

JOHN ANDREW SCHUNESSEN AND THE RAINIER CREAMERY

By CATHERINE TOLLESHAUG

John Andrew Schunesen was born December 19, 1860 and grew up on a large dairy farm in Skane, which is the southern tip of Sweden. The fertile level farms there are really a continuation of those found in Denmark and separated by the Skagerrack. His home was just thirty miles from Malmo where the trains and traffic from the north countries are ferried across into Denmark; and it was to Copenhagen that he was sent to school. His father was of the landed gentry type who contributed nothing at all in the way of labor and expected the farm to keep him in style. His mother was the one to do the planning and at his father's early

death she took over the management of the estate. There was a creamery on the farm and when John Andrew came home from the university with an agricultural and veterinarian degree he was ready to assume his right as the eldest son, as head of the family. But his mother who was so able, and who had two other sons and five daughters to educate was very skeptical of the new ideas he brought home from the college, and was unwilling until he had proven himself capable, to relinquish her authority, and so the members of the family worked together until one by one the other children left the home to find other occupations and when John

Andrew was twenty-eight years old and only the younger son was left at home, he felt that now was certainly the right time for him to assume his birthright but his mother still was not ready and John Andrew packed up his belongings and with hurt pride and disgust left for America. The family was not to hear from him until he had made a name for himself in the land of golden opportunities.

In 1888, Mr. Schunesen arrived in Moorhead, Minnesota and there he immediately met Anna Samuelson a pretty little nineteen year old girl from Darlana in Sweden, and letting no grass grow under his feet they were soon married. The opportunities did not prove as golden as he had dreamed and they worked in restaurants and whatever job came to hand. Then someone told him that the dairy industry out in Oregon needed skilled men and in 1890 they came to Portland. Contacting the agricultural department which was attached to the McMinnville college, he was sent into Tillamook to Woods, located about where Pacific City is today. Mrs. Schunesen was never physically strong and she remembered the trip by horse and wagon from McMinnville to the coast as seemingly endless but she had taken a small white puppy with her that whined all the way and comforting the puppy kept her mind off her own misery.

Mr. Schunesen was to manage the then called Blue creamery and their living quarters were a large room over the creamery which was built upon piling at the very edge of the inlet. Their table was a packing box and nail kegs served as chairs and other furnishings in keeping. The farmers brought the cream to the creamery by road to the rear but the

most came by boat thru the inlets. There was plenty of leisure time and they spent many happy days fishing and visiting with the scattered neighbors. Mrs. Schunesen remembered these days as some of the happiest in her life, and the people of that community as the most friendly, and kept a special place in her heart for a Grandma Compton who was a mothering angel and midwife to the community. It was Grandma Compton who eased her through the trying time when a son was born, and because medical care was so far away, lived but a few days. There was an opening in the college creamery at McMinnville and the Schunesens moved to McMinnville. Another son was born here but lived only a few months. A professorship was open and Mr. Schunesen was offered the post but the agricultural course was an uncertain department and the pay mostly the honor of being called professor. so he declined.

A call came into the college for help in establishing a creamery at Rainier, Oregon and Mr. Schunesen came down to investigate and to talk things over with John Dibblee and Dean Blanchard who had built a building and were ready to add a new industry to Rainier. The prospect looked good and in April of 1896 the Schunesens moved to Rainier taking housekeeping rooms in the John Dibblee home. Things moved slowly for the community itself was not exactly a dairy location and the following spring they took a leave of absence and went to Portland where a daughter was born to Mrs. Schunesen in the Good Samaritan hospital and he named her Katherine for the mother he was too proud to contact. Assuring himself that mother and child were healthy they came back home

to Rainier and moved to a little red house near the creamery, where two years later a daughter Helen was born. Mr. Schunesen negotiated with the owners and purchased their interests in the creamery.

Cream was brought in from the few scattered farms around Rainier and now that rail connection had been completed in 1898 between Astoria and Portland, farmers from the Goble and the Mayger-Quincy district began to ship cream in by train. The river boats stopping at every little cove or station brought cream in from the Washington side of the river. Mr. Schunesen managed the work single handed, meeting train and boat with a two-wheeled hand cart. The Schunesens moved again into apartments in the Andrew Clark home and then to a house owned by Mary Pomeroy. Mr. Schunesen was town marshal, street lighter, school clerk, town hall janitor and was kept so busy that the times he was at home the children had to tip-toe and whisper so as not to disturb him. In 1904 Mrs. Schunesen's mother and brother came to make their home with them and Mr. Schunesen took the brother as his first helper. The big boats docked at the creamery dock and it became a ritual with Mr. Schunesen to meet the boat. If the boat was late, so was his noon meal, or eaten hurriedly so that he could get back in time. "Here comes the Hassalo," or "here comes the Harvest Queen" and in the evening he listened for the Iralda's voice as it swung into dock from Portland.

