Fly Creek Cider Mill's Extra-Sharp, Mill-Aged New York State Cheddar – The Story

The tradition of great-tasting cheese at the Fly Creek Cider Mill started long before present-day founder Charlie Michaels ordered his first wheel.

The Michaels Family were long-time Main Street Merchants in near-by Cooperstown. Starting around 1865 Nehemiah Michaels established the Washington Market purchasing the old Otsego County Sheriff Office and moving it to a vacant lot at 95 Main Street. The store was mostly a meat market but also sold cheddar cheese cut from the wheel and wrapped in white butcher's paper then tied with a string.

Nehemiah's son purchased the lot next door and built a new Michaels Market which the next two generations continued operation as an IGA until 1976. Throughout the years extra-sharp cheddar cheese also known as "store cheese" was a staple at the store continuing with Nehemiah's Son Howard Nehemiah and his son Howard Potter "Hi" Michaels.

Bill (Howard William) and Howard Potter (Hi) Michaels at Michaels' Market c. 1973

Not having the desire to be a Main Street Grocer Hi's son Charlie purchased the Fly Creek Cider Mill and continued the Michaels tradition of offering New York State Cheddar. Charlie took the tradition one step further and built an aging rack in a cool area under the press allowing him the ability to add age which customers came to enjoy and expect.

Today the Mill still purchases New York State Cheese and ages it on-site in a temperature controlled facility. "We continue to purