

HISTORY QUESTION OF THE MONTH

Farming has always been a risky business due to forces beyond the farmer's control. One of the primary crops for farmers in our area was peas. What were some of the situations that occurred that were beyond the pea farmer's control and threatened their livelihood?

ANSWER

Peas were a big crop for the farmers in the area. For a time the community had two pea viners. One was located on 2700 East, south of the Butler School. It closed during the depression. The other one was located in the area of 7000 South and Highland Drive. It was originally owned by the Twin Peaks Canning Company who sold out to the Rocky Mountain Packing Corporation December 31, 1926. Their plant was located on 4800 South and West Temple Street in Murray. Each year they would contract with local farmers for a number of acres of peas. Price was based by the ton on a sliding scale depending on the quality. The viners operated for a short period of time during harvest season each year. The peas from the viners were taken to the cannery and the refuse was made into forage and returned to the farmers as feed for their livestock.

In June of 1928, on the eve of the opening of the pea canning season, a devastating fire roared through the Rocky Mountain Packing Corporation Plant, completely destroying the building and putting in jeopardy the crops of peas that had been contracted for the season. It was hoped that other cannerys would step in and help save the pea crops from going to waste. The Company wasn't sure if it would rebuild until persuaded to do so by the community. In 1929, the rebuilt plant reopened.

In 1932, the plant closed, leaving farmers in a quandary over what to do with their land. It reopened again in 1933, paying \$42 a ton for peas. Again in 1934, the company decided not to contract for peas, citing a shortage of water as the reason. In 1935 the price of peas was set at \$52 per ton and in 1936 it rose to \$54 a ton. During 1940, no pea crops were planted as the Salt Lake County Crops Association rejected a profit-sharing contract with the packing corporation. In 1943, there was a shortage of labor, so a pea-viner crew was organized by the Salt Lake County agricultural agent. Each farmer agreed to donate one day's labor. In 1944 the price for peas had risen to as much as \$100 a ton for the freezing variety.

In 1945, Hunt Foods, Inc., bought the majority of stock in the Rocky Mountain Packing Corporation.