



*Mrs. H. Ranney at age 92.*

Lydia  
Chase  
Ranney  
1800-1901

pioneer  
teacher  
farmer  
centenarian

Excerpt from:  
When cheese was king : a  
history of the cheese factories  
in Oxford county by Edward  
Moore.

## Ranney Cheese Factory



*Mrs. H. Ranney at age 92.*

This story of Hiram and Lydia Ranney of Salford is one of great interest to anyone studying the history of the cheese industry.

The Ranneys were of New England stock. Mrs. Ranney, whose maiden name was Chase, was descended from one of three Chase brothers who came over on the Mayflower. She was born in 1800 in Mass. and in 1819 married Hiram Ranney of Vermont. They began dairying in Vermont and were soon sending butter and cheese from 25 cows to the Boston market. Their three children, Hiram, Homer, and Lydia were born there.

As a result of backing a relative's note they lost their entire property and decided to start over again in a new country. They drove to Quebec in a covered wagon, carrying their possessions with them, and remained there for three years. Hearing of better land and opportunities in Upper Canada, they again set out in October 1834 by covered wagon and drove westward for three weeks.

Arriving in Dereham township, they stopped for a few days to rest at Mr. Peter Hagels, one mile north of Salford. Mr. Hagel persuaded them to stop here and establish their home in that locality. The principal object in this advice was to secure a woman of Mrs. Ranney's education and ability to act as teacher for his own and his neighbours' children who were growing up with no schooling. The neighbours soon erected a log school house and we are told that Mrs. Ranney rode on horseback to Hamilton to obtain a license to teach. She was the first teacher in Dereham to receive a government grant and the school opened with about sixty pupils, several of whom were over twenty years of age. Years later Mrs. Ranney used to tell of some of her school boys shouldering rifles and taking part in the rebellion of 1837. It is interesting to speculate whether they acted as militia or rebels, as sympathies in South Oxford were divided.

Soon after their arrival, the Ranneys purchased fifty acres of uncleared land to which they kept adding until eventually they owned 700 acres in one block. Four years after their arrival they were again engaged in the dairy business with 25 cows and Mrs. Ranney gave up her teaching. As was the custom of the times she took charge of the butter and cheese making.

London was their cheese market at first and their dairy herd grew to over 100 cows, while their market expanded to include Toronto, Hamilton, Brantford, and Guelph. The story is told that in the beginning they took a load of cheese to London on an ox cart and sold it at .07¢ per lb. They kept a number of girls employed to do the milking, and as a means of keeping them occupied between milkings, the Ranneys maintained a large flock of sheep and had the wool spun and woven. Several young men learned the art of cheese making in the factory under Mrs. Ranney's instruction, and later became prominent cheese makers in the county.

The Ranney's daughter, Lydia, married James Harris who also went into dairying, and built a cheese factory on the property where the Elm Hurst Restaurant now stands at the junction of Highways No. 19

and #401. This Harris factory was built the year after Harvey Farrington built his Pioneer factory in Norwich. The Ranney cheese factory was entirely owned by the Ranneys and was used to process their own milk. On the other hand the Farrington and Harris factories, while privately owned, received milk from neighbouring farmers (called patrons) which the cheese factory owner made into cheese for a negotiated price. Some of this cheese was taken back by the patrons while the balance was sold. After deducting the cheese makers charges, the proceeds were divided among the patrons as payment for their milk.

It is not known when the Ranneys stopped manufacturing cheese. One son, Hiram Junior, died while still a young man and his widow later married Harvey Farrington who was a widower when he came to Canada.

The 1876 Atlas shows H. Ranney holding about 345 acres in Dereham as follows:

Lot 15, Concession 2 -	200 acres
North Half of Lot 14, Concession 2 -	120 acres approximately
Part Lot 13, Concession 2 -	25 acres approximately

The Atlas indicates a cheese factory located on the last named piece of land — located on the west side of Highway #19, 1 mile south of Salford. By this time, of course, Mrs. Ranney would be 75 years of age and they had no doubt sold about half of their property. In a special dairy edition of the *Sentinel Review and Dominion Dairyman* published in January, 1896, we have a picture of Mrs. Ranney at age 92 looking like a woman of 60. She was reported to be in good health, alert and able to answer her correspondence. There have been conflicting claims as to whether Eliza Wilson or Lydia Ranney was first to make cheese in Oxford County, but the two women themselves seem to have been quite unconcerned about the matter. These two immensely capable and practical women were true pioneers, not only of the cheese industry, but in every sense of the word.

