

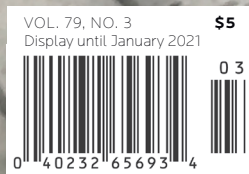
Hennepin HISTORY



A PUBLICATION OF HENNEPIN HISTORY MUSEUM

VOL. 79, NO. 3, 2020

The Greenway before it was green
When 35W divided South Minneapolis
Mary Gibbs's last Minnesota home
Augsburg history professors talk
about the past and today
Around Lake Minnetonka
Delicious Dairy Queen
Book excerpt: Bdote
and more!



Dairy Queen

Comfort and community for 80 years

BY WILLIAM BURLESON

ON 44TH AVENUE SOUTH AND EAST LAKE STREET in Minneapolis sits one of those old-time Dairy Queen stands. My Dairy Queen. It's mine in the sense that there's a feeling of ownership for all who live in my neighborhood and share in the delight that is a cold soft serve on a hot day. I asked a young woman what brought her to DQ. "I love DQ because it's hot out!"

On any warm night you can find the full range of Longfellow residents walking up, standing or sitting at metal picnic tables or at the bus stop. The dress code: shorts and flipflops. Key for me is that they not only sell the signature soft serve products and frozen

looking forward to bending down and delivering your order through the little sliding window to some teen you can barely see in the dark (do they use 40 watt bulbs back there, and why?). Then they pass you back what you've been waiting for, whether it's a Blizzard or a Dilly Bar or any of a crowd of treats, all built around the signature product of soft serve ice cream-like goodness, many with a signature curl at the top.

Behind those little sliding windows, DQ has served as the quintessential teen summer job for generations. "I worked one summer at a DQ," says Edward Sheehy. "Little kids came up to the window

and asked if we had any 'mistakes' that they could have for free. They meant the stuff in the pan under the soft serve nozzle that caught whatever dripped out after making a cone. I told 'em to come around to the back door and gave them free cones."

However, my little stand is only one type of Dairy Queen. DQ has fought for a place in the pantheon of fast food alongside the big boys since 1957 when the Brazier concept was introduced. These locations, plus the newer branding of Grill and Chill, are year-round, indoor fast food restaurants with burgers, chicken strips, and chili dogs. On occasion my family of origin would walk to the Brazier that was on Nicollet and I-94

(later to become the Jerusalem restaurant for many years). I couldn't tell you what we ate, but I can tell you my mother would get a hot fudge sundae every time, and I, a root beer float.

IT ALL BEGAN WITH SOFT SERVE

In Edina, just off Highway 100, is what could be the most non-descript modernist office building ever. Six floors of bland white stone and band windows, and, other than the sign, there's no hint that this is the headquarters for what could arguably be the happiest place in big city neighborhoods and small town highway strips alike.

It all began with the invention—or accidental discovery—of soft serve.



Photo courtesy the author.

William Burleson's neighborhood Dairy Queen on 44th Avenue South and East Lake Street, Minneapolis

treats plus a handful of food items, they have special sundaes for dogs, with a little cup of soft serve and a biscuit. When my wife and I go, our dogs pull us all the way there.

Since 1940, Dairy Queen, headquartered in Hennepin County, has served as a community gathering place, impromptu treats after dinner, teenage dates, awards for well-behaved kids and the occasional victorious softball team. "The Minnesota Freedom band would always go after one of our concert band rehearsals on Monday evenings to the one on 46th and Lake St," says Mary Murphy of Minneapolis.

DQ is a great equalizer—whether you arrived in a Tesla in 2020 or on a Stingray in the 70s, everyone lines up in the same line,

VISIT A DAIRY QUEEN IN THESE HENNEPIN COUNTY CITIES: BLOOMINGTON • BROOKLYN PARK • CHAMPLIN •

One story goes, that on Memorial Day weekend, 1934, in New York state, Tom Carvel got a flat tire on his ice cream truck. He, being the entrepreneurial sort, started selling his melting ice cream to people driving by. Boy did it sell. In 1936, Carvel opened his first ice cream shop right where his truck had broken down, selling his new “invention” of soft ice cream. To this day, Carvel Ice Cream Shoppes are going strong with 500 locations, mostly on the eastern US.

Another story is that J.F. McCullough and his son, Alex, had been experimenting with a soft frozen dairy product for some time. They contacted Sherb Noble, a good friend and customer, who owned an ice cream store in Kankakee, Illinois. Noble agreed to run an all you can eat sale, and, within two hours, dished out more than 1,600 servings.

Pick your story, but it would seem to me that both could be true.

