

James L. Kraft (1874-1953)



By the age of 29, James Lewis Kraft had experience in three business enterprises, including a cheese business based in Buffalo, NY. That year, 1903, while in Chicago managing the company's local branch, Kraft's business partners eased him out. Stranded in this city with a scant \$65, Kraft quickly put his merchandising experience to work.

He noticed that local merchants had to travel to Chicago's wholesale warehouse district to buy the cheese they sold in their stores. So, Kraft used his meager capital to rent a horse and wagon, and each day purchased a stock of cheese to resell to the small storekeepers. The merchants appreciated the convenience, and Kraft prospered.

By 1909, his brothers Charles, John, Fred and Norman joined him, and they incorporated the business under the name of J.L. Kraft & Bros. Co., with J.L. Kraft as president.

In 1915, they began producing processed cheese in 3-1/2 and 7-3/4 ounce tins. J.L. Kraft's method of producing processed cheese was so revolutionary, in 1916 he obtained a patent for it. J.L. Kraft followed up on his success with processed cheese in tins by introducing or acquiring many additional products, including such familiar names as *Velveeta* process cheese, *Philadelphia* cream cheese, *Miracle Whip* salad dressing and *Kraft* macaroni & cheese dinner.

He used innovative advertising to promote his products and was a pioneer in the sponsorship of American television and radio shows. The company's "hands" commercials, showing a pair of hands preparing recipes using Kraft products, became a symbol of the company's advertising success.

The success of J.L. Kraft and his company was noted by Thomas McInnerney, founder of National Dairy Products Corporation. In 1930, Kraft-Phenix Cheese Corporation (as it was then called) was acquired by National Dairy Products Corporation. Kraft continued to operate as an independent subsidiary of National Dairy Products Corporation for many years, but eventually was absorbed into the operating structure of the parent company, which changed its name to Kraftco Corporation in the late 1960s, almost 16 years after J.L.'s death.