The Ranneys were the first cheese makers to turn out oversize wheels of cheese of whom we have any record. This form of promotion and advertising was repeatedly copied through the years. One of Ranney's "Big Cheese" productions was said to weigh 1200 lbs.

Information from *Sentinel Review and Dominion Dairyman*, January, 1896.

## Salford Cheese Factory



*Salford Cheese Factory, Former Salford School on the left was used as the curing room and still stands on Highway 19 south of Salford.*

Salford has been known for its cheese makers since 1870 when Homer Ranney was listed as a cheese manufacturer here. Before this, his father Hiram Ranney had been involved for many years in large scale cheese making from his own herd of cattle. The Ranney factory at Salford is shown on the 1876 atlas map as being on the west side of the Ingersoll road (Highway #19) on Lot 13, Concession 2, back from the road.

LYDIA CHASE RANNEY

1800-1901

Born in Massachusetts in 1800, Lydia Chase grew up with the daily chores of cheese and butter making. Fortunately for cheese lovers across Canada, Lydia came to be the founder of Ingersoll's cheese industry and the first cheddar cheese maker in Canada. In a time when milking was "woman's work", Lydia proved her energy and resourcefulness as the operator of a business which supplied cheese for many residents of Oxford County and beyond.

When Lydia married Hiram Ranney in 1819, they purchased twenty-five cattle and established a cheese business in Vermont. Lydia's organizational skills and dairy "know-how" soon resulted in the Ranneys selling cheese and butter to the Boston market. Later, a bad business deal with relatives caused the Ranneys to lose their land, making it necessary for them to seek new property.

In a covered wagon, Hiram and Lydia travelled through Lower Canada (now Quebec) and stayed there for a few years. Moving on through Upper Canada, they eventually arrived in Ingersoll, and stayed with the Hagel family. Mr. Hagel recognized Lydia's refinement and education and as a result, he persuaded her to remain at Hagel's Corners to teach the local children. Lydia had been a school teacher in Vermont, and did not mind the idea of organizing a school. Soon after, the Ranneys bought a fifty acre farm five miles south of Ingersoll and built their own house, using a combination of wood and clay bricks.

Lydia rode into St. Thomas alone on horseback to secure her teaching certificate for practice in Canada. She taught in a little log school house from 1834 to 1842, earning the title as the first school teacher in the area. The school where she taught in Salford received the first legislative grant in the county.

Gradually, thoughts of the dairy business turned Lydia's interests away from teaching. In 1842, she began making cheese in a lean-to at the back of the Ranney plank house. Three cows were kept in front of the house, and Lydia did all of the milking and cheesemaking herself, while Hiram farmed.

Soon the business became more and more profitable, Lydia making the cheese and Hiram transporting it to markets in the county. The herd was eventually expanded to 100 cows, and at their business peak, the Ranneys owned 700 acres, a large farm for that time.

When Ranneys' cheesemaking operation became larger, they gave classes in cheesemaking to young women and men. Lydia, a school teacher through and through, made sure that her fourteen milkmaids knew exactly what to do. As making cheese was not an all day operation, the Ranneys started a flock of sheep on the side. When the hired milkmaids were not busy milking cows and making cheese, they were taught by Lydia to spin and weave.



#### WHO SHOULD MILK...MAN OR WOMAN?????

I am not a fault-finder or at least I have not yet attained that name, but I do object to women milking...not because they don't do it right, but because it is not a woman's place to be running after the cows. Women who attend to their household duties rightly, have no time to attend the cows...I have heard some men say, 'My wife says a man is too dirty to milk', and I didn't much wonder it by the husband. That is a very good way to raise dirty boys...I would say to my fellowman, remember the old rhyme:

'A man's work is from sun to sun,  
But a woman's work is never done.'

from the Ingersoll Chronicle  
Dec. 7, 1871

The Ranney cheddar cheesemaking was the first of its kind in Canada, and the Ranneys kept busy with the production and sale of their cheddar. Lydia and her girls made cheeses weighing up to 1000 pounds for display at fairs around the area. Regular trips to Guelph, Hamilton, and London were made by Hiram over the bumpy roads in a horsecart. A 120-mile round trip to Hamilton via the Old Stage Road took four days by wagon.

