

# THE BARRE CENTER CANNING PLANT

BY C.W. LATTIN

The photo taken by Fred Holt in 1934 shows the original Barre Center canning plant on Maple Street, which was built by Barton and Journal Salisbury between 1899 and 1901. Sixty years ago on April 13, 1946, these buildings were completely destroyed by fire.

In 1968, the Town of Barre celebrated its Sesquicentennial and published a booklet on its history. It is in this publication we find a chapter written by the late Austin Dale about the Barre Center canning plant. He indicates that before the old canning plant was built, there was a large sawmill located on the site powered by a steam engine. Within this old mill was one of the largest water wells in Orleans County having a 10-foot diameter. It was hand-dug 30 feet deep and laid up with large stones, but was also drilled another 30 feet, giving a total depth of 60 feet. This water supply was to become imperative for running a canning factory.

In the late 19th century, the Salisbury Brothers bought an apple press that they located in the old mill and powered by the steam engine. They produced here, custom cider and also made barrels, hiring about 10 coopers for several years.

In 1899, with the financial help of their uncle, Guy Salisbury, they formed a partnership under the name of Orleans County Canning Co. and built the factory in the upper photo. The two items packed at first were peas and tomatoes. Supposedly this plant was one of the very first canning factories in the state to use tin cans, which required the covers to be



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hand soldered. In 1920, after Journal Salisbury was elected commissioner of welfare, he sold his interest to his brother Barton.

In 1922, Wallace W. Dale bought the plant and continued in business under the name of Orleans County Canning Co. From this point on, new equipment was added, which increased the variety of fruits and vegetables being processed. Mr. Dale hired over 50 people and produced several thousand cases of packed food each season. The plant warehouse was also used to store wool which Mr. Dale bought in the county for the Boston wool market. He also stored and sold cedar shingles.

In 1934, Wallace Dale formed a partnership with his son, Austin, under the name of Orleans County Canning Co. They processed peas, cherries, tomatoes, tomato juice, tomato

puree, catsup and apples. During World War II, more than 60 percent of the production was for the Armed Forces.

Austin Dale states: "On April 13, 1946, the old wooden canning plant built by the Salisbury brothers, was completely destroyed by fire. Mr. Dale, when arriving home from a business trip in Indiana, immediately started building a new canning plant, of brick construction. Eleven weeks after the fire, the new plant processed the largest pack of peas in its history. This was done without a roof on the plant, as construction of the roof was completed later."

"After completion of the new plant, the production was now approximately two hundred thousand cases yearly, plus several thousand cases handled

from other packers. And the plant employed approximately three hundred people."

"In 1954, the partnership sold the plant to a group of growers, who had supplied the plant with fruits and vegetables for many years. The new group incorporated under the name of Orleans County Canning Co. Inc. The factory continued operation, as a canning plant, until early 1958."

In the fall of 1958, Irving Cooper and associates of Buffalo, purchased the factory and used it for storage. Later it was sold to Zicari Produce of Albion.

I'm told that at the time of the fire, there was a water tank which collapsed, spilling nearly 60,000 gallons of water which inadvertently helped put out the fire in the boilers of the factory.

Water was pumped by firefighters from a nearby quarry to help put out the fire. Many other buildings in close proximity to the fire including Grange Hall, church and several houses were saved, primarily, because of little wind of April 13, 1946.

*Notice: Guided walking tours of Mt. Albion Cemetery are given the third Sunday of each Month May through October with either Bill Lattin or Neil Johnson.*