

Oscar T. Bloom

by Lynne Belluscio

I read that the Museum Association of New York has been working with the producers of the television series "Mystery at the Museum" and they are looking for more unusual objects to feature on the program. I thought they might be interested in our gelometer which is on exhibit in the Jell-O Gallery. It was sent to us by the Atlantic Gelatin Company in Woburn, Massachusetts, where the gelatin for Jell-O is - - or I should say - - was made.

The factory has closed, like so many other facilities operated by Kraft Foods. Unfortunately, the closing has put 200 people of out work. The company was founded in 1919 when European sources for gelatin were interrupted by World War I. The gelatin is derived from the connective tissue of animal hides which were being

processed as leather in the nearby shoe factories. It was said that after the collagen for the gelatin was extracted, the hides could still be processed for leather.

Once the gelatin is created it has to be tested for its "bloom" which I have recently discovered, should be spelled with a capital B - - Bloom. (Actually, there is another definition of the word bloom and that is to dissolve gelatin. A recipe will say to bloom the gelatin.) The Bloom is the rigidity of the Jell-O to withstand the pressure of a little plunger that is pressed into the surface 4 mm deep.

The machine that tested the gelatin was called a gelometer and it was invented by Oscar T. Bloom - - thus "Bloom" with a capital B. From what I can find, he worked for the Swift Meat

Company in Chicago. I have found that Bloom has other registered inventions which includes a feeding bag for calves.

The patent for the gelometer was filed on April 11, 1923 and was granted on June 9, 1925. The machine is operated by an electro magnet. As the plunger goes into the gelatin - or any other substance - - it displaces gun shot which falls into a small beaker. The beaker is weighed. The more the gun shot weighs the higher the Bloom count and the stronger the gelatin. A strong Bloom reading is 300. I read in one report, that most American gelometers are equipped with plungers that are square on the bottom, but other countries have rounded plungers, which changes the results, but that takes the scientific information about gelometers to a much higher level.

A while ago, a Kodak engineer came to the museum to photograph the gelometer. He was on his way to a conference on gelatin in Belgium. Of course, the Bloom of gelatin was extremely important to Kodak when they were still making emulsion film - - the emulsion is gelatin - - and they were quick to point out that the quality of gelatin for film had to be of a much higher quality than the gelatin used for Jell-O.

Several years ago, I remember talking with Marge Sharpe, who worked in the test lab for a while. She said that it would take time for the Jell-O to set before they could test it. It was the rule that the Jell-O couldn't be packaged until the test was complete, but sometimes that didn't happen and a batch of Jell-O would be packaged. So much for quality control. I was told that today, the Bloom of gelatin is not tested with a gelometer. Rather, light refraction is used, but I have not been able to

find out much about that.

Our gelometer was shipped to California fifteen years ago, when I appeared on "To Tell the Truth." John O'Hurley was the moderator and the gelometer was on the desk in front of him. Of course the panelists had to determine which one of the contestants was the Director of the Jell-O Museum.

So I haven't decided whether I'll send in a proposal for Mystery at the Museum. It's really not a mystery, but it is an interesting story.

