Who Remembers…Sunbeam Bread?



Sunbeam Bread baked at New Bedford Baking Co.
by Spinner Publications

Welcome to the second installment of the "Who remembers…?" series. In the inaugural article we reminisced about Virginia Dare Soda. My intention with this series of articles is not just to invoke nostalgic memories for those of us who have been "there", but to share with the newer generation positive things that made up our childhood. Of course, sharing the area's history is a way to not let the good things that have happened in the area pass away to be forgotten forever.

More importantly is discussion and contribution from readers. Everyone has an anecdote to share that makes these articles special. The Virginia Dare article was read, shared, commented on and liked by thousands. There was a nice sense of community. There is something about reminiscing that serves as a sort of therapy and relief from the stresses of the day. You sort of travel away in your head and leave the world behind even though for a few moments.

A Bit of History
Currently there are 40 bakeries baking Sunbeam bread and rolls across the country and even one facility in Mexico City,

Mexico. The brand was easily recognized by its mascot Little Miss Sunbeam®, who was created by children's book illustrator Ellen Segner. She was commissioned by the Quality Bakers of America to come up with a symbol that would help recognize the brand. Segner's inspiration came from a little girl that she observed often playing in nearby Washington Square Park in New York City. Originally Little Miss Sunbeam was used on holiday packaging, but eventually used year round in some regions.



229 Coffin Avenue Today

Sunbeam Bread brand is owned by the Quality Bakers of America cooperative. The brand got its start in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1942. After World War II the brand began to grow and spread through other parts of the country. The Coffin Avenue facility was used to bake bread since 1934 so it was a natural site for baking the brand. In 1955 it was bought by the New Bedford Baking Company. In 1994 it was purchased by My Bread Baking Company, in 1996 First Citizens' Federal Credit Union purchased it and in 1998 it was resold to St. Louis based company Earthgrains. When it closed its doors in 2005, it employed approximately 180 people. Malden-based corporation Lucar Development LLC bought the property in 2006 for $725,000.

In 2011, New Bedford Baking Company opened discussions with the city to reopen the Coffin Avenue facility and begin baking again. They figured it would take $8 million to being the building up to code, repair and purchase equipment, and get up

and running. Getting the facility going again was projected to create 150 new jobs. Alas, nothing came to fruition and the property is presently still up for sale.

A Stroll down Memory Lane

I know for anyone that grew up in the area – not just New Bedford – that the simple mention of the word Sunbeam immediately invokes the aroma of freshly baked bread. Instantly you are walking or riding in the back seat of mom or dad's car down Coffin Avenue. Any tomfoolery, goofing around or discussion came to a halt so you could partake in the pleasant aroma of bread wafting out of ovens. You could easily imagine a loaf of that glorious white bread in your hands as you give it a gentle squeeze.



The Unmistakable Little Miss Sunbeam®

Great debates were had on the best way to utilize the heavenly slices: Tuna Melt, French Toast, PBJ, emergency hot dog or hamburg bun, or just all by itself. As you drove past the facility at 229 Coffin Avenue and the aroma begun to fade, one was possessed with a way to get at some Sunbeam Bread, somehow, someway. If only we could convince mom or dad how important it was to have NOW.

I can vividly recall that momentous day at Hayden McFadden elementary that a permission slip for a field trip to Sunbeam was passed out. It was like Christmas Day came early. We all

wondered what we did to deserve such good fortune! The joy however was interrupted with a dose of realism. Feet were put back on level ground. Surely a hurricane would arrive on that day! Or the Medeiros Bus Company's drivers would go on strike. Or a doomsday asteroid would hurdle to earth wiping out our chance….and oh yeah, wiping out humanity.

Pulling up to Coffin Avenue and not having to continue on meant scores of kids walking around with noses high in the air and lots of sniffing. Seeing how the bread was made and packaged was fun, but eating fresh baked samples was a spiritual or pseudo-religious experience!

Well, that is how I remembered it as a child. As an adult, every time I drive by I still whiff the ghost aroma of the facility in full swing.

Do you remember Sunbeam bread? Have an anecdote to share? Correction to make? News about the site to share?

ngg_shortcode_0_placeholder