

PIONEERS



José María Williner

(1855 - 1933)

As the European economic situation was not flourishing, he decided to broaden his horizons. He arrived in Argentina with an iron will of progress and strong young arms.

He developed an important activity in the field of dairy farming, without leaving aside his social life and public action. He stood out as a great big-hearted man.

José María Williner was born in Grachen, Canton of Valais (Switzerland), in 1855. His father used to make and repair umbrellas and parasols for a living.

As the local economic situation was not flourishing, he decided to broaden his horizons.

At that time, in Europe, there were rumors that America was a land of great possibilities for people with enough strength. Being only 22 years old, he arrived in Argentina with an iron will of progress and strong young arms. First, he settled in Pilar. Then, in 1882, he bought his first piece of land in Bella Italia, from Mr. Ricardo Aldao.

In 1885, he married Matilde Zurbriggen. Ten children were born from this union. José María was one of the first to devote fully to cattle raising, purifying breeds outstandingly by crossing his animals with thoroughbreds. His passion took him to the field of dairy farming. He started setting up dairy farms with good production animals. He ended up having a total of 14 dairy farms, all managed by farmers from Valais who, just like him, had come to this land pursuing a better future.

At the dawn of the century, he managed to produce an important volume of milk which he delivered to The River Plate Dairy Company, better known as "Las Colonias". Thanks to an agreement signed with it, the company built a "cremería" in his fields, being the first within the jurisdiction of Bella Italia. José María named it "La Suiza" in honor of his country of origin. He did the same in Felicia and Hersilia.

Years later, his firstborn son Alfredo started to get involved in the activity of his father and shared with him the daily rush. He ended up being an efficient collaborator and an effective support in the administration and coordination of all dairy farms.

Regarding his social life, José María Williner stood out as a great big-hearted man and lover of progress.

As regards his public life, he stood out because of his activity related to the buying and selling of lands, as well as the organization of the first towns. He was elected Mayor of the towns of Bella Italia and San Guillermo, and he worked for their development. He was one of the founders of the Cooperativa de Consumos de Rafaela (Consumer Co-operative of Rafaela), which later turned into Supermercados Quijote (Quijote Supermarket).

He died in Rafaela on August 4th, 1933.



Alfredo Williner

(1886 - 1941)

He was the firstborn son of José María Williner.

According to the traditions of the time, he started to share rural activities with his father. It was the beginning of his connection with dairy farming, to which he devoted the rest of his life.

Apart from being a pioneer in the industrial activity, he participated in community movements, had an active civic life and took part in the establishment of several institutions.

Mr. Alfredo Williner was José María Williner and Matilde Zurbriggen's firstborn son. His father, José María, was Swiss and his mother, Matilde, was the daughter of Swiss immigrants who had arrived in the center-west of the Province of Santa Fe at the end of the XIX century.

Born in Lehmann (Santa Fe) on December 28th, 1886, he completed his studies in the City of Esperanza; and when he left school, being the oldest son, and according to the traditions of the time, he started to share rural activities with his father, who already had 14 dairy farms.

That was the beginning of his connection with dairy farming, to which he devoted the rest of his life and all his wishes. At that time, he realized the importance of having good quality animals for the production of milk. For this reason, he did his best to improve the Shorthorn breed of cattle. This specialization brought him success in several rural competitions.

In 1912, he married Magdalena Rosa Armando, daughter of Italian immigrants. Four children were born of this union: Hilda, Laura, Armando and Miguel.

Gaining economic independence, he particularly focused on agricultural operations and, in 1928, with vast experience in the dairy sector and having discerned the potential of the region for the activity, he set up a "cremería" in Bella Italia (Santa Fe), point of origin of the present company called Sucesores de Alfredo Williner S.A.

These were difficult times for industrial and business activities due to the crisis the country was experiencing. He had to convince farmers to incorporate dairy farms to their operations, encourage the newly-initiated, face the competency of a monopolistic foreign company and place products in a restricted market.

Despite the difficulties, an extraordinary attitude nourished his faith in the milk industry and incited him to continue thriving.

In a short time, he added four more "cremería" to the first one he had established in 1928. In 1934, he set up his own butter factory and

years later he added the manufacture of yogurt and dulce de leche.

His efforts and faith in the milk industry can now be fairly admired and assessed, as the region where he first established his industry is today the most important milk production region in South America.

However, he did not only devote his time to the industrial activity. He understood that he lived in a place that needed his help if he wanted to progress. He realized that for him to progress, the region needed to progress too.

Thus, he participated in community movements that led to the foundation of the Sociedad Anónima de Hacendados de Rafaela (Landowners Incorporated Business Company of Rafaela), a homestead consignee firm. The same intention of progress made him participate in the foundation of the Cooperativa de Hacendados de Hersilia (Landowners Co-operative of Hersilia), a town where his father had some pieces of land.

