

Lancaster Farming *Antiques Center*

Cool Stuff: Wilson's Ice Cream Freezer Collection

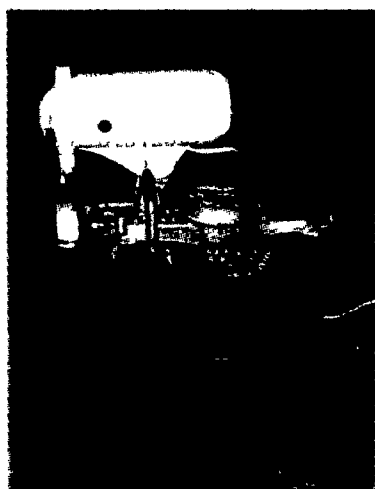
Steve "Doc" Wilson
Ice Cream Collector

FAYETTEVILLE, Ark. — I've always thought it was interesting that although ice cream is loved worldwide, the concept of making home-made ice cream seems uniquely an American summer-time tradition.

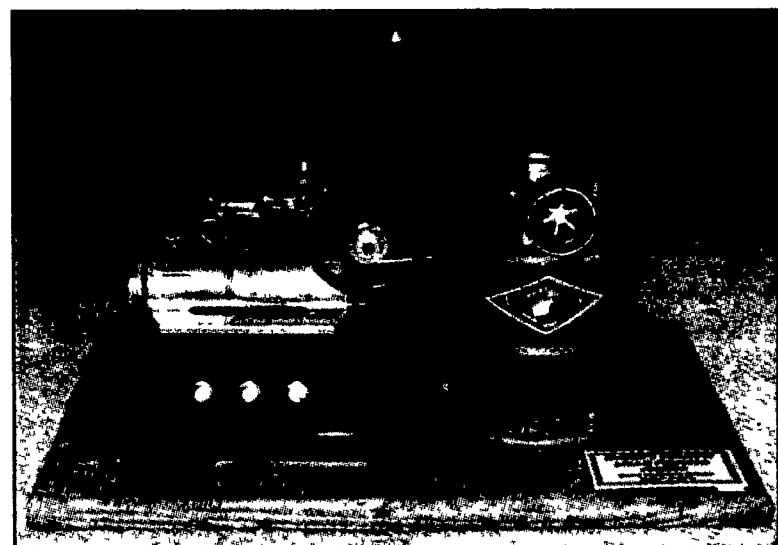
How many of us remember when we were children having to sit on the top of the old wooden ice cream freezer while Dad steadily turned the crank?

Of course the rule was whoever cranks the ice cream gets the first taste of the delicious frozen treat!

These kinds of experiences led me to a passion for homemade ice cream and all things "ice creamy." Eventually I acquired a collection of ice cream freezers, which has been recognized by the Guinness Book of Records as the largest in the world. I also had the exciting experience of being featured in a Food Network special on ice cream.



One of the first attempts for an electric-powered freezer was this 1935 model Sunbeam, which made a gear adapter which would attach to the 1923 White Mountain freezer. Then all you had to do was drop in place your 1934 model 3B Mixmaster and there you have it — an electric-powered ice cream maker! The example in this collection is the only one known to exist today, and it still works!



This small pint salesman sample White Mountain freezer was connected to a tiny steam engine to make the world's smallest steam-driven ice cream freezer.



Some models more than 100 years old are still in useable condition, such as the 1871 Fre-zee-zee model which is unusual in that the crank and gear mechanism is incorporated into the handle.

My freezers have led me to lots of experience making ice cream and that has led to winning many ice cream making contests over the years.

Collecting ice cream freezers is in essence collecting America itself, and uniquely American memories. The nice thing is, it's not an expensive hobby, but you do need considerable space if your collection gets very large!

Ice cream freezers make great collectibles because they add a nostalgic and rustic flavor to any room decorated with them, but they can also be very functional. I believe that freezers should be



The 1871 Fre-Zee-Zee Benham Instant Freeze Sunbeam/White Mountain 1915 Fre-Zee-Zee (glass canister) is a steam-powered miniature.

used: it's what they were made for. But it's also important to preserve them because they operate in such a corrosive environment of salt and ice.

