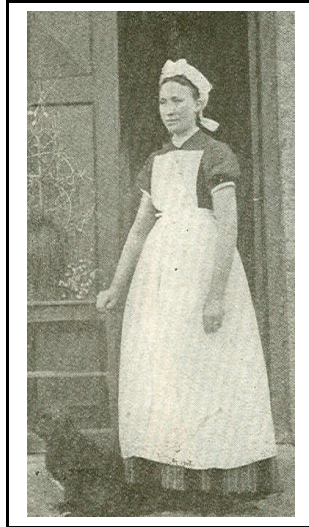


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The first dairymaid in Polk County, Wisconsin. By the late 1870s the early Danish settlers in Polk County had weathered the hardest pioneer years and were beginning to prosper. Then there was an economic slump and they had to look for sources other than farming for ready cash. Most farmers had dairy cattle, but local merchants would only exchange other goods for milk and butter. In 1884, spearheaded by Nelson Lawson, local farmers in the Little Butternut Lake (West Denmark) area decided to start a dairy. Not strictly a cooperative venture, members could purchase one to four shares in the enterprise, with their votes being proportionate to the shares owned. Commencing operations in the spring of 1885, the dairy was managed by two recent arrivals from Thorning parish in Viborg County, A. C. Ravnholt and his wife. Johanne Ravnholt (above) had trained at a dairy on the island of Falster and it was she who churned the dairy's first butter, while her husband was responsible for fetching the cream from the local farmers. They did this for four years prior to purchasing and moving to their own farm in north Milltown, where they ran their own dairy until the end of the century. The West Denmark dairy continued to operate, but since most farmers had only a handful of cows and prices remained low, the income produced remained fairly modest. In 1890 butter reached a low of 7 cents a pound. The following year H. J. Hjort purchased the operation from the shareholders. Herd sizes were gradually built up and modern devices such as centrifuges introduced so that dairying finally became a source of significant income. In 1906 milk and cream was being delivered from 100 farms and over \$45,000 worth of butter was sold from the dairy. Improved transportation routes also resulted in more distant markets, and other dairies were started. But it was the efforts of the little dairymaid from Viborg that made the first venture in the field in Polk County a success.

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