began driving a horse-drawn wagon.

As the Westerville Creamery grew it acquired local dairy companies including Low's Dairy in Westerville which delivered milk to customer's homes. With the ownership of Low's Dairy, came the services of Dewey Parker. Parker was the local milkman for over 40 years and served several generations of Westerville residents. The Public Opinion said about his career, "he has delivered milk to the doorsteps in the village for so long that he says he has brought milk to babies, seen them grow up, go to school and is now bringing milk to their babies."

For many years Dewey delivered milk to Westerville residents using a horse-drawn wagon. He would start his route around 2 am and deliver until mid-afternoon. Customers came to expect extra services from their faithful

milkman, leaving him notes in their empty bottles asking him to check on their chickens or do other chores around their homes. Dewey stated, "Yes, I have turned into a good cook and well-trained farmer along with my duties of delivering milk."

Today we don't have a Dewey Parker delivering milk to our homes. We can't put our empty glass bottles on our doorstep and wake up to find fresh full bottles of the white liquid. That kind of personal service has disappeared as the community has grown and times have changed.



## DAIRY FARM FACTS

- The number of dairy cows in the state decreased by 55% over the 30-year period from 1965 to 1995.
- Currently there are approximately 260,000 dairy cows in the state.
- Ohio's farms have the lowest average herd size in the United States, averaging 58 cows per farm.
- Consumer demand for milk is going up approximately 2.2% annually.
- Ohio has 76 milk processing plants.  
(like the Westerville Creamery)
- In Westerville the land that was once used to raise dairy cows now is filled with houses and other businesses.
- Because Ohio's supply of milk is decreasing, new processing plants are not being built in the state.

# Activities

## Math:

On page one you read about the Westerville Creamery separating the cream from skim milk and sending the cream on to manufacturers to make ice cream. When was the last time you had an ice cream cone? How much did it cost? Do you think an ice cream cone cost more or less in 1900 than today?



## Language Arts:

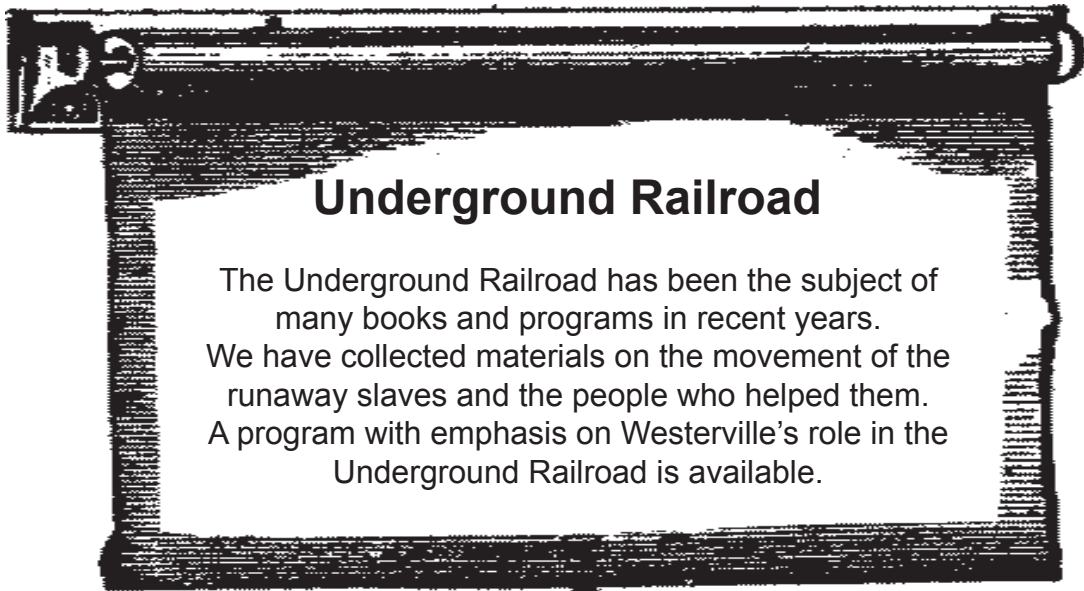
On page four you read how Dewey Parker delivered milk to Westerville residents. Now Westerville residents go to a variety of stores to purchase their milk. Some people buy their milk at a grocery, others purchase their milk where they buy gas for their cars. Write about where your family buys their milk and what else can be purchased at that store.



## Art:

On page five you read that the number of dairy cows in Ohio is decreasing and in Westerville the land which once had dairy cows now has houses and businesses. Draw a picture showing cows grazing where your house is now.





## Underground Railroad

The Underground Railroad has been the subject of many books and programs in recent years. We have collected materials on the movement of the runaway slaves and the people who helped them. A program with emphasis on Westerville's role in the Underground Railroad is available.



## Schedule a local history program for your classroom

We will share the early history of Westerville with stories of the first settlers and Native Americans in the area. Your students will hear about the milestones of transportation in our community and see old photographs from our collection.



Any of the above programs can be scheduled by contacting **Beth Weinhardt**, coordinator of local history, at the **Westerville Public Library** at 882-7277 ext. 160 or by e-mail at [bweinhar@westervillelibrary.org](mailto:bweinhar@westervillelibrary.org).

## NEW: Ohio History Day for 4th & 5th Graders

Ohio History Day is welcoming entries from 4th and 5th graders on April 26th at Columbus State Community College. In the past the social studies competition was open to middle school and high school students. The theme for the 2008 contest is Conflict and Compromise. The categories for entries include documentary, website, exhibit, performance and paper. Students can create an entry in any of these categories using a topic of their choosing which fits the theme for 2008.

**For further information or questions please contact Megan Wood at the Ohio Historical Society 614-297-2343 or [mwood@ohiohistory.org](mailto:mwood@ohiohistory.org).**