

## THE CANNING BUSINESS – A NEW DEVELOPMENT

### *Part two of a series*

By the late 1890's, the search was on for a more efficient and generally better way to can food than in "cap-hole" cans. George Cobb, Amos Cobb's son, was particularly interested in the possibility of an open top can that could be sealed without solder or acid, and he proceeded to experiment with such a can at the plant on East Church Street.

During the same time period, Max Ams and his partner Julius Brenzinger were working to refine a new process of canning, using ideas that had been developed in Europe. Ams had first obtained a patent for the manufacture of hermetically sealed tin-plated cans in which he packed Russian caviar, and he was working with Brenzinger to refine the process. Max Ams' preserving company was not far from the New York City offices of Charles Bogle, a fancy food importer and a man with money to invest, and who was an acquaintance of George Cobb. Eventually, George Cobb was able to interest both Bogle and Ams to join with him in the further development and refinement of the new can. This new can was made of tin plate imported from Wales, and with the use of Brenzinger's double-seaming machine that crimped the end and the can body together in five thicknesses, gave an airtight seal without the use of solder. The era of the open top can was at hand.

George prevailed upon his father Amos to try the new procedure, and in 1898 a line of the new cans was delivered to the Fairport plant. The cans were filled with pears and processed in the usual manner. Despite the explosion of a few of the cans, the experiment was a success. By the following year, a full line of the Ams machinery was at work in the Fairport plant. Nevertheless, the going was not smooth during those experimental years. Workers did not always fully understand the new process and they certainly were not experienced in the use of the new machines. Many spoiled cans were quietly slipped into the canal as a result. A disastrous pack of Bartlett pears in 1903 nearly led to the end of the new process, but it only resulted in a gentlemanly disagreement over who was at fault, the new can or the Cobb family. As far as consumers were concerned, they noticed with pleasure that black specks and bits of solder had disappeared, along with mashed and lacerated fruit that had been the result of stuffing the produce through the small hole in the top of the old cans.

With the success of the "ABC" team of Ams, Bogle, and Cobb, the experimental stage ended and the age of open top sanitary cans arrived with the organization in 1904 of the Sanitary Can Company. Charles Bogle was installed as President, Frederick Cobb as Vice-President, George Cobb as Secretary-Treasurer, and Max Ams as a director. The new company, with the help of the Fairport Loan Association, opened in the former Cox Shoe Factory building on Parce Avenue. The canning machinery was moved from the East Church Street plant and Charles Ayers also installed side-seaming machinery. As the process of can making became more and more mechanical, and the open-top or sanitary can became the standard, never again would food be packed in containers that were not airtight and used solder. With mechanization, the process was constantly being speeded up. The production of twenty five thousand cans was considered good for a ten-hour day, and in 1904, the company manufactured and shipped 6 million cans.

Meanwhile, the old factory continued to be used as a canning facility for several more years, and according to a 1904 news article, there were plans for additions to the facility. It was about this time, as well, that the first migrant workers were brought into town. Polish families from Buffalo were transported to Fairport and housed in 3 or 4 wooden sheds located along the



*American Can Company office circa 1912*

towpath across from the canning factory. When canning activities eventually ceased, the buildings were used for storage by the American Can Company.

The American Can Company, having been organized in 1901 by the amalgamation of a number of can companies, absorbed the Sanitary Can Company in 1908, partly in reaction to the Panic of 1907. Both Charles Bogle and George Cobb continued on with the new company in their New York offices.

*To be continued*