

## T. L. HAECKER, THE FATHER OF DAIRYING IN MINNESOTA<sup>1</sup>

DURING THE EIGHTIES Minnesota forged ahead from fifth to first rank among the leading wheat-producing states of the Union. In the following decade, it not only retained this pre-eminent position, but nearly doubled its output. By 1909, however, Minnesota had fallen back to third place, and it produced only a little more wheat than it did twenty years earlier. The dictates of geography, plus the operation of the forces constituting the agricultural revolution, had driven wheat westward and beyond the borders of the commonwealth.

The more discerning realized the inevitability of the decline of wheat as the chief basis of Minnesota's agricultural wealth. The vagaries of the weather, the ravages of grasshoppers, chinch bugs, and rust, and the depletion of the soil resulting from constant single-cropping emphasized the precariousness of depending upon wheat as the main cash crop. During the nineties, agricultural leaders advocated the diversification of crops and the need of livestock to rebuild the soil, and a noticeable start was made toward the development of what proved to be the ultimate substitute for wheat, namely dairy products. Although it has been said that dairying pushed out wheat, it is much more in accordance with the historical facts to say that dairying gradually developed to take the place of wheat raising, an industry long

<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented at the joint session of the Agricultural History Society and the American Historical Association at Philadelphia on December 29, 1937. The background and interpretation are based on extensive research in the history of dairying in the Northwest. Many of the data here used were further substantiated by an interview with Professor Haecker on August 14, 1937. In the general research as well as in the preparation of this paper, the author has been ably assisted by his friend and associate, Mr. Horace H. Russell.

marked for decline. It was in 1891, when the farmers were groping for a solution of their agricultural dilemma, that the man who was destined to be known as the "Father of Dairying in Minnesota" began the twenty-seven years of leadership and direction which helped the state become one of the world's greatest centers of butter production, both in quantity and quality.<sup>2</sup>

A knowledge of the background of Professor Theophilus Levi Haecker is essential for an understanding of his contributions. He was born of German immigrant stock, the fourth of twelve children, in a log cabin in Medina County, Ohio, on May 4, 1846. Seven years later, his parents moved to Cottage Grove in Dane County, Wisconsin, where he received his initial training in the line of agriculture to which he contributed so much. Years later, Professor Haecker made reference to this fact in the following words:

Mother was an expert buttermaker, and her butter was always spoken for by the year by the best customers in Madison at highest prices. She was my teacher not only in dairy manufacture, but in production. I put up the first cow shed on the old farm. . . . Under her direction we gradually built up quite a nice little dairy. Cattle then were grazing on the Commons, so I had to go for the cows while they were at large during the summer. Mother was superlatively orderly, neat, and industrious, and having spent so much of my younger days with her I received a training which was very helpful in my personal experience in dairying.<sup>3</sup>

In the fall of 1863, Mr. Haecker entered the University of Wisconsin, and the following March he enlisted in the

<sup>2</sup> The most careful biographical sketch thus far issued appears under the title, "Theophilus L. Haecker, Apostle of Agricultural Coöperation," in William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 4:402-407 (St. Paul, 1930). See also E. B. Johnson, *Forty Years of the University of Minnesota*, 339-341 (Minneapolis, 1910); W. A. Gordon, "Theophilus Levi Haecker," in the *Dairy Farmer*, August, 1929, reprinted in *Ten Master Minds of Dairying*, 49-53 (Des Moines, Iowa, 1930); Charles F. Collisson, "Minnesota Dairy Development Started by Haecker, Now Leads Nation," in the *Minneapolis Tribune*, October 8, 1922; and A. J. McGuire, in the *Land O' Lakes News*, January, 1925.

<sup>3</sup> "Boy's Life of T. L. Haecker," in *Hoard's Dairyman*, 73:734 (August 10, 1928).

Thirty-seventh Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry. On his return from the grand review in 1865, he worked on farms at Cottage Grove and in Franklin County, Iowa, where his parents had moved, attended the University of Wisconsin in Madison for short periods, and taught rural schools. In 1871, he established a newspaper at Ackley, Iowa, which he continued until the financial crisis two years later. Ultimately, however, he returned to Cottage Grove and began to acquire and develop what came to be known as the Silver Springs dairy farm.