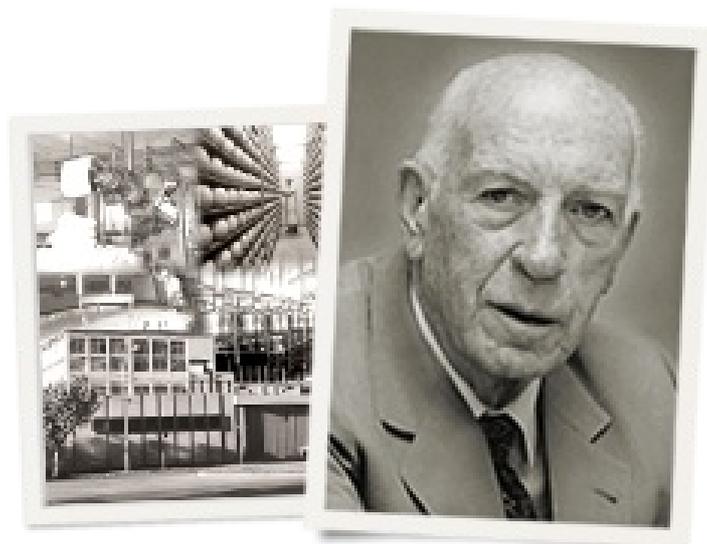
When Rafaela was affected by an issue of electricity, he joined the group which strived to have their own power station. Thus, he became part of the board of the Compañía de Electricidad de Rafaela (Electricity Company of Rafaela), which later became the Usina Eléctrica Municipal (Municipal Power Station).

He also participated in the civic life of the city being, on one occasion, elected substitute councilman of the City Council of Rafaela. From June 1918, to January 1920, he was Mayor of the town of Bella Italia.

In several opportunities, he was a member of the Board of Directors of the Sociedad Suiza de Socorros Mutuos (Swiss Mutual Aid Society) "La Unión", an entity developed to group Swiss immigrants and descendants.

He died at the early age of 54, on March 14th, 1941, leaving a successful industry as a token of the faith he had placed on the dairy activity.

His successors continued developing the work he began by permanently improving the company. This is the reason why the company achieved great importance not only in Argentina, but in the world. Mr. Alfredo Williner is a clear example of what can be done when will is put to the service of the progress of an activity that can improve a whole region by diversifying and qualifying its production.



Armando Williner

(1919 - 2000)

Armando José María Williner was an important person not only in the city, but also in the region. He can be remembered from different perspectives, always being faithful to his principles and taking care of the progress of his community.

He lived his life with the simplicity of the great ones; he built a company with the enthusiasm and perseverance of the visionaries; and

left his mark in history, just as forceful men do.

Born in Rafaela on November 30th, 1919, Armando José María Williner was an important person not only in the city, but also in the region.

Grandson and son of pioneers, he inherited his elders' spirit of renewal and, thanks to his strong personality, he added value to and increased the creativity that gave Sucesores de Alfredo Williner a leading role in the milk production sector of the region .

When he finished his studies, he started to work with his father. When his father died, Armando was only 21, and had to take charge of the company, alongside his family, made up by his mother and three siblings.

He successfully guided the plant, which was directly associated with one of the most outstanding sources of production in the region: dairy farming. However, Don Armando, as he was commonly called, also had time to devote to several activities related to the civic life of the city, to sports and to the region development, as well as to his friends and family. Together with his wife, Alicia Piovano, he built a solid home and had four children and twelve grandchildren.

He can be remembered from different perspectives. He was the first Mayor of the Instituto Municipal de la Vivienda (Municipal Housing Institute), an entity that was created when Rodolfo Muriel was in charge of the City Council, and which improved the city landscape and helped fulfill the dream of many of having their own home in Rafaela.

He also carried out his leadership in the business unionism, and became head of the Industrial and Business Center of Castellanos Department. His administration is remembered as an open-door administration, with a great spirit of joint action.

As a Rotarian, from the beginning of the institution in Rafaela, he devoted time and effort as member and head of the club, as he also did with the Swiss Mutual Aid Society "La Unión".

He decisively acted at the different levels of the Rafaela Football League and especially in the club he loved, Ben Hur, where he held the position of president and, above all, was an enthusiastic fan of the football and basketball teams.

He was also President of the Asociación Santafesina de Industriales Lácteos (Dairy Industry Association of Santa Fe) and of the Cámara de Mantequeros (Butter Manufacturers Association), Vice-president of the Centro de la Industria Lechera (Dairy Industry Center), member of the Consejo Provincial de Lechería de Santa Fe (Milk Provincial Council of Santa Fe), and head of the Usina Eléctrica Municipal (Municipal Power Station) and of the Sociedad Anónima General de Consumos de Rafaela (Consumer Incorporated Business Company of Rafaela).

The list of activities is probably incomplete, but it is enough to show the enterprising spirit of Mr. Armando Williner.

He was the person who inspired, promoted and permanently guided a business family that today keeps setting the course of the companies that make up the Williner Group.

His humble spirit, passion for work and indomitable honesty were always admired and taken as examples by all his loved ones, employees, friends and every person who had the opportunity of knowing him.

From an early age, he successfully guided the company and knew how to sort out difficulties with knowledge and aptitude without the comforts of modern life.

Mr. Armando José María Williner, a visionary who inherited from his ancestors the entrepreneurial spirit that characterized him, was an important person in the activities of his hometown and region, devoting his time to multiple activities related to industry, production, community, sports and development.

He had a friendly personality and was much appreciated for his enjoyable conversation, an intelligent sense of humor and timely remarks.

He died in the City of Rafaela on November 8th, 2000.