



BILLINGS FARM & MUSEUM

COLLECTIONS CORNER: SOAP

Soap! Can't get much clean without a little, or maybe a lot, of elbow grease and soap. A recent adventure into our Billings Farm & Museum collection yielded various soap brands from the later 19th and early 20th centuries.



Historic soap boxes from our collection

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Procter & Gamble's Ivory soap is one that can still be found in stores. The "Soap that Floats" was a high quality but inexpensive soap. The floating feature, however, was an accident during the mixing process of one batch. A mixer was left on too long, whipping air into the soap. Reviews came back praising the floating soap leading the longer mixing to become standard.

Another Procter & Gamble product was White Naphtha Soap. Unlike their Ivory soap bar used for cleaning bodies, The White Naphtha Soap was for cleaning laundry and other house-hold cleaning. Production of P & G White Naphtha Soap ended in the 1960s, but it remains among the well-known Procter & Gamble products.



The two girls in the picture are comparing their mothers' choice of soap. The girl on the left's mother used Wool Soap, keeping her sweater in good condition while the girl on the right's mother used a different soap and her sweater shrank. Swift & Company was first and foremost a butchering company in Chicago, this tallow soap pioneered the repurposing of meat byproducts and allowed the company to diversify and become more efficient.



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Another soap that can still be found on the market is Grandpa's Wonder Soap. This soap was made with pure pine tar, useful in cutting grease and dirt from the hands of farmers, mechanics, printers and painters. Today, the company still holds true to the 1878 values set by "grandpa" Jess Hoffman.

Kendall Manufacturing Company established in 1827 was well known for their "Dirt Killer" Soapine product. Many of their ads had a black colored whale with a white spot claiming "Soapine did it!" Their French style soaps were for laundry, hands, everything in between. Their Soapine product claimed to "Work Quicker, Easier, Cheaper, and Better than soap or anything else. One trial will convince you."



James Kirk was a factory owner in Chicago. The "American Family Soap" (1870) from Kirk & Company was one of the soaps produced by the "pioneer of the soap industry." Founded in 1839, the company began in Utica, New York, moving to Chicago in the late 1850s. By 1870, the Chicago factory employed 30 men, 20 children, and produced \$600,000 worth of soap in a year's time.

