

Alpenrose Dairy

By Tami Parr

For over a hundred years, Alpenrose Dairy in Portland has produced and distributed dairy products in the greater Portland area. The company has also provided a venue for sporting events and other entertainments for the public, including Easter egg hunts and Christmas in Dairyville.

During the late nineteenth century, political and economic turmoil in Europe caused many people to flee to the United States. Among them was Florian Cadonau, an eleven-year-old Swiss boy who immigrated to America with his family in about 1872. Cadonau married Agnes Zadow in Carondolet, Missouri, in 1886, and the couple moved to Oregon, a popular destination for Swiss immigrants during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries because of its fertile lands and mild climate. When Paul Ritter, the Swiss ambassador to the United States, was touring the state in 1912, he called Oregon “a second but a larger Switzerland.”

Southwest Portland was populated with several dairies, many owned and operated by Swiss and German immigrants, including the Raz Dairy (later called the Fulton Park Dairy), the Edelweiss Dairy, and the Silver Hill Dairy. Florian Cadonau purchased a dairy at Southwest 35th and Vermont (then known as Hoffman Road) in southwest Portland and in 1891 began delivering milk to Portland customers by horse-drawn buggy.

Florian’s son Henry grew up helping his father deliver milk. In 1916, he and his wife Rosina, the daughter of the Swiss consul to Portland, took over the business and established their own farm at Southwest 45th and Vermont, which they named Alpenrose Dairy. Over the next few decades, Alpenrose grew steadily, surviving the mergers and consolidations that were common in the dairy industry during those years. After a large fire in 1943 destroyed a barn and equipment, Alpenrose relocated to its current location on Shattuck Road in southwest Portland.

During the 1950s, Henry Cadonau created a baseball diamond for his son Carl and his friends on a corner of the family’s property, and the field became a venue for Little League baseball games. Alpenrose Dairy soon became a popular destination, with tours, a petting zoo, Shetland pony rides, and freshly baked cookies from Grandma Rosina’s farmhouse kitchen.

Carl Cadonau Jr. and Rod Birkland, great grandsons of Florian Cadonau, ran the Alpenrose Dairy operation. At its production facility on Southwest Shattuck Road, Alpenrose processes and packages its own brand of fluid milk, sour cream, and cottage cheese, and creates co-branded dairy products for other labels. Alpenrose purchases all of its milk from the Farmers Cooperative Creamery in McMinnville and sells about 1.25 million gallons per month.

There are now three baseball diamonds on the Alpenrose property, and the dairy has hosted the Little League Softball World Series for twenty years. The Alpenrose Opera House, which has a Skinner pipe organ purchased from Portland’s Civic Auditorium (now the Keller Auditorium), hosted events at its 630-seat concert venue.

In 2019, Alpenrose Dairy was sold to Kent, Washington-based Smith Brothers Farms. The sale marked the conclusion of a bitter dispute among family members, some of whom did not want to sell the business. Smith Brothers has continued to operate the dairy under the Alpenrose Brand, but familiar Alpenrose facilities including the Opera House, the baseball fields, Dairyville, and the Velodrome have closed permanently. In July of 2021, a variety of items from the former attractions Story Book Lane and Dairyville were sold at auction, marking the end of an era in Portland dairy history.

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