The best way to care for your collection is to clean them thoroughly, removing as much rust as possible, and then applying a good coat of paint or stain, trying to approximate the original color as closely as possible. You'll never get a perfect match, because after years of use no one knows what the original shades were.

The history of ice cream is the history of America. Made using the "still pot method" by George Washington, first served in the White House by Dolley Madison (before her husband became president, she served as Thomas Jefferson's social secretary). A slave, Augustus Jackson, known for making great ice cream in the White House in the early days of our new country later went on to be the wealthiest African American business man in Philadelphia when he opened his own ice cream parlors.

When ice became available in the ordinary home, the first patented homemade ice cream freezer appeared in 1843, invented by Nancy Johnson, a Philadelphia housewife.

In World War I ice cream was determined by Congress to be an essential nutritious food and was allowed to be made using rationed ingredients. Troops in W.W.II were given ice cream to boost morale. A quartermaster, along with his boyhood friend, who traded a jeep for an ice cream freezer later opened his own chain of ice cream stores — Baskin Robbins.

Baskin Robbins commemorated the move of the Brooklyn Dodgers to California with a special flavor called Baseball Nut Ice Cream which contained cashews and raspberries!

Ice cream has been eaten by astronauts and still made in the home by more than 70 percent of all Americans. And to do that, you need an ice cream freezer.

For the collector, ice cream freezers will vary in cost from \$15-\$20 to thousands of dollars for some very rare models.

It's not unusual to stumble onto a one of a kind model that was made by some small company which never patented their own model. You'll find various models over 100 years old still in useable condition, such as the 1871 Fre-zee-zee model which is unusual in that the crank and gear mechanism is incorporated into the handle.

Rarely, you'll find a freezer made out of the U.S., such as the Benham freezer with brass parts produced in England by the same craftsmen who crafted the orb and cross atop St. Paul's Cathedral in London. The photo shows the only known example of this 1878 freezer still in existence.

Over the years there were some innovative ideas in ice cream freezers. A good example is the 1930 Instant Freeze, which is a



Steve "Doc" Wilson's comprehensive collection of ice cream freezers has been recognized by the Guinness Book of Records as the largest in the world. "The history of ice cream is the history of America," he says. Check out his Website for all kinds of ice cream trivia.



Wilson's ice cream freezer collection led him to making ice cream and winning numerous contests.

"horizontal" freezer. Here the ice and salt mixture goes inside the canister and the ice cream mix is poured into the bottom of the tray. As the drum rotates, the ice cream freezes in a thin layer on the outside of the canister and is later scraped off.

It was a very inefficient way to make ice cream, but the design has been copied for years in children's freezers.

The day finally came when the old handcranked freezer was replaced (almost) by electric models. One of the first attempts was made in 1935 by Sunbeam, which made a gear adapter which would attach to the 1923 White Mountain freezer. Then all you had to do was drop in place your 1934 model 3B Mixmaster and there you have it — an electric-powered ice cream maker! The example in this collection is the only one known to exist today, and it still works!

The 1915 model Fre-Zee-Zee was made entirely of wood, ex-

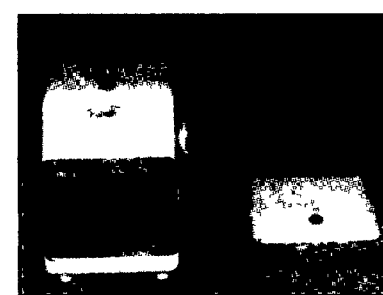
cept the canister which was made of glass! And the surprising thing is, quite a number of these can still be found. And in one case the small pint salesman sample White Mountain freezer was connected to a tiny steam engine to make the world's smallest steam driven ice cream freezer.

Perhaps the best part of collecting ice cream freezers is the visitors who come to see the collection. It's a "hands on" collection, and all visitors are encouraged to pick up the freezers, turn the cranks, and let the memories come flooding back.

The most fun of all is when the visitor inevitably suddenly spots a familiar freezer, the visitor's eyes light up, and they gush forth a memory that begins, "Hey, we used to have one just like this one! I remember we used to..."

That makes it all worth while! Happy collecting!

For entertaining education on all sorts of ice cream-related topics, check out Steve "Doc" Wilson's Website www.users.nwark.com



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