

**Do you know the *CAMEMBERT CHEESE* which decorated the most famous tables of New York, Chicago, Miami, San Francisco, Philadelphia, at the end of the XIX<sup>th</sup> and at the beginning of the XX<sup>th</sup> century?**



## **THE ORIGINS OF THE CAMEMBERT CHEESE IN USA**

The processing industry of dairy products in the U.S. is very important. Its sales reach several billion dollars a year.

The origins of this industry date back to the early 1600s, when colonists brought dairy cows. During the next 250 years, the dairy industry remained craft or farm industry. The local farmers supplied milk, butter and cheese to the towns and the surrounding villages, and this even in the 1850.

Jesse Williams invented the modern method of industrial manufacturing of cheese and installed the first cheese factory in Rome in 1851, in the State of New York.

In France, the Camembert cheese is born during the Revolution, in the Pays d'Auge (the region of Normandy). A refractory priest of the Brie sought refuge with Marie Harel at her farm in Beaumontel. Thanks to advice of the priest she created a new cheese named after his home village "CAMEMBERT". In the early nineteenth century, the camembert cheese was manufactured in the nearby villages and sold only on the markets of Vimoutiers, Argentan, Lisieux and Caen.

In 1854, the completion of the railway link Paris-Lisieux took actively part in the development of Camembert. Then in 1863, during the inauguration of the railway link Granville-Paris, Emperor Napoleon III tasted this cheese and liked it very much. He made send camembert in Paris and took care of its national and international promotion.

Camembert were packed in crates and carried by carts to the closest railway stations from the cheese dairies. A few hours later the cheese was on sale on the Paris markets. So the proxies were responsible for reselling it to wholesalers, grocers and dairymen.



The railway links Rouen - *Le Havre and Caen-Cherbourg* ensured the departure of the cheese to distant destinations by ship, with *Le Havre-Southampton-New-York* route operated by French Line Co. and *Southampton-Cherbourg-New-York* route operated by the Cunard Line Co.




According to the book "Camembert national myth" from Peter Boisard, the camembert cheese was consumed on the transatlantic liners and its surpluses were sold on arrival. This camembert market initially came from the European immigrants clung to their food traditions.

In 1890, the invention of the round wooden box by an engineer named Ridel, revolutionizes packaging, storage and export of the camembert. From that moment it was easier to preserve the cheese and send it for longer distances.

At the end of the XIXth century there were many exchanges of goods between Europe and the USA, as the butter or the Isigny Small Swiss Gervais. In the USA, between 1895 and 1905 there was a tenfold increase in imports of the cheese. The demand for Norman Camembert cheese made from raw milk did not stop increasing.

Very appreciated by the New Yorkers this luxury item was reserved for the great restaurants of New York like the Mouquin's restaurant which in 1892 made bring the camembert cheese directly from Normandy. (see the menu of 1892 and the label USA10 deposited 09-04-1896).



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In 1900, in order to reduce export costs and supply quickly restaurants of New York, Julien Bessard du Parc, cheesemonger since 1894 in La Chapelle aux Pots in Oise (France), created a cheese dairy in Sidney, near New York.



Freed from the long voyage across the Atlantic, the camembert made in Sydney was sold less refined and more palatable to the taste of the majority of the Americans. Furthermore *Penicillium album* was gradually replaced by *penicillium candidum*, which removes the blue-reddish tint from Camembert cheeses in favor of the white uniform color and the less pronounced taste. Unfortunately it seemed that the climate of the region of New York does not facilitate the elaboration of this kind of cheese (see articles of 1895 of the newspaper "Throughout the world" and of the 25-01-1908 of the NY Times) and finally Julien Bessard du Parc had difficulty gaining the gastronomic favors of the Americans. His death in December 1906 precipitated the end of this American adventure. In May 1908, the "Phoenix Company" repurchased the cheese dairy that ran until 1921.



Also other companies like "The Borden's sales company" and "Kraft & Bros" started manufacturing industrially the Camembert cheese on American soil and distributing it throughout the country.

