

Commercial and industrial facilities and residential neighborhoods often co-existed in Washington throughout history, although that fact is difficult to visualize today. Of the many dairies operating from the 1880s to the 1950s within the city, Thompson's Dairy was perhaps the largest, located on the northern half of the block surrounded by U, 11th, 12th, and V Streets, NW. The business was first established in 1881 by local farmer John Thompson at 7th and L Streets, NW.

Thompson and his family members expanded his business and eventually moved into a new building that opened in November of 1928 at 2012 11th Street, NW. By then they were producing 5,000 gallons of milk a day, available for individual home delivery throughout the entire city. He encouraged and taught local farmers to provide richer and cleaner milk than had previously been on the market, and his business would thrive at that location until 1971. Annual tours opened the plant to hundreds of local school children, parents, teachers, dietitians, and dairy farmers.

Horse-drawn dairy wagons were used long after gasoline delivery trucks were the norm, for two reasons. The most obvious was the quietness of a horse and wagon in the pre-dawn hours, at a time when

Scenes from the Past

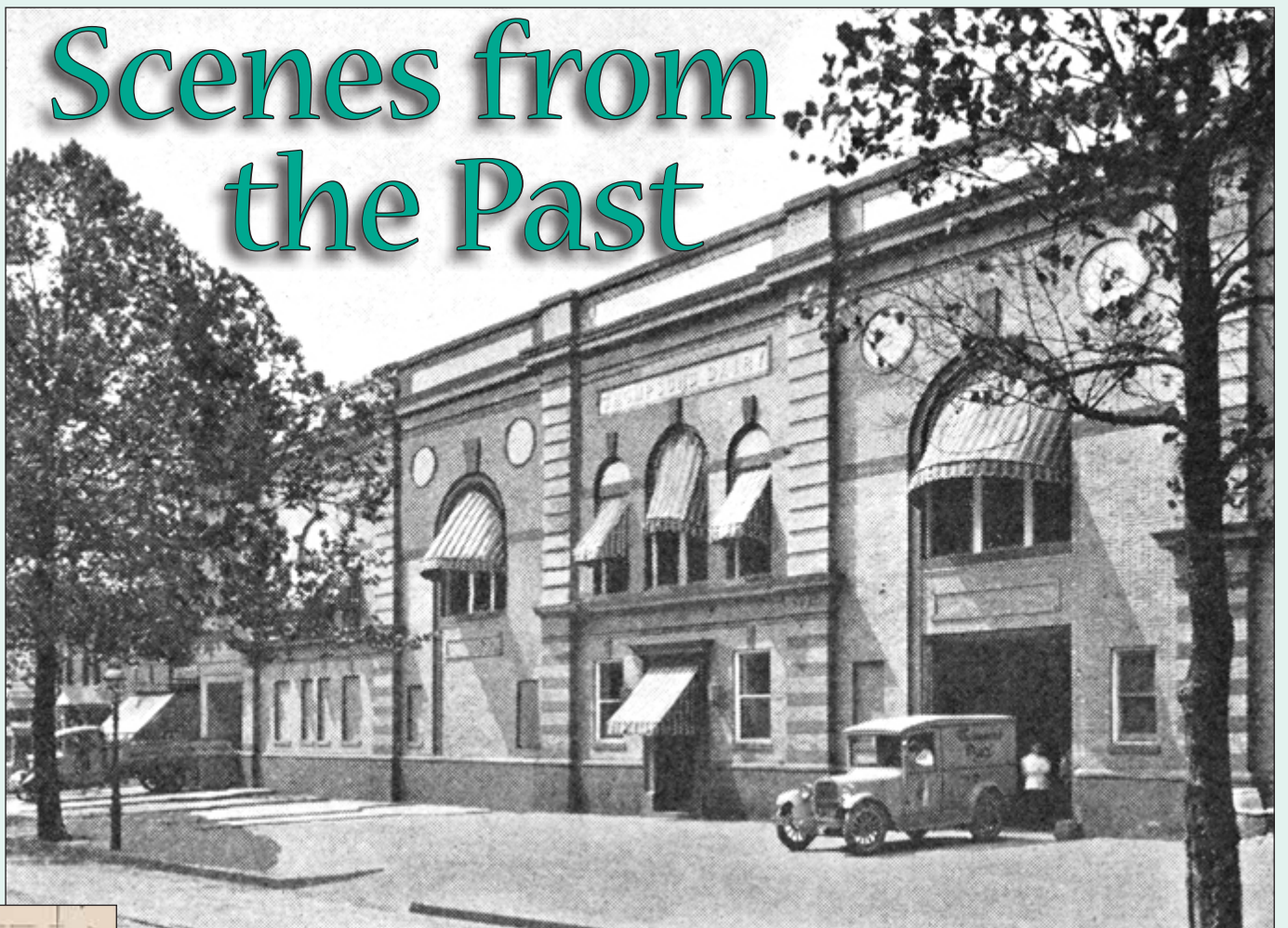


photo —Kelsey & Associates private collection.

Above, Thompson's Dairy building as pictured in the 1930 Book of Washington.