Regardless, on June 22, 1940, McCullough and his son, Alex, and Sherb Noble opened the first Dairy Queen along Route 66 in Joliet, Illinois. That DQ still stands, now a local landmark. Harry Axene, a sales manager for a farm equipment company, was quite impressed by McCullough’s business and its long lines. He would eventually buy 50% of the business and control territory rights for Illinois and Iowa. Soon there were 10 Dairy Queen franchises, then 100 in 1947.

In December 1948, the first meeting of the newly incorporated Dairy Queen National Trade Association was held in Davenport, Iowa. The company took off. By 1955 there were 2,600 DQ’s across the country. A 1951 ad in the Minneapolis Star listed 15 locations in Hennepin County (including my East Lake stand). In 1962, International Dairy Queen was born, headquartered in Minneapolis.

However, as with any large company, there have been a lot of changes over the years, changes of ownership, and bumps in the road.

Hugh McCullough and Harry Oltz, of Hammond, Indiana, the inventor of a special freezer for dispensing their soft serve product, got into legal tussles. Eventually, McCullough sold his shares and the rights to the name Dairy Queen for \$1.5 million. Corporate turmoil continued into the 70s, with the company changing hands yet again. The new owners were able to bring DQ back to profitability, and in 1972 began trading DQ stock over the counter. This time, DQ International was born, with stores in countries such as Guatemala, Iceland, Japan, Panama, Trinidad, the United Arab Emirates by the end of the decade.

The 80s and 90s saw DQ gobble up some smaller competitors, such as Golden Skillet, KarmelKorn Shoppes, Inc., and Orange Julius. It also saw more lawsuits with franchisees. Finally, in 1997, the company was sold to Warren Buffett’s Berkshire Hathaway Inc. of Omaha, Nebraska, for only \$585 million in stock and cash. Berkshire Hathaway still owns it today.



SIGNATURE TREATS

As much as the soft serve cone with the curl is the foundation of DQ, and as much as they try to compete with other fast food chains with hamburgers and French fries, two products over the years supported and defined DQ with their undying popularity.

Phyllis and Bob Litherland established one of the early Dairy Queens in Downtown Moorhead in 1949. Together they struggled and worked long hours and built something of an institution for the western Minnesota town. “When they started that business, a lot of people told them it was just a fad and it would never last,” said the couple’s daughter, Teri Thorsen, in Phillis’s 2018 Forum News Service obituary. “I think it was tough in the early years.”

Six years after opening, the Litherland’s would invent the Dilly Bar.

The iconic Dilly Bar is ice cream on a stick, its round shape and DQ curl in the middle held together originally with a thin coating of chocolate, and later, cherry or butterscotch.

“I visited DQ almost weekly during the summer while growing up in central Iowa in the 60s and 70s,” says Matt Karl of Minneapolis. “The cherry Dilly Bar was my favorite. It still is.”

The story that has been passed down is that in 1955, when at Phyllis and Bob’s DQ, somebody—exactly who seems to vary—poured a swirl of ice cream on paper, stuck a stick in it and dipped it into chocolate. Someone said, “That’s really a dilly,” or maybe “Ain’t

Let’s all go to the

DAIRY QUEEN



CRYSTAL • EDEN PRAIRIE • EDINA • EXCELSIOR • GOLDEN VALLEY • HOPKINS • MAPLE GROVE •

that a dilly!” depending on the source. Either way, the name stuck.

The home office took note, and soon Dilly Bars were available across the country.

The Downtown Moorhead DQ is still in operation—one of the oldest in the nation—and as opposed to other DQ’s, the current owners continue the tradition of hand dipping Dilly Bars. They now boast the “World’s Largest Dilly Bar,” a 12-foot-tall monument to their famous treat.



If soft serve is their reason to be, and Dilly Bars are iconic ice cream treats, the Blizzard propelled DQ into the future.

Blizzards are a cup of soft serve blended with all kinds of other treats. At the time I’m writing this, the web site has 17 different varieties of Blizzards on the menu, from classics such as chocolate chip cookie dough, M&M’s, and Reese’s Peanut Butter Cups, to “limited time” creations such as Frosted Animal Cookie, Raspberry Fudge Bliss, and Wonder Woman Cookie Collision. The bestselling? Oreo in vanilla soft serve.

The origin story for the Blizzard once again belongs to a franchisee, this time in Missouri. Samuel Temperato owned 67 restaurants in the St. Louis area at the time. According to Temperato, Ted Drewes who ran the still-popular Ted Drewes Frozen Custard stands had a product called “Concrete” frozen custard. Temperato could see how popular they were. Temperato created his own super thick shake and had the stroke of genius to blend in candy. He brought the idea to Dairy Queen’s senior executives, and in 1985 the Blizzard was born. They sold for only \$1.25.

