



W. W. Mayo House

Minnesota Valley Canning Company / Green Giant Company

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First Plant in Le Sueur

“What this town needs is a Corn Cannery. Sweet corn will prove a valuable crop for the farmers. The cannery will furnish much employment, and the investors will profit.”

The sales pitch of John Silver Hughes worked. Hughes, a descendant of the family who started canning in Maryland, came to Le Sueur in the winter of 1902 to sell the town on the idea of a cannery.

With enough interest generated, a group of businessmen met in the back room of the James Cosgrove Harness Shop one night in March, 1903, and made plans for the new corn cannery.

Founders included: C.N. Cosgrove, who presided at the organizational meeting; William H. Rethwill, who became the first president; George W. Taylor, later the second president; W.H. Tomlinson; Dr. Frank A. Dodge; Robert H. Cosgrove (son of C.N.); John R.S. Cosgrove and James A. Cosgrove (brothers of C.N.); and Lewis C. Cosgrove (nephew of C.N.) Other supportive businessmen: Harry Weis, Ed Wierwill, Pat McKasy, Aner Cadwell, John McKasy and Ora Parker.

Sixty seven shares of common stock were sold for \$100 a share. An abandoned hotel was purchased as the factory site. Mr. Hughes found used canning equipment in Wichita, Kansas. 96 bushels of sweet corn seed and 300,000 cans were bought. The Minnesota Valley Canning company was born.

About 200 acres were planted. The first year's efforts were considered a success. Under the labels of Artesian and Minnesota Valley, 11,750 cases of Evergreen white cream style corn were packed, shipped to Duluth and St. Paul, and sold.

The Board, being satisfied that their infant was hearty, declared a ten percent dividend, paid the president and secretary \$200 each for the year, and voted to double the capacity of the plant.

The Giant first appeared in 1928. This trademark and Green Giant peas became so well known that in 1950, the company's name was changed to Green Giant Company. Production grew from 11,750 cases to 2,250,000 cases in its 75th year, 1977.



Guiding the fortunes and future of the Minnesota Valley Canning Company / Green Giant Company was the father and son team of Carson (C.N.), and Edward B. (Ward). Ward was general manager when C.N. was elected president in 1925, at age 72. Ward took over the helm in 1929, at age 41.

Beginning in 1925 and over the next 25 years, 25 additional canneries were built or acquired and sales increase to \$75 million.

C.N.'s key to success: "I have had to use three: ambition; faith - faith in God, in fellow man and myself; and work. These three, but the greatest of these is work."

Ward the visionary. "I think Ward Cosgrove discovered the Minnesota Valley Canning Company. That is to say, he saw its possibilities and made plans accordingly so that today (1930), while a comparatively young man, he heads the largest institution of its kind in America, and perhaps, the world," wrote W.V. Working, a local writer and a worker in the factory in 1903.

Highlights of the First 50 Years *(Information focuses on Cosgrove family involvement)*

1903

Carson (C.N.) Cosgrove presides at organizational meeting.

Incorporated as Minnesota Valley Canning Company with 67 shares of stock sold at \$100 a share.

Robert Hugh Cosgrove (son of C.N.) is elected to Board of Directors and serves as its first Secretary.

Packed 11,750 cases of white cream style corn, marketed in Duluth and St. Paul.

1905

C.N. elected to Board of Directors.

1907

Company begins to pack peas.

1911

Specialization begins.

1914

Edward B. (Ward) Cosgrove hired and elected to the Board of Directors serving as Secretary. Over the next 15 years, Ward is a salesman, accountant, farm and field manager and general manager for the company.

1918-1919

Ward has his office in the Mayo Home and on several occasions Board Meetings are held in the home.

1925

C.N. is elected president (1925-1929) at age 72, then chairman of the board until his death in 1936 at age 83.

Other canneries begin to be acquired or built. 25 added over next 25 years

1928

The original Green Giant appears in advertising. Sales reach over \$2 million.

1929

Ward becomes President (1929-1954) at age 41, then Chairman of the Board until his death in 1962 at age 74.

1950

The Green Giant becomes so popular, name of company is changed from Minnesota Valley Canning

Company to Green Giant Company.

Beyond 50 Years

Green Giant diversifies in types of products and acquires other companies.

Robert C. (Bob) Cosgrove is President from 1964-1969 and 1974-1975 and Chairman of the Board through the merger with Pillsbury Company in 1979.

Sales nearly double, reaching 191 million in 1969.

Bob Cosgrove died in 1993 at age 74.

Last season of operation for the original Le Sueur plant was 1994. The plant officially closed on February 1, 1995.

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