Exploiting all their ingenuity and creativity, the advertisements of this time competed strongly in order to captivate the attention of the consumers. Thus we can see the most varied graphics on the cheese boxes such as cows, dairywomen and bucolic landscapes that remind the origin of the cheese. Napoleon, Joan of Arc, the Eiffel Tower, the Arc of Triomphe, also appear on these graphics to remind of their homeland, France.



The designs of trade boats evoke the long journey that the cheese crossed.

A cook, a star, a blimp, flags, the presidents Roosevelt and Fallieres, all located between the Eiffel Tower and the Statue of Liberty in order to evoke the relationships that the camembert created between the French and the Americans.

Many graphics in the inside of the chic restaurants show the purpose of the product. Labels also show the various medals won in cheese makers competitions.

The Americans could identify themselves with the characters that appeared on camembert's boxes of "Les Yanks" or "Progress" and by unconsciousness got closer to the camembert cheese and bought it.

The used advertising slogans as "Here it is, the good and delicious Camembert", "Double cream", "Triple cream", "Made expressly for", "Finest Camembert", "Extra Quality", "The best cheese in the world", "With complete natural milk", "The real Camembert" pushed consumers to buy it.

The ancient boxes of Camembert did not always have Anglophone characters; it was thus difficult to identify all the French exporters. After manufacturing, the cheese could be shipped not only to Paris, Lyon, Marseille, but also in Havre in order to cross the Atlantic. Thus it was necessary to do some additional researches through books, archives of cities and companies in order to find the exporters and importers and retrace all the voyages made by these fragrant boxes.

Only a few exporters and some cheese dairies had published Camembert labels for the export as the prolific "Dairy Company of the Norman Farmers" which included several cheese dairies. They exported about ten different labels.

It was probably this group of cheese dairies which exported the greatest number of cheeses, followed by the cheese dairy de La Chapelle aux Pots, d'Orbec, several cheese dairies of Saint-Pierre-sur-Dives and then that of Aumale.

From 1900 to 1910 in Le Havre, Rousset Alphonse was the main French wholesaler exporter (especially until 1907). He worked hand in hand with Charles Percival, importer in the United States. The words "Perceval" and "Rousset" appearing on some labels give proof of their close cooperation. Alphonse Rousset shipped the cheese coming from the cheese dairy of The Chapel aux Pots, from the SLFN (USA24), from Norman Cheese dairies (NY01), and supplied several companies including the Beech-Nut Packing Co. (USA12).



The archived deposits of brand in Compiègne indicate that from 1908 Lenoble Edouard in Lisieux, Lenoble Aîné, and then Marais Paul shipped numerous brands to the U.S.

The principal American importers were Perceval Charles, The Mouquin Restoring & Wine Co, F. Delemare, John G. Nevmeister Co, F.X. Baumert and Co, Otto Roth & Co, Robin Packing Co, Weinberg To ridge & Egg Co, A.J.R. Co, W. Scott gr. John, Phoenix Cheese Co, Ehlenberger George & Co Inc, B. Delpeuch, J.L. Kraft & Bros. Co. Inc, Beech-Nut Packing Co, A. Reynolds, Kingsdale Dairies.

During the war 1914-18, the Camembert cheese supported the troops' moral and that even in the trenches. The tops of camembert boxes conveyed the images of propaganda which were supposed to give strength and a desire to live to the soldiers.

In 1917 the entry of United States into the war allowed young Americans to discover Camembert cheese.

In 1926 the fame of the Camembert cheese had been preserved for posterity thanks to an American, the doctor Joseph Knirim. He cured the intestinal diseases of his patients with this cheese. In 1926 he erected a statue of Marie Harel in Vimoutiers (Normandy). The statue was destroyed during the Second World War and then built again in 1956 thanks to donations from employees of Borden's Cheese Co.



Nowadays, the Camembert cheese is manufactured everywhere in France and in the world. Only the Camembert made from the fresh raw milk and manufactured in Normandy, has "a protected designation of origin" (in French "Appellation d'Origine Protegee" (AOP) and is recognized by gourmets. Today, the most important factories of Camembert cheese are located in Ohio in the United States. The Camembert cheese was a victim of its success!

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