Over the years, the Ranney operation influenced others to follow similar endeavours, and cheese factories appeared across Oxford County. There were outside forces also. Prior to 1850, the United States was well advanced in scientific methods of the dairying trade. When the American Civil War began, trade routes from the United States to Britain were often blocked by patrol ships. As a result, the Americans could not ship cheese to Britain. This proved advantageous for Canada, for with a ready market like Britain, cheesemaking boomed. Cheese was added to the scant list of Canadian exports: timber, fish, and furs were previously the chief trade between Great Britain and Canada. Coupled with the right climate and soil for dairy cattle, Oxford County was a prime place for the cheese industry. By 1870, Canada was shipping over 300,000 boxes of cheese to Britain annually.<sup>1</sup>

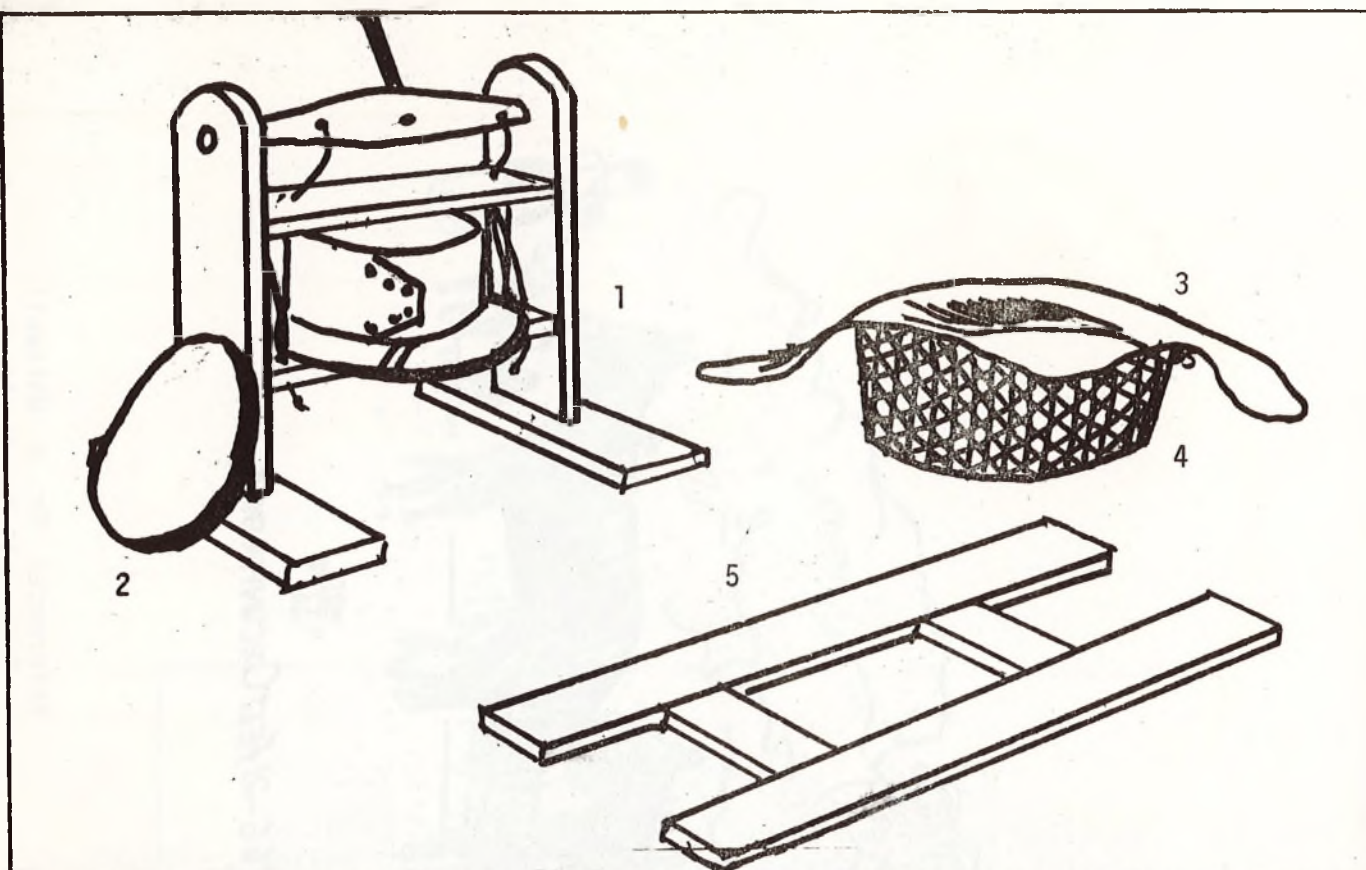
Before Lydia Ranney's death in 1901, she saw her modest efforts at cheesemaking grow into a county-wide industry with factories replacing farm methods, and an export trade bringing renown and prosperity to Oxford County. Her profound influence on Oxford County can be seen by the growth of cheese factories--in 1904, there were 200 cheese factories in Oxford! Lydia encouraged a certain Mrs. Charles Wilson to enter the cheese business, and James Harris, maker of Ingersoll's "Big Cheese", was trained by Lydia also. We owe our thanks to Lydia Ranney, who through capable organization and constant energy, made a lasting contribution to Oxford County.