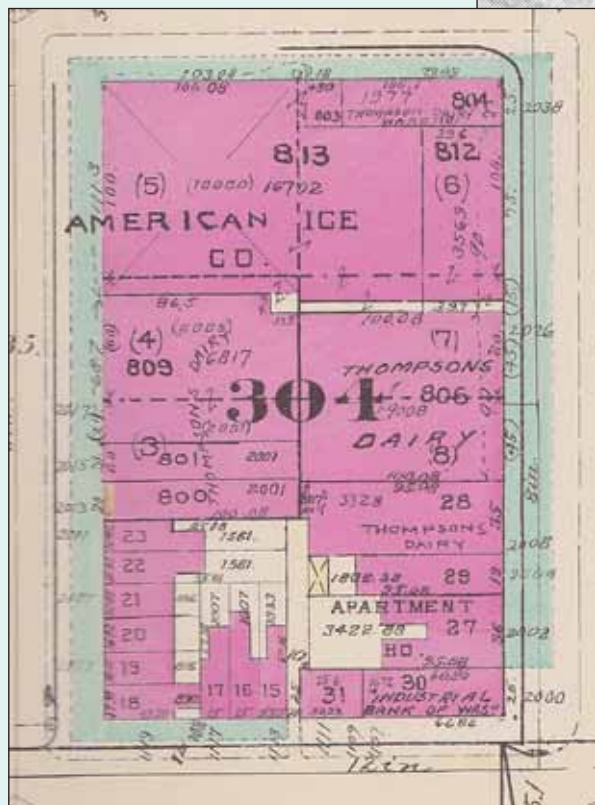


photo —Kelsey & Associates private collection.

This 1939 Baist map shows the location of the various Thompson Dairy buildings in the block surrounded by U, V, 11th and 12th Streets, NW, adjacent to the American Ice Company.

motor trucks lacked a mufflers and frequently backfired. The second reason was that it only required one person to deliver the milk — horses learned the route and would pull the wagons all by themselves from house to house as the deliveryman focused on moving bottles from the wagon to the doorstep, and was essentially a passenger on the delivery wagon during the route.

At its peak period of production in 1965, Thompson had 580 employees and a fleet of delivery trucks serving an astonishing 535 delivery routes. Drivers received enameled awards for safe driving every year or so, which can be found for sale on such popular auction sites as eBay.

Thompson's Dairy was one of the few dairies nationwide that utilized an expensive bottle that was designed with a bulb at the top that allowed the cream that

Cont., SCENES FROM THE PAST, p. 7

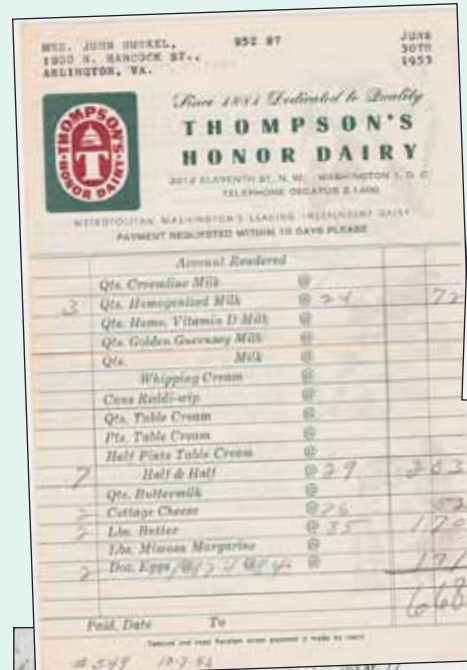


photo —Kelsey & Associates private collection.

At left, this receipt from June of 1930 shows the pricing of various available products produced at Thompson's Dairy that year, along with recipes on the back for which their milk products were recommended.



photo —Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division.

Thompson's Dairy building as seen in this undated view of about 1925.



photo —Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division.

Thompson's Dairy fleet of horse-drawn delivery wagons, circa 1925, photographed at the base of the Cardozo High School grounds on Florida Avenue, between 11th and 12th Streets.

SCENES

From p. 6

would separate and rise to be poured off before the milk, saving the housewife the task of separating the two elements.

The receipt pictured here from the dairy on June 30, 1953 reveals that two-

dozen eggs then cost \$1.71, two pounds of butter were \$1.70, while three quarts of milk cost just 72 cents. The back of the receipt cleverly contained recipes for various Thompson products, including Cottage Cheese sandwiches, sour cream chocolate cake, and chocolate milk. The receipts apparently changed every month, for the June edition also featured ideas for

a July picnic.

The plant eventually relocated to the suburbs in 1971, with portions being razed, while others were converted into automobile repair garages. Today it is the site of a modern condominium building located adjacent to the Industrial Bank at 11th and U Streets. □

—Paul Kelsey Williams
Historic Preservation Specialist
Kelsey & Associates, Washington, DC

Copyright © 2011 InTowner Publishing Corp. & Paul Kelsey Williams. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited, except as provided by 17 U.S.C. §§107 & 108 (“fair use”).