



Midhirst Dairy Factory

Mountain Rd, Midhirst

1892

Use:	Commercial	Historic Value:	3 out of 5
Materials:	Concrete, timber, iron roofing	Architectural Value:	- out of 4
NZHPT Registered:	Not registered	Technical Value:	1 out of 2
Legal Description:	Lot 2 DP 14836 Blk XIII Huiroa SD - Subj to & int in R/W -	Symbolic Value:	- out of 3
		Rarity Value:	- out of 2
		Townscape Value:	- out of 2
		Group Value:	- out of 2
		Overall Heritage Value:	4 out of 20



Local Midhirst farmers started a co-operative packing company, which salted, worked and packed into boxes the granulated butter that arrived there. However, this venture was not a success and so in 1892, a private Midhirst factory was built by Messrs Honnor and Crocket, with Mr. J.B. Veale being appointed manager and secretary. This was more successful, as the bush had been cleared enough for the scale of dairying to be increased sufficiently. It processed some 55,000 gallons of whole milk at peak, and manufactured lactic casein, roller buttermilk and butter. The factory had creameries at Beaconsfield Road, Salisbury Road, Waipuku, Rugby Road, Pembroke Road and York Road, which serviced the settlers for many years.

On the 13th April of 1895, a meeting of milk suppliers and creameries decided to form a co-operative to take over this operation, following the trend in the more-developed parts of Taranaki. As a result, the factory and creameries became the Midhirst Co-operative Dairy Factory. The new company had a capital of 4000 pounds, and paid 2612 pounds to Honnor and Crocket for the buildings. During the first few years of this operation nearly seven and a half million pounds of milk was received, and 306,182 pounds of butter was made.

In the 1896 season the company joined the Taranaki Co-operative Dairy Association. During the next season, it was decided to enlarge the factory and put in a refrigerating plant – to make the factory “*second to none on the Coast*”. A “Victor” turbine was also installed at the factory.

In 1910 a modest retail outlet was operated for the convenience of suppliers. Its success fluctuated, and in 1921 the company tried to sell it, with no success. However, by 1955 a new store was built, and it managed to have an annual turnover of 2.5 million dollars.

In 1912 the Company started to precipitate casein from skim milk, and four further creameries were opened. During the next season, the factory was also extended. These changes remained until 1924, when a new butter factory was erected on the north side of the Te Popo River, and electric power was installed in the factory and creameries. Mr. Alan Guthrie was the manager during these projects – also building a new creamery in Midhirst, a Casein Drying Plant in October 1928, a Workshop and Engineering Dept in 1930, a new office and starting a housing programme in 1934. These improvements were helped by the fact that the Dairy Company had become the major employer after the Midhirst branch of the Bank of New Zealand closed down.

During the 1920 season there was a proposal to erect a new Dual-Plant Factory, and a Casein Drying Plant. This proposal was realised in 1924, when a new butter factory was erected on the north side of the Te Popo River. Electric power was also installed into the factory and all the creameries at this time. Success of the factory continued, even with a disastrous slump in casein and butter prices, and the factory manufactured a peak output of 1500 tons of butter in the 1937 season.

A few years of division of suppliers as to whether the milk collection should be done by tankers, or stay as it was – going to the creameries first – ensued in 1955. This led to the company secretary producing a paper showing that it was more economical and logical to close all the creameries and use tankers, and so in 1958 this step in technology occurred after a unanimous vote towards it. From this time, a real team effort and pride in the company was generated, resulting in the Midhirst Company leading the New Zealand Dairy industry in

annual payout and product quality for many years.

In 1973, the company merged with the Taranaki Dairy Company, as it was assured greater financial return to its shareholders. In January 1974, the Midhirst Dairy Factory closed, in order that the casein and butter factories could be demolished in order to build a new milk powder plant. The specifications for this new three-story factory included the timber being *“the best of their several kinds, free from all defects and be straight gained, mountain grown and to the approval of the architect”* and the doors *“to be close fitting to prevent vermin”*. It had a total cost of \$7.5 million, and became the largest single dryer in New Zealand, processing a maximum of 795,600 litres of milk in 21 hours.

The ‘new’ factory is no longer in use, and the old factory is being used as an odds and ends shop. The size of the buildings make them impossible to miss, and as a result they act as a daily reminder of the importance and influence of the dairy industry in Taranaki.