Lydia Ranney appears to have been a pioneer woman worthy of great respect. Although in the rural setting women often were the equals of men as they ran the home and farm as "partners", it was unusual at this time for a female to initiate and manage a farming-related enterprise. Even today, farming and dairying are male-dominated fields. Lydia was truly remarkable because she succeeded as businesswoman and housewife at a time when the latter provided full-time employment for most women.

### THE BIG CHEESE

In 1866, James Harris, Hiram Ranney and George Galloway worked together to make a huge piece of cheese, suitable for showing at Saratoga State Fair in New York. It took two days to make, and weighed 7300 pounds. Lydia had to work hard that week to help her husband with his share of the cheese: much of the Ranneys' milk went into its making, for the Ranneys were as eager as any for a part in the operation. The publicity at the fair was a means of advertising the excellent quality of the Canadian cheddar cheese.

Note: Although James Harris usually received the praise and recognition for making the Big Cheese, it should be remembered that at one time he sat in Lydia Ranney's kitchen, learning the art of cheesemaking from that capable, industrious lady!



The drawing displays an old fashioned cheese press with ropes and windlass to press the whey from the curds which are held in the wooden hoop resting on drainboard. (#1) The wooden hoop or "folla" rests against the press. This is used to press down on the curds. (#2) The cheese cloth bag drains the curds into a big openwork black ash cheese basket (#3, 4) which in turn rests on the cheese ladder or "tongs" (#5) which rests over the whey pail.

from The London Free Press  
January 15, 1949

### Recipe for the Making of Cheddar Cheese

Milk is brought in and poured in very clean steel vats. Heated pipes are connected to the vats. Liquid rennet is added, also some colouring liquid, as ordinarily cheese is white.

All is heated to a high degree and constantly stirred so that the milk will not burn and stick to the bottom of the vat. With the constant stirring and the heat, thick curds form in the milk which sinks to the bottom of the vat. The balance is called whey, which is run off and fed to the pigs. Salt is used to season. The curds are cut and pressed into blocks. The cheese is wrapped with a cloth and put away until it is cured, and ready for use.

To make their cheese, a rather complicated procedure to go through, they killed a calf. It's stomach was taken out and thoroughly cleansed to get rennet, which is necessary for cheese making.

Sweet milk was boiled and a solution was made of the rennet. This was added to the milk while it was boiling. This in turn made the milk curds. The milk would separate when the curd was formed. This was called whey, and was drained off. The curd was cut up, using salt to season it and was then put in a press. This in turn removed the balance of the whey and was pressed into a solid block of cheese, to which perhaps a little colouring was added. This was called Cheddar Cheese and was in great demand at that time.

Harry Whitwell, Ingersoll Our Heritage

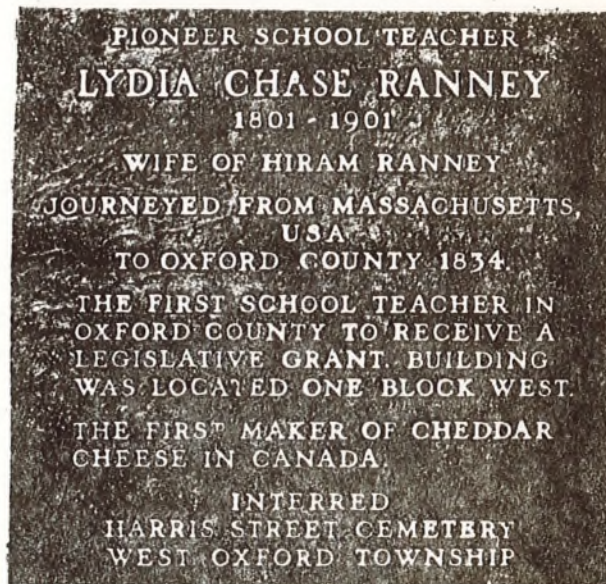




LYDIA CHASE RANNEY

From a photo,  
courtesy of  
Mr. P. Ranney

PLAQUE AT SALFORD  
PUBLIC SCHOOL,  
SALFORD, ONT.



