

# Calumet County Historical Society Museum

**Open Sundays June-September 1:00 to 4:00  
or by appointment**



## Kossman Dairy History Recalled at Museum

By Ray Mueller

One of the updates at the Calumet County Historical Museum during the past year was the completion of a dedication to and recognition of a man who made history in the county and well beyond.

What's on prominent display in our north building was made possible through the efforts of Oscar Kossman more than a century ago. So who was Oscar Kossman?



Oscar, who was born in Sheboygan and then moved with his mother and siblings to Milwaukee after his father died, came to Calumet County in 1915 as the first official milk tester – an on-farm program through which the milk produced by each cow was weighed and samples were taken to test for the percent of butterfat, which was the standard measure for determining a dairy cow's productive value until the 1980s.

Before he chose to take his position in Calumet County, Oscar became familiar with agriculture as a teenager while working for his uncle on a farm near East Troy in Walworth County. After high school, he worked for another farmer in Walworth County for four years, leading to his enrollment in the Farm Short Course at the University of Wisconsin in Madison.



While taking that course, which is still offered during the winter, Oscar distinguished himself in the eyes of two of his professors – H.C. Searles and Roy Harris. Searles was a traveling dairy instructor for the Wisconsin

State Dairymen's Association in the eastern part of the state and Harris was in charge of



the state-wide program.

The two men recruited Kossman to do pioneer work for Dairy Herd Improvement (the formal name for milk production and quality testing) that continues today. Oscar chose Calumet County because he had heard “so many fine things about it.” At the time, a Chilton Cow Testing Association had just been formed. With just over 30 members, Oscar could visit each member's farm once a month with a few days of doubling for weighing the milk and taking the sample for butterfat testing with the new Babcock unit that was developed by Stephen Babcock at UW – Madison.

Most of the herds in the testing association had 15 to 25 cows at the time. Only four of them had a mechanical milking machine (electric power was nearly two decades away). Most of the cows were milked by hand.

Kossman was paid \$30 a month and was also eligible for “keep” – which consisted mainly of hay and oats for the horse which pulled his wagon. That wagon is on permanent display in our north building along with a picture of Kossman.

With the United States involvement in World War 1, Oscar enlisted in a Wisconsin unit of the army infantry which trained at Hobart Park (the current county fairgrounds) in Chilton. He was then assigned to two other military camps within the country before serving overseas for 14 months.



Following his return home, Oscar bought his own dairy farm in the town of Chilton. He married Myrtle Davis, the daughter of E. Frank Davis, who was one of the farmers on his milk testing route.

The Kossmans had two daughters and three sons. One of sons, Lyle, took over the farm. And that led to another connection with our museum.

After he retired from the farm near Brant, Lyle had the windmill from the farm moved to the backyard of his Reed Street residence in Chilton. About five years ago, Lyle decided to donate the windmill to the museum, where it stands today. Lyle died at age 80 on February 8, 2013.

