

Malted Milk Balls

by Lynne Belluscio

Some of you have been following some conversations on Facebook “LeRoy Then and Now” about the “Jersey Side” which is the northeast side of town. One of the landmarks of the area was the large limestone building on Church Street at the railroad tracks, just before you go down to “Kansas.” The building in 1940 was an alfalfa plant, which had been established in 1938. The manager of the alfalfa plant was Jess Moulton, who was the first president of LeRoy Rotary Club. Later he worked at Genesee Brewery and when I started working at Genesee Country Museum in 1976, Jess had retired and he was working at the museum’s brewery. He was one of the nicest men who worked at the museum. The alfalfa plant was a huge building built of local limestone and had previously been part of the Bay State Cotton Mill. The huge building had been originally built for the Matthews Malting Company founded in 1874. By 1896, the LeRoy facility was the largest malting company in the world - - or so it was said. The barley was brought in from Canada by the railroad.

Malting is a three part process to change the starch in grain (usually barley or rye) to a variety of sugars that can be used in beer, whiskey, and a variety of other foods and beverages. First the grain is steeped in water for about two days and it begins to sprout. Then it is spread out on the floor and the sprouts are allowed to germinate. Finally, the sprouted grain is heated or roasted to stop the germination process. The point at which it is stopped determines the amount of sugar and enzymes produced and this will affect the flavor, aroma and color of the beer or other products. It should be mentioned that the heating process - - in fact the entire malting process had a certain amount of danger and necessitated a stone or brick building. The steeping process



1896 photo of Malt Company building on Church Street. Oatka Creek in the foreground.

and the germinating process, unless properly controlled, could produce too much heat, and the grain could smolder and eventually burn. The roasting process, in the presence of dust, could cause an explosion.

Malt is essential to make beer. It provides the sugar for the fermentation process. Hops are added for flavor and yeast to start fermentation. Beer usually contains less than five percent alcohol, but those beers that contain more than 5% are called lager or ale.

Malt is also used in the manufacture of malt whiskey. American and Irish whiskeys are required by law to be made only of malted barley and are called single malt whiskey. Rye whiskey, obviously is made from malted rye. Other varieties of whiskey can be made from unmalted grains, such as corn, but cannot be labeled as malt whiskey. In the United States, a malt whiskey is defined by law as a whiskey product produced at an alcohol by volume level not exceeding 80% from a fermented mash of not less than 51% malted barley and stored for aging in a charred new oak

barrel. If the whiskey has been aged for at least two years, and contains no added coloring and flavoring, and has not been blended with neutral spirits or other types of whisky, then the bottle can be labeled as a straight malt whiskey. A blended whiskey has to contain at least 51% straight malt whiskey.

Malt is also used to make malted milk. In 1887, English pharmacist, James Horlick trademarked “malted milk” which was made from a malt-based supplement and dried milk. It was considered a health food for infants and invalids and became popular with explorers who needed a light weight supplement to carry with them on expeditions. The beverage became known as “Horlicks.” Another malted milk beverage was Ovaltine. When malted milk was added to ice cream, it became known as a “malt” and led to the popularity of the “malt shop.” Powdered malted milk became the basis for a variety of candies known as malted milk balls, usually with a chocolate coating on the outside and sometimes with a sweet candy shell. In England, malted milk

balls are called “Maltesers” and were introduced in 1937. In the United States, Nestle introduced “Whoppers” in 1949.

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