

Pepperidge Farm: Healthful Bread Builds a Business



How many goldfish crackers have you eaten in your lifetime? Did you know they were created by a Connecticut company? Goldfish crackers are made by Pepperidge Farm, which is located in Fairfield.

In 1926, Margaret Rudkin and her family moved from New York City to Fairfield. They named their farm after the pepperidge tree in the back yard.

Rudkin's son, Henry, Jr., had asthma. His doctor believed his food was making him sick.

Rudkin started making homemade bread. She hoped it would help him get better.

Rudkin made her bread with natural ingredients. She researched the history of making bread. She looked through old cookbooks. She even ground her own flour. Her first few loaves of bread were hard and flat. But she got better and better with practice.

Rudkin's husband had a terrible accident. He was unable to work. Rudkin decided to sell her bread to earn money. She thought other people might want this healthy bread, too.



Margaret Rudkin in a publicity shot, making bread in a hygienic uniform but with the touchstones of colonial life around her as part of a demonstration on the history of bread-making, date unknown.

Mark in 1929. In 1926 the family moved to Connecticut, purchasing a picturesque 123-acre farm in Fairfield, which they named

Pepperidge Farm—named, according to

She went to her local grocery store to ask the owner to sell her bread. She wanted 25 cents a loaf. Other bread cost only 10 cents a loaf. The owner did not think he would be able to sell such expensive bread. But the bread was so good and healthful that people bought it.

Rudkin soon needed more space for her growing business. She moved her bakery into her garage. She wanted to sell even more bread. Her husband was working again. He took loaves of bread on the train into New York City each morning. A store there sold it.

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Terminal, a porter met him and carried the loaves to Charles & Co., a specialty food store on 43rd Street. Sales were brisk, as locals were eager for homemade bread.

As her business grew Rudkin made an effort to hire and train women, especially those who knew little about baking bread, as she didn't want them to have to unlearn bad habits. Indeed, in a March 13, 1938 *Bridgeport Sunday Post* article Rudkin said that bread making was a woman's job.

That year Rudkin also hired Harold A. Baldwin, the company's first male employee, as bookkeeper, according to a timeline he later compiled for the company. Her staff now included five regular employees plus two local high-school girls who came after school to help wrap the bread in wax paper and affix the product labels.

Workers wearing uniforms resembling nurses' uniforms, c. 1938. Fairfield Museum and History Center



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above: The 25th-anniversary issue of the company newsletter, *The Pepperidge Farm Conveyor*, 1962. Fairfield Museum and History Center

left: Delivery trucks parked in front of the original Pepperidge Farm garage site, c. 1940. Fairfield Museum and History Center



Workers prepare to hand-knead loaves of bread, postcard, c. 1958. Museum of Connecticut History

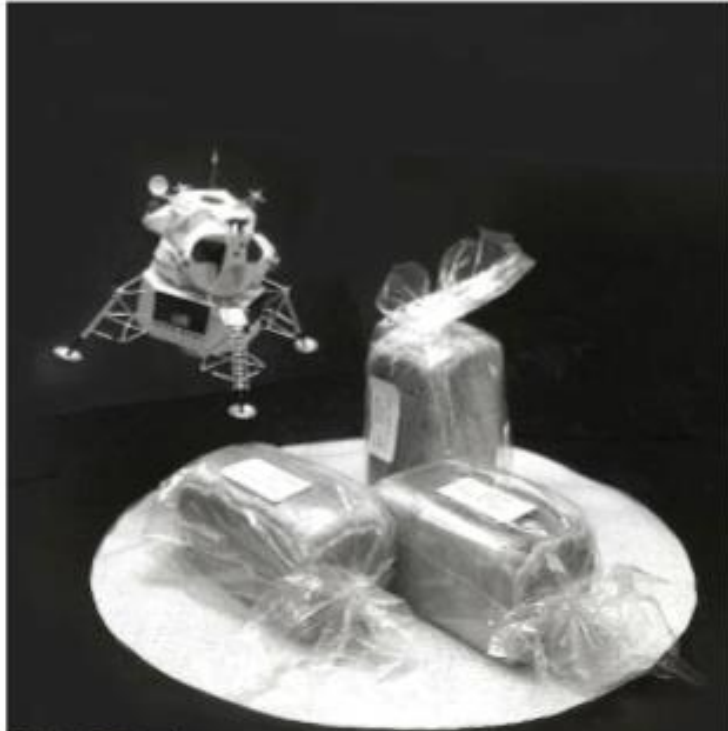


By 1938, Rudkin was baking and selling so much bread she had five people working for her. Two girls came after school to wrap and label the bread. Rudkin hoped to sell 3,000 loaves a week. She borrowed money from a bank to buy better kitchen equipment. She started selling rye bread, pumpernickel, and dinner rolls. By 1940, she had sold more than 1 million loaves of bread!

During World War II, lots of the ingredients she needed were in short supply. This made baking bread difficult. Rudkin never changed her recipe, though. She wanted to make sure the taste and quality stayed the same.

website. She turned over the reins to her son William in 1962. In 1963, the *Margaret Rudkin Pepperidge Farm Cookbook*, which included about 500 recipes, was released. It became the first cookbook to reach *The New York Times* bestseller list. She retired in 1966 and died of breast cancer in 1967 at Yale-New Haven Hospital.

A smart businesswoman, she parlayed an identity as a concerned mother and resourceful homemaker into a national company at a time when female business leaders were few and far between. In so doing she left behind an American legacy. "There isn't a worthwhile thing in the world that can't be accomplished with good hard work. You've got to want something first and then you have to go after it with all your heart and soul," she said. ☞



Margaret Rudkin published a cookbook in 1963. Fairfield Museum and History Center



above: Pepperidge Farm provided both sandwiches and individual slices of bread frozen and vacuum-packed for the Apollo 13 space flight, April 1970. The sandwiches, carried in a pocket of each astronaut's space suit, were to be eaten six hours after lift off. Pepperidge Farm publicity photo. Fairfield Museum and History Center

left: Mary Ferenc, Pepperidge Farm's first employee, mixing bread for the Apollo 13 mission, 1970. Pepperidge Farm publicity photo. Fairfield Museum and History Center

In the 1950s Rudkin won several awards. And she continued to expand. She added new products such as coffee cake and cookies. In 1961, she sold the company to Campbell Soup for \$28 million. Rudkin continued to lead the company.

In 1958, she found the recipe for the goldfish cracker on a trip to Switzerland. The company introduced it in 1962. In 1963 she released a cookbook. It was the first cookbook to sell so many copies that it appeared on *The New York Times* bestseller list.

Margaret Rudkin died of cancer in 1967. However, Pepperidge Farm continues to be a successful business. Her hard work and creative ideas helped this company grow into what it is today.

“There isn’t a worthwhile thing in the world that can’t be accomplished with good hard work. You’ve got to want something first and then you have to go after it with all your heart and soul,” Rudkin said.

Captions: **2:** From “Healthful Bread Builds a Business,” Connecticut Explored, Winter 2015-2016 **3:** From “Healthful Bread Builds a Business,” Connecticut Explored, Winter 2015-2016 **4:** From “Healthful Bread Builds a Business,” Connecticut Explored, Winter 2015-2016

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