

The History of St. Helena Hospital

Chapter VI - The Sanitarium Food Company

Granose, Nut-Cero, Proteena, Zwieback – words from a foreign language? No, these were some of the products produced by the Sanitarium Food Company which operated at St. Helena Hospital from 1898 to 1920. Thanks to the vision and entrepreneurial spirit of John A. Burden, business manager of the Hospital, a thriving health food industry was born.

Burden came to St. Helena in 1891. The twenty-nine year old business manager played a key role in the developing sanitarium and health food work. He followed with keen interest the work the Kellogg brothers of Battle Creek were doing in the production of health foods. Burden was sure that a similar industry would be profitable for St. Helena Sanitarium. In 1898 production began in a small building north of the old San building. The smell of freshly baked whole-wheat bread wafted over the valley as the baker and his assistant kept two ovens busy producing the hearty loaves. Demand was so great for the product that a larger facility was required.

There was no room on the side of the hill near the Sanitarium to add another building. In 1900 Burden had the opportunity to purchase eighty-five acres in Pratt Valley from Robert Pratt. By sealing the deal he not only purchased land on which to build the factory, but he also purchased Pratt's interest in Crystal Spring which doubled the Sanitarium's water source. The ten acres at the south end of the property was earmarked for sewage treatment. A few months later Burden sold the Pratt home along with the 65 acres between the food factory and the sewage plant to Ellen White. She named the estate *Elmshaven* and resided there until her death in 1915.

A four-story factory building was opened on Sanitarium Road in 1901. State-of-the-art machinery included two large reel ovens, five granose flake machines, a granose mill and a wine-press for making unfermented grape juice. Rol Rose, the manager of the facility for over 20 years, supervised thirty-two employees. Rose was a master baker, turning out all kinds of crackers in addition to whole-grain breads and biscuits. Zwieback was made by slicing bread and baking it again until all the moisture was removed. This crisp, dry bread kept and traveled well and it is reported that it was also very easily digested. According to one report, Gilbert Steck, a former chef at the Sanitarium as well as concert band director for a number of years, learned to cook and bake in the factory.

The employees worked three shifts around the clock to produce granose flakes and biscuits, Caramel Cereal Coffee (a hot beverage similar to Postum, made from roasted grains), peanut butter, grape juice, malted nuts, and Nut Cero and Nut Loaf—vegetarian meat substitutes which are today known as Nuteena and Proteena and are available at the College Market in Angwin. Along with the freshly-baked loaves of bread and crackers produced by the bakery, the granose, granola, cereal coffee and nut meats were then delivered to a number of vegetarian restaurants and health food stores operated by the Sanitarium. In an early marketing brochure, these facilities are listed as shown below:

With restaurants and health food stores in California and Utah, clearly the St. Helena Sanitarium had made its presence known near and far! Early plans for the business called for the production of dried fruit and the shipping of health foods to the Pacific Islands. There was little competition and the business thrived. In 1901 Burden left the San to move to Australia to develop a sanitarium and health food industry there. St. Helena's health food industry operated until 1920, when the food factory was torn down.

An interesting sidelight is that the Foothills Elementary School, today located on Sunnyside Road, had its start because the children of the food factory workers needed an education. Ellen White, who had four grandchildren living nearby, and other members of the community banded together to establish the Crystal Springs Elementary school, which opened in a building on Sanitarium Road in 1902. The school later moved to a location on Crystal Springs Road, and remained there until it was burned down by a disgruntled student on Thanksgiving night, 1935. The next year classes resumed at the current location on Sunnyside Road.

The school is still in operation, but nothing remains of the food factory except a few photos and some memorabilia. Recently a friend of the Hospital purchased on E-Bay a couple of bottles embossed with the words *Sanitarium Food Company*. These items will be on display during the 125th Anniversary Celebration in October. In 1907, after the Battle Creek Toasted Corn Flake Company was incorporated, Dr. J.H. Kellogg and his brother, Will offered the successful managers of the Sanitarium Health Food Company the chance to buy the West Coast rights to manufacture Corn Flakes. Who knows what the history of the health food industry at St. Helena would have been had the offer from the Kellogg cereal industry magnates in Battle Creek had been accepted.

Sources: 1) *The Vision Bold*, pp. 113-114; 2) a historical narrative from the 100th Anniversary Celebration; 3) <http://www.gilead.net/egw/books>; 4) *St. Helena Star*, Sept. 6, 2001, article on the 100th anniversary of Foothills School; 5) *Spectrum Magazine*, Jan 1977.