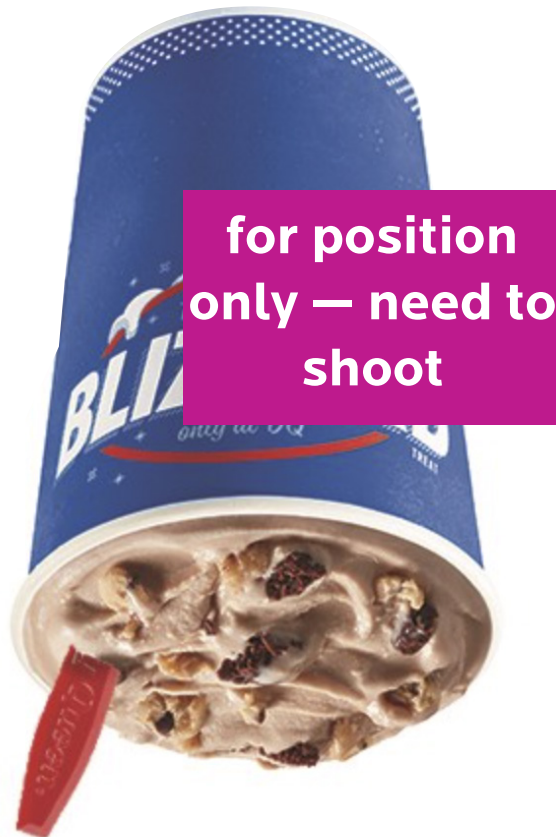
According to the Dairy Queen Corporation, more than 175 million sold that first year. It was a hit, and it remains so today. Helping it along was a marketing campaign exploiting one of its hallmark features: they are thick. Very thick. So thick that from the beginning, they are served upside down, long red DQ spoon pointing south. Commercials focused on how they were served upside down, and promotions ran that if it wasn’t, the next one would be free.

UNDYING POPULARITY OF DQ

Ask someone about DQ, and they’ll probably tell you a story about when they were a kid. “When I was a youngster in the 60’s our family vacationed in Minnesota every year. We stayed at my aunt and uncle’s cabin near Moose Lake,” says Amy Chelgren Kenzie of Roseville. “When we would go into town to do laundry, the kids always got a treat at the DQ next door to the laundromat.” The tradition continues. When her daughter was growing up, “we often went to DQ with the entire soccer team after games. To this day, I still have cravings for Oreo Blizzards.”

“Growing up, the DQ was way too far to walk, but now and then on a hot summer day, mom and dad would gather us kids and say we were ‘going for a ride,’ which meant we were going to DQ,” says Jim Larsen of Minneapolis.

“I consumed more Dilly bars then I can count,” says Gayle Renee Sjoblom, now of Arizona. “I still visit my DQ not too far from my home in Phoenix I now love to get a Blizzard. I of course treat my daughter!”



for position
only — need to
shoot

It’s hard to imagine the ice cream headaches going away any time soon. In Hennepin County there are 12 DQs, and across the United States and around the world there are more than 5,700 Dairy Queens serving their special soft serve with the curl on the top. At all those stores, I bet people still line up on hot days just like at my own personal DQ, albeit now six feet apart. Blizzards are still passed through the little windows along with so many other comforts. DQ is, and I’m certain will remain, the go-to for chunks of Oreos, a curl of soft serve, and a nice sprinkling of neighborhood.

William Burleson is an author and lifelong Minneapolis resident. He is the founder of Flexible Press, Minneapolis, and editor of the new anthology, *Home*. Learn more about him at williamburleson.com.

REFERENCES AND FOR MORE ABOUT DAIRY QUEEN

- Dairy Queen history <https://www.dairyqueen.com/us-en/Company/About-Us/>
- Woodbridge, Ontario DQ history <https://www.dqwoodbridge.com/history-of-dairy.php>
- Taste of home website: Here’s What Dairy Queen Looked Like When It First Opened <https://www.tasteofhome.com/article/first-dairy-queen/>
- https://www.mashed.com/91624/secrets-dairy-queen-doesnt-want-know/?utm_campaign=clip
- ABC News <https://abcnews.go.com/GMA/Consumer/dairy-queen-sweet-secrets-lock-key-secrets-americas/story?id=11624947>
- International Dairy Queen, Inc. - Company Profile <https://www.referenceforbusiness.com/history2/35/International-Dairy-Queen-Inc.html>
- “Minnesota Woman who helped to create Dairy Queen’s Dilly Bar dies at 90.” Tracy Briggs Forum News Service August 21, 2018 <https://www.twincities.com/2018/08/16/moorhead-woman-who-helped-to-create-dairy-queens-dilly-bar-dies-at-90/>