Mrs. Schunesen became active in Lodge work and in the Methodist church and Mr. Schunesen in town affairs and although folks usually respected his opinions, they didn't always appreciate his dictatorial manner in presenting them.

About this time three young Danes came to Rainier to start a soap factory and because Mr. Schunesen spoke their language they became frequent visitors at his home. One, Nicholas Blumensaadt was a camera enthusiast and took pictures of the Schunesen children which he enclosed in a letter to his sister in Denmark telling of his visit with the family. The sister read the letter and showed the pictures to some friends among whom happened to be a sister of Mr. Schunesen and so a letter came from the sister which Mr. Schunesen did not answer, but which Mrs. Schunesen carefully put away among so many little things she collected and treasured and with her help Katherine began a correspondence with the family in Sweden.

Butter was shipped in barrels of brine to Alaska and the surplus was shipped into the wholesale houses in Portland. Ice cream became a new product and ice tank, cold rooms and equipment were added and the big diesel engine in the shed will never be forgotten for many a night a wake was kept coaxing the oily thing to cooperate.

By 1910 the business supported three employees and Mr. Schunesen contracted with Harry Brouse to build the large roomy house adjacent to the Pomeroy house and the Schunesens moved in in the fall, and early the next year Mrs. Schunesen surprised everyone by having another daughter, naming her Mary in honor of Mary Pomeroy who cared for Mrs. Schunesen.

All the changes that came so fast in the next few years everywhere, came also to Rainier, . . . electrical equipment . . . new machinery . . . the automobile . . . and with the opening of the Columbia River Highway, com-

petition began to be felt. By 1914 Katherine had a beau and Michael Tolleshaug came to work in the creamery summers, while he attended Pacific Lutheran College in the winters. Both Katherine and Helen were sent to the State Normal school, for Mr. Schunesen believed a woman should have a means of earning her own living. Katherine began teaching in the Rainier school and in 1918 married Michael Tolleshaug who shortly answered the draft call and was sent overseas. Labor conditions were uncertain and Katherine resigned her contract for the following year and went to work in the creamery and with the help of Mr. Clifford Clark who came down from Tacoma to manage the creamery work and with the assistance of ever changing green help, managed to keep things going until the war was over and Mr. Tolleshaug came home. Mr. Tolleshaug went with truck and established direct delivery routes in the nearby towns—Scappoose, St. Helens, Clatskanie, Vernonia and Cathlamet.

Helen married Levi F. Austin and went to live at White Bluffs, Washington where Mr. Austin was developing a peach orchard.

The Tolleshaugs built their home by that of the Schunesens so as to better care for their needs and by 1927 the Tolleshaugs had three sons. Longview was being developed that later would create another market and in 1930 Ole Titland, a nephew of Mr. Tolleshaug came to work with them. The business grew and old equipment needed replacement but Mr. Schunesen insisted on clinging to the old and there followed several years of doing things the hard way until in 1936 he took Mr. Tolleshaug into partnership and a new building was built and new equipment added.

New methods and new products became necessary. The creamery purchased the bottle milk route of the J. C. Skeans dairy and began to bottle milk. Cold storage lockers were installed. The cream pickup was changed to milk pickup and new trucks and drivers were added. Cheddar cheese became another new product and the Dean Blanchard warehouse to the west was converted into a cheese plant. Cheese was marketed under the Rainier Maid brand and they began to make cloverbloom brand cheese for Armour & Co.

Mary came home from the university to be with her parents and married Frank Hollihan, moving to Portland. The Tolleshaug boys grew up, went to Oregon State and then into the service. After the war the boys came home to take a place in the business. A larger market was needed and the business branched out into Longview when the boys purchased the Standard Dairy there.

Mr. Schunesen passed away in 1947 at the age of 86 and the business was reorganized. It became a family partnership of the Tolleshaugs including Ole Titland. A new modern plant was built in Longview and all milk bottling done there, and a distributing plant added to care for the Rainier Maid products. A distributing plant was built in St. Helens to handle the products from both the Longview and Rainier plants.

Mrs. Schunesen passed away in 1954 at the age of 84 years.

Each year marks something new to be added—farm refrigerated tanks and refrigerated tank trucks to pick up the fluid milk were installed. Milk is picked up in the Warren-Deer Island area, a bit around Rainier and the tank trucks pick milk up on the Washington side as far down as Nassele.

At the present writing the Rainier Creamery has twenty employees, the Longview plant twenty-one and the distributing plant at St. Helens five.

This is the third generation to

carry on the business and there are seven members of the fourth growing up. The family does not own the business . . . that business with its ever increasing demands owns them.