

Freda Ehmann and her Olives

One hundred years ago, an enterprising woman and her son built a modern stylish Craftsman Bungalow style home in Oroville. The woman was Mrs. Freda Ehmann and her olive pickling process laid the foundation for canned black olives that are a staple condiment and recipe ingredient today.



Freda Ehmann

When it comes to canning olives, Freda Ehmann is considered the "mother" of the canned olive industry. Although Freda did not invent the olive curing process, she created a product that until that time had not been reliably successful until she introduced the cured black olive to the general public.

Freda was a widowed immigrant from Germany who in the 1890's had a 20 acre olive orchard near Oakland. Attempting to develop a market for the olives, which until that time had been grown primarily for olive oil, she began experimenting with curing a couple of barrels on her back porch.

In 1886, the first olive orchard was planted in Butte County. While still in the Bay Area, Freda Ehmann developed an improved process to cure ripe olives. Freda, along with her son, Edwin, moved to Oroville in 1898. Determining that Oroville was a feasible place to grow and process olives, in 1899 the Ehmanns built an olive processing plant there. What made Freda's olives distinctive was that she insisted that the olives not be pickled until they were black. Previously, pickled olives were usually an unattractive mottled green and brown.

Freda's plant expanded during the period 1901-1920. The Ehmann Olive Company was dedicated in 1920.

The Ehmanns sold their interest in the company in 1925 and moved back to the Bay Area. In 1976, the factory moved to its present location, the former home of Wyandotte Olive Cannery. Today, a new company carries on the tradition with the name of "Ehmann Olive Company," with the Factory still located in Oroville.