Shortly after Mr. Haecker began farming for himself early in 1874, the newly inaugurated governor, William R. Taylor, an old neighbor for whom he had occasionally worked when a boy, asked him to come over to his farm. In the course of their visit, the governor said: "I know you are a young Shanghai, but I remember when you used to work for me you put everything in its place. You did your work well, were dependable and industrious. I need such a person in my office." Taylor was a Democrat and the Haeckers were Republicans. After deliberation, Mr. Haecker became a clerk in the governor's office on May 11, 1874, and so satisfactory was his work that he remained there, regardless of the political tide, during the seventeen years covered by the administrations of Taylor, Harrison Ludington, William E. Smith, Jeremiah M. Rusk, and William D. Hoard. For twelve years, Mr. Haecker was largely responsible for advising the governors on all petitions for pardons and commutations of prison sentences.<sup>4</sup> The fact that no criticism was ever raised against him in this work is an eminent tribute to his fair-mindedness and integrity. This daily contact with the men who controlled and fashioned the destiny of a great state was an experience of inestimable value to him.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Professor Haecker; *Hoard's Dairyman*, 73:736; T. L. and A. L. Haecker, "Life and Work of T. L. Haecker," in *Hoard's Dairyman*, 72:686 (July 10, 1927).

During these years at the Capitol in Madison, Mr. Haecker continued to manage his Silver Springs farm and to add to its acreage. The land had been in the hands of his mother's family since 1841, and his grandfather had been one of the first in Dane County to give special attention to dairying. Because of Mr. Haecker's inquiring mind and progressive outlook, his farm became a veritable experimental station. Red clover, whose value as a hay and soil builder was then little known in Wisconsin, was planted in 1878. Studies were made of the influence of protein rations on the quality of pork and of mixed rations on the production of dairy cows. These experiments were based largely on the German authorities, Wolff and Lehman, whose standards had been accepted for perhaps half a century, but it was not long before Mr. Haecker began to question the emphasis that scientists placed on proteins in the feeding of dairy cows. Mr. Haecker was a pioneer in the use of cottonseed meal for livestock. He also conducted gravity cream experiments which definitely showed that milk from certain cows creamed quicker than that from others. The farm had the first patent churn and one of the first silos in southern Wisconsin. The superior butter made on the farm found a ready market among the officials and prominent citizens of Madison.

Mr. Haecker was an active and influential leader in the Cottage Grove community. He served as secretary of the local grange and also of the grange council for Dane County. A hall was built co-operatively on his farm. Having studied literature relating to the Rochdale system of co-operation, he, with his neighbors, pooled orders for groceries, wagons, harnesses, and other farm equipment, and bought them in quantity at wholesale. Some of their farm products were marketed in the same way. A co-operative creamery was also organized and operated by the community, and its experiment in co-operative fire insurance ultimately spread to include most of the county.

Mr. Haecker also took an active part in the popular movement which urged the need of practical education at the college of agriculture of the University of Wisconsin in Madison. As a result, men like W. A. Henry and Stephen M. Babcock were put in charge of its early work. Mr. Haecker maintained close friendships with these pioneers, and in 1882, he was commissioned to inspect some of the best dairy herds in the East and select full-blooded stock for the foundation herd of the University Farm. It was his first opportunity to observe in an extensive way the nexus between the physical types of cows and their production.<sup>5</sup>

Mr. Haecker left the Capitol in 1891 as the incoming governor, George W. Peck, had been forced to pledge himself to make wholesale dismissals. Shortly thereafter, Mr. Haecker enrolled at the university for the first session of the dairy school — the first of its kind in the world. Within a week, the instructor in the factory course discovered that Mr. Haecker knew as much about practical buttermaking as he did, and the pupil was made an assistant. Shortly thereafter, he was also put in charge of the home dairy work. Such was Professor Haecker's career prior to his arrival in Minnesota at the age of forty-five.

In 1891, the regents of the University of Minnesota took steps to develop a dairy school in the college of agriculture. As their representatives, Knute Nelson and John S. Pillsbury went to Madison to investigate the pioneer work in dairy instruction and research that was being done there. They became acquainted with the practical achievements of Mr. Haecker, and on their recommendation, he was appointed instructor in dairying for six months at a salary of seventy-five dollars a month. Accordingly, in the fall of 1891, Professor Haecker removed to St. Anthony Park in

<sup>5</sup> Haecker, in *Hoard's Dairyman*, 72:686, 708 (July 10, 1927); "The Dairy Form and Constitution," in *Hoard's Dairyman*, 30:12 (February 17, 1899).

St. Paul, taking with him the dairy cattle which he had been authorized to purchase for the University Farm and also his own Jerseys. From the day of his arrival until his retirement from active teaching and research twenty-seven years later, he devoted all his physical and mental energy to the popularization and scientific development of dairying in the Northwest. During this time, he dealt with practically every phase of the industry from the care of the herd to the manufacture and sale of the finished product. Every question concerning dairying was referred to the cows at the University Farm, and they were required to supply the facts for the answers. Each cow was fed separately and each and every kind of feed was weighed for every feeding. Every milking was weighed, tested, and taken to the laboratory for extensive analyses. Records of everything relating to the production performance of the cows, including the weather, were kept.

Shortly after his arrival in Minnesota, Professor Haecker began to urge that butter rather than cheese be emphasized as the main dairy product. In reply to the question as to why he did so, he said: "I had been down in Green County, Wisconsin, and seen what they were doing there with cheese. It seemed to me that Minnesota should turn to butter rather than compete with Wisconsin in cheese as it had the advantage in freight rates."<sup>6</sup>

It was early realized by Professor Haecker that Minnesota would have to offer butter of high quality if it was to capture and develop markets outside its borders. The dairy school, therefore, gave early and special attention to improved methods of production and to the control of conditions surrounding buttermaking. A special feature which resulted in the speeding up of the quality objective was the short course, given during the winter months, on the latest methods of making butter and cheese. It afforded training for the older men who were already engaged in the industry,

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Professor Haecker.

whereas the full-school-year courses prepared the younger men. A total of some twenty-five hundred trained creamery operators went out from the division of dairy husbandry of the University of Minnesota to give enlarged and practical effect to Professor Haecker's research and demonstrations, and year after year, practically without exception, awards for butter quality made at national and international exhibitions went to the products of men trained in this school.<sup>7</sup>

As a teacher and director of work on the farm campus, Professor Haecker had no patience with indolence and slipshod methods. Some students may have regarded him as a severe taskmaster, but the rank and file were inspired by his leadership and carried his message of co-operation and better dairying to practically every part of Minnesota and the Northwest. Professor Haecker never spoke of the dairy cow except in a tone of reverence and respect. To him, the dairy cow was the most wonderful animal in the world; she was God's special gift to mankind. Again and again, he admonished his classes: "Treat the cow kindly, boys. Remember she is a lady—and a mother."<sup>8</sup>

Minnesota is now the main center of co-operatives in America.<sup>9</sup> Co-operation of the consumer type made its first appearance in the Middle West on a considerable scale during the Granger movement, but in the fields of production and marketing it made little headway until the last decade of the century. At that time three inventions—the silo, the centrifugal cream separator, and the Babcock but-

<sup>7</sup> *Farmer*, 39:1395 (October 8, 1921). The number is substantiated in a letter from J. B. Fitch, chief of the division of dairy husbandry, to Dean W. C. Coffey, dated February 8, 1938. It is now in the possession of the writer. For early recognitions of the importance of Professor Haecker's work, see *Hoard's Dairyman*, 28:927, 35:608, 38:849 (January 7, 1898, July 22, 1904, September 20, 1907); and *Farm, Stock and Home*, 22:470, 589 (October 1, December 1, 1906).

<sup>8</sup> A. J. McGuire, in *Land O' Lakes News*, January, 1925; "Professor Haecker Honored," in *Farm, Stock and Home*, 41:35 (January 15, 1925).

<sup>9</sup> *Congressional Record*, 80:6739-6762 (May 6, 1936).

terfat tester—which greatly facilitated the economic and scientific development of dairying became generally available. To these forces for improvement in dairying, a movement for co-operation in production and marketing was added, and it was Professor Haecker who gave it direction and impetus.

In the course of an extensive field survey of dairy conditions in Minnesota in 1892, Professor Haecker found that the Danish community of Clarks Grove in Freeborn County was doing a number of things co-operatively. Its co-operative creamery had been organized in 1890, largely through the efforts of a farmer named Hans Peter Jensen, who had seen the remarkable progress made by co-operation in dairying while on a visit to the homeland. The development at Clarks Grove was initiated under religious auspices, and there is basis for the view that the religious revival in Denmark, part of the quickening of national consciousness following the loss of Schleswig-Holstein in 1864, was responsible for this early co-operative, which was destined to be used as the pattern for similar efforts throughout Minnesota and the Northwest.<sup>10</sup>

Professor Haecker was much impressed with the spirit and the practical success of the co-operative activities at Clarks Grove.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, what he saw there substan-

<sup>10</sup> T. L. Haecker, "The Story of Clarks Grove," a manuscript in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society; E. B. Kirkwood, "Minnesota Butter Used on White House Table," in the *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 18, 1915; Franklyn Curtiss-Wedge, ed., *History of Freeborn County*, 460 (Chicago, 1911); Floyd Sorenson, "The Development of a Cooperative Community, Clarks Grove, 1863-1912," in the *Evening Tribune* (Albert Lea), July 6-11, 1934; J. A. Vye, "Clarks Grove Cooperative Creamery," in *Minnesota Farmers' Institute, Annual*, 1913, p. 71-76; "Clarks Grove Creamery a Pacemaker," and A. W. Warren, "Clarks Grove Puts Its Religion into Business," in *Farmer*, 43:726, 744 (May 16, 1925), and *A Brief Historical Sketch of the First Danish Baptist Church* (Clarks Grove, 1923).

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Professor Haecker; *Hoard's Dairyman*, 69:14, 23 (January 16, 1925); *Farmer*, 39:1395, 1403, 43:35 (October 8, 1921, January 10, 1925).

tiated and confirmed the hopes which he had held for his home community back in Wisconsin. He made a careful study of the situation and then took steps to promote the idea of co-operative creameries of the type found at Clarks Grove. The basic principles to be emphasized were one man, one vote, and the return of all profits to patrons in proportion to the amount of produce each supplied. He believed that organizations embracing these concepts would be the salvation of dairying in Minnesota.

Accordingly in March, 1894, the Minnesota Agricultural Experiment Station issued a press bulletin on "Organizing Co-operative Creameries" which Professor Haecker had prepared. In explanation, he wrote: "The great interest that has sprung up in the minds of the people of Minnesota on the subject of diversified farming brings so many letters of inquiry to the Dairy School on the subject of organizing co-operative creameries, that it is found impracticable to answer them in detail by letter." The bulletin was designed to give "such information and suggestions as will be calculated to place this industry on a firm basis." It included a succinct analysis of the reasons why previous attempts to establish creameries had failed and a brief discussion of the number of cows needed to support a successful creamery. It also provided a sketch of a desirable type of organization, including model articles of association and bylaws based largely on those of Clarks Grove.<sup>12</sup>

For over twenty years, Professor Haecker mingled with the farmers of Minnesota, teaching them how to co-operate in the production and marketing of their products without dictation from outside interests. In accordance with a conviction, buttressed by experience, he merely pointed the way. Going into communities that were far enough advanced to

<sup>12</sup> *Hoard's Dairyman*, 69: 14 (January 16, 1925). In his later writings and addresses, Professor Haecker occasionally stated that his *Press Bulletin* was issued in March, 1893; the extant copies which have been examined, however, bear the date March, 1894.

support creameries, he told the farmers about the experiences of other places and left the actual organization of co-operative associations to them. In essence his philosophy is expressed in these words: "Self help is the best help, and the only help that counts. No man could call me a promoter. I was only a teacher and could only show them how. They had to do the rest themselves."

When Professor Haecker began to advocate co-operation in dairying, there were not over four co-operative creameries in existence in Minnesota.<sup>13</sup> At the time of his retirement in 1918, there were 630, and the privately owned enterprises had learned that successful creameries must serve the farmers well. Today, Minnesota has 638 co-operative creameries, 36 co-operative cheese factories, and 6 co-operative fluid milk stations. Wisconsin started creamery production of butter about the same time as Minnesota, but made less rapid progress, and it is Professor Haecker's view that "they let in outside stockholders who in time gobbled up the creameries and set cooperation back many years."<sup>14</sup>

Professor Haecker traveled widely over Minnesota, speaking at county fairs, farmers' institutes, dairy conventions, and similar meetings. For many years he edited the dairy column for *Farm, Stock and Home*, one of the best agricultural papers ever published in the Northwest, and contributed to the *Dairy Record* and other similar publica-

<sup>13</sup> Like so many of the problems of firsts in history, and especially in agricultural history, the question as to which is the oldest co-operative creamery in Minnesota is difficult to answer. Steps were taken to organize the Vernon and Zumbro co-operative creameries at a meeting on January 6, 1889. Since the members were unable to agree on the location, they decided to organize two creameries. Both began operation in May, 1889. The Biscay creamery was organized on February 7, 1889, and a creamery at Chatfield on December 27, 1889. Although the organization meeting for Clarks Grove was held on January 29, 1890, its present building has over its doorway the legend, "Minnesota's First Co-operative Creamery." *Farmer*, 39:1395, 1401, 43:726, 727, 732 (October 8, 1921, May 16, 1925).

<sup>14</sup> Minnesota Farmers' Institute, *Annual*, 1919, p. 256; *Congressional Record*, 80:6739 (May 6, 1936); *Farmer*, 39:1403 (October 8, 1921).

tions. In fact, it is not an exaggeration to say that practically all the main sources of data relating to the agricultural history of Minnesota have articles by Professor Haecker. Year after year, he answered specific inquiries on dairy problems and constantly urged farmers to establish co-operative creameries, to select dairy type of cattle, and to adopt scientific feeding standards.

Professor Haecker was one of the first to establish and emphasize the relationship between form and function in the dairy cow.<sup>15</sup> This fact he developed by classifying cows according to type, production, and the profit netted above the cost of feed and care. Scientific study showed that single-purpose dairy-type cows were better and more economical producers. Thus, he was able to establish a standard for judging dairy cows which is successfully applied to all cows, regardless of breed, in estimating their production from outward appearance.

Today, as one travels through Minnesota, he sees herds of Holstein cattle, almost to the exclusion of other breeds, wherever dairying dominates. Prior to 1910, however, the farmers who were going into the dairy industry had not reached a decision as to which was the most suitable breed. In what may be termed the battle of the breeds, Professor Haecker took a deliberately cautious but decided stand. His experience dictated that he should advocate dairy types for dairying, and that there was no room for the so-called dual-purpose cow. His support went to the Holsteins, and years later, he explained: "I decided that the Jerseys and even the Guernseys were too nervous and delicate for the average farmer. The Holsteins could stand ordinary feed and care, so I recommended them."<sup>16</sup>

The results of Professor Haecker's many years of experiments with feeds were summarized in his bulletin on *Feed-*

<sup>15</sup> Haecker, in *Hoard's Dairyman*, 48:632, 648, 72:760 (December 25, 1914, August 10, 1927).

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Professor Haecker.

ing *Dairy Cows*, which was first issued in 1913.<sup>17</sup> This publication placed him in the front rank of the great scientists who have dealt with agricultural subjects, and yet it was written so plainly and simply that every farmer could understand the contents. About eighty thousand copies of this bulletin were distributed by 1923, a circulation that probably equals that of any other experiment station bulletin.<sup>18</sup> The basic principle set forth was the economy of fitting the rations to the fat test of the milk produced. As part of his studies, Professor Haecker experimented to determine the influence of a change from barn to pasture feeding on the butterfat content of the milk. In this connection—and possibly also in a perplexed and somewhat discouraged moment—he once wrote: “Surely the ways of the cow are very strange. She does and she doesn’t, and then again she does neither.” The feeding standards popularized by Professor Haecker’s bulletin have been adopted in many parts of the world. In later years, he devoted considerable attention to the working out of similar standards for beef cattle.<sup>19</sup>

As a teacher, research worker, and leader, Professor Haecker had the foresight and judgment which enabled him to select the lines of investigation of greatest practical benefit and of most pressing need. Coupled with these gifts

<sup>17</sup> This was published by the Minnesota Agricultural Experiment Station as number 130 of its *Bulletins*. It was revised and enlarged in February, 1914, and reprinted in February and August, 1915, October, 1916, June, 1917, December, 1918, January, 1920, and September, 1921. See also T. L. Haecker, “Feeding Dairy Cows,” in *Hoard’s Dairyman*, 32: 898 (December 6, 1901).

<sup>18</sup> According to some sources, 120,000 copies had been distributed by 1921, and 175,000 by 1929. See *Farmer*, 39:1403 (October 8, 1921); Minnesota Agricultural Experiment Station, *Special Circular*, p. 43 (February, 1929). These figures are, however, too high, and apparently include the bulletins issued to supersede number 130. Fitch to Coffey, February 8, 1938.

<sup>19</sup> *Farm, Stock and Home*, 24:285, 308 (May 1, 15, 1908); *Hoard’s Dairyman*, 52:140, 72:792, 814 (August 25, 1916, August 25, 1927); *Farmer*, 36:894 (May 18, 1918).

were sincerity and common sense which enabled him to assume leadership not only of his professional colleagues but of the actual "dirt" farmers throughout the commonwealth. In retrospect, his decisions concerning Minnesota dairying seem so logical that the casual student may be tempted to assert that geography and economics alone molded the course of its development. Assuredly, however, his leadership and vision did much to negate the necessity of decades of chaotic trial-and-error experimentation before the actualities of the course which the development of dairying was to take were ascertained.

Professor Haecker, now in his ninety-third year, has lived to see his services given the wide recognition that they deserve. In 1909, he was a delegate to the international dairy convention at Budapest, and this honor afforded him the opportunity of personally observing dairying as practiced in Europe. Dairy organizations have tendered him testimonials of appreciation of his leadership and of their indebtedness to him. In 1923, the University of Wisconsin honored him as a national leader in the fields of cooperative dairying and cattle feeding. Six years later, a poll conducted by the *Dairy Farmer*, a magazine with a national circulation, selected Professor Haecker as one of the ten scientists of the world who had made the most outstanding contributions to the dairy industry.<sup>20</sup>

Best of all, his contributions have been honored in the adopted state which he served so well. In 1925, the new dairy building of the college of agriculture of the University of Minnesota was dedicated as Haecker Hall.<sup>21</sup> On

<sup>20</sup> "Prof. Haecker Abroad," in *Farm, Stock and Home*, 25:489 (August 1, 1909). For comprehensive statements concerning honors, see Folwell, *Minnesota*, 4:407; *Farmer*, 39:1391 (October 8, 1921); *Hoard's Dairyman*, 65:124, 68:608, 72:792, 80:353 (February 9, 1923, November 28, 1924, August 25, 1927, July 25, 1935).

<sup>21</sup> *Farmer*, 43:35 (January 10, 1925); *Hoard's Dairyman*, 69:14, 23 (January 16, 1925); *Dairy Record*, January 7, 1925; *Land O' Lakes News*, January, 1925; *Farm, Stock and Home*, 41:4 (January 15, 1925).

one of its walls is a bronze tablet which bears a striking medallion portrait of Professor Haecker and the following brief tribute:

In honor of Theophilus Levi Haecker, in charge of teaching and research in dairy husbandry, University of Minnesota, 1891-1918.

For his investigations in the nutrition of dairy cattle and his leadership in organizing co-operative dairying, the Nation is his debtor.

EVERETT E. EDWARDS

BUREAU OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
WASHINGTON, D. C.



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