FOOTNOTES

1 from the files of the Ingersoll Cheese Factory Museum, Ingersoll, Ontario

# The Ingersoll Chronicle

DAILY EDITION.

INGERSOLL, ONTARIO, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 1901.

PRICE

## DEATH OF A CENTENARIAN

Mrs. Lydia Ranney Passes away  
at the Age of One Hundred  
Years and Five Months.

### SKETCH OF HER CAREER.

A Pioneer in the Dairy Business  
The First School Teacher  
in the County — The  
Trials of a Pioneer  
Life.

The death occurred at Hagersville on Wednesday of Mrs. Lydia Ranney, formerly of Salford, at the ripe age of 100 years and five months. For some time past deceased has been residing with her granddaughter, Mrs. (Rev.) G. B. Harris, at Hagersville, and has been quite feeble for a considerable length of time, but was able to be around and the day before her death partook of a meal with the family. The end came suddenly and unexpectedly.

Mrs. Ranney's maiden name was Chase. She had as an ancestor one of the three Chase brothers, who came over from England in the Mayflower. She was born in the state of Massachusetts, on the 22nd of Sept., 1800, and was married to Hiram Ranney, of Vermont, in 1818. The young couple went into dairying in Vermont and were soon sending the butter and cheese from twenty-five cows to the Boston market. Here were born to them three children, Hiram, Homer and Julia; but having signed notes to accommodate a relative, they lost most of their property, and resolved to make a new start in a new land. Settling out with a covered wagon, and in it their all, they drove into Lower Canada and there remained for three years. Hearing of cheap land and better prospects in Upper Canada, they again packed up, and in the month of October, 1837, drove for three weeks westward. Stopping for a few days rest at Mr. Peter Hagel's, of Hagel's Corners, Durham Township, they were persuaded by him to settle down and make for themselves a home nearby place. Mr. Hagel's principal object was to secure a woman of Mrs. Ranney's ability and education to teach his own children and his neighbors' children that were fast growing up without any school privileges. Under Mr. Hagel's leadership the neighborhood turned out and soon had up a log school house. The school opened with about sixty pupils, several of whom were over twenty years of age. Mrs. Ranney rode through the woods to St. Thomas, to be examined as a teacher, and on horse back returned duly qualified, and opened the first school of which we have any official account in the county of Oxford. She talked of her boys who shouldered rifles and took part in the rebellion of '37, and gave the names of several of them, thrifty farmers not far from the place where the old school house stood on the winding cow path, how the main road through the village of Salford. Soon after they came to the country they purchased the first fifty acres of land and Mr. Ranney went to work hewing out a home. To this fifty they kept adding until they finally owned 700 acres in one block. Four years after they came to Durham they had succeeded in getting into the dairying business again with the old number of twenty-five cows they once had in Vermont.

Mrs. Ranney, after the year '39, when her trustees were Peter Hagel, Hiram Sinclair and Henry Hill, gave up teaching and gave her attention to home duties. London was their market for cheese and butter, and as time went on, their cows kept increasing until a wag of the village of Salford said he and Mr. Ranney had the most cows of any two men in the county—he owned one, and Mr. Ranney one hundred.

Mrs. Ranney has been a widow for the past thirty years, and has outlived all her children. Her grandchildren still living are Sullivan B. Ranney, Esq., of Salford; Judson Harris, Esq., of Ingersoll; Rev. E. J. Harris, B.A., of Toronto; Mrs. Wm. Craig, of Toronto; Mrs. (Prof.) S. J. McKee, of Brandon College, and Mrs. (Rev.) G. B. Davis, of Hagersville.

### OUR DEAD QUEEN.

The Chronicle has secured a quantity of excellent lithographs of our late beloved Queen, which will be