

Bethinking of Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin County Historian



Thomas Page

PACKER OF HIGH GRADE

FRUIT, VEGETABLES, CATSUP
TOMATO PASTE, CIDER & VINEGAR

Albion, N.Y.

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THE THOMAS PAGE CANNING CO.

By THOMAS PAGE JR.

It is my pleasure to present a story this week written by Thomas Page Jr. about his father's canning Co. The illustration is of the works from an old company envelope.

The luscious tomato, once known as a poisonous fruit and later on called "the Love Apple" had its origin in the Western Hemisphere. The tomato then was introduced to the European Continent, most notably to Italy during the early part of the eighteenth century.

Thomas Gaetano Page, a pioneer in the canned foods industry, was born in 1877 in the township of Brant, New York, son of Dominic Gaetano and Concetta Page, who migrated from Palermo, Sicily in 1866.

Mr. Page, a connoisseur of exotic foods at the age of twenty-four, married Josephine Vacanti and moved to Albion, New York with the expressed purpose of experimenting with fresh vegetables, most notably the fruit of the tomato. Mr. Page realized the tomato's potentials as a tasty, succulent sauce, paste and puree. A cook shop for experimentation purposes was built adjacent to the Duffy-Mott apple cider plant located on Fruit Street (Just recently renamed Crimson Drive). It was there in that small shop that Mr. Page developed the unique recipes for the present popularity of the tomato paste along with tomato ketchup and other sauces. After registering these unique recipes with the Register's Office at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., Mr. Page built his first canning factory on the site of his cook shop on Fruit Street. With the eventual popularity of his canned tomato products being put on a commercial basis, Mr. Page expanded his business to a point where he built a second cannery. This cannery plant along with two large two-story warehouses was constructed on West Avenue just within the village limits of Albion at a cost of \$300,000.00. The plant, along with the warehouses, was completed in 1918 and employed three hundred local men and women during the canning season. (The property now houses the Agway Store and warehouse as well as Albion Carpet Gallery.)

Following the acceptance of his original recipes by the public for his tomato paste and tomato ketchup, the business expanded under the company's name of Thomas Page Canning Company. Mr. Page then ventured into other canned commodities including choice canned pears, peaches, plums, white cherries along with string beans, sweet peas and sweet corn. These canned products reached the public under the Pages Royal Kitchen labels.

In 1922, Mr. Page entered his canned products, most notably his original Tomato Paste and Tomato Ketchup in the European International Food Exposition held in Rome, Italy. In so doing, Mr. Page was awarded the highly desirable Gold Medal Award by the Governing Board of the European International Exposition for the excellence of his canned products. This Gold Medal was presented to him in 1923: "Pages canned food products have been awarded the Gold Medal and Diploma from the European Expsizione Del Progresso Industriale, Roma and Italian Government at Rome, Italy for their Superior Quality. 1923"

During the historic Wall Street Crash of 1929, Mr. Page unfortunately was forced into bankruptcy and the Albion Plant was shut down. Following this incident, Mr. Page was signed to a contract with the Ocean Spray Canneries in Boston, Mass. where he headed the supervision of its plants.

In 1934, Mr. Page resigned his position with the Ocean Spray Company and reactivated his own company under its new name of Pages Gold Medal Company at the Albion plant and continued to specialize in the highly credited canned tomato products that had previously brought him world recognition and acclaim.

Just prior to his sudden death in 1937, Mr. Page was experimenting with canned sauerkraut, attempting to create a sauerkraut that boasted a finer texture and more innovating whiter in color than the prevailing dull, yellow coloring of the potent and pungent (German origin) product.

As for the tomato and its by-products, it goes without saying that Mr. Page did indeed contribute greatly to the commercialization and world popularity of this once considered toxic berry. Even more importantly what would spaghetti sauce, pizza sauce and other by-products of the tomato be without the experimentation of what was at one time known as a poisonous fruit and later on as the "Love Apple"?

As a footnote, I would add that Mr. Page was not the first to produce any of the above products. He was however, an experimenter and in this way pioneered in the improvement and quality of these foods which brought him acclaim in 1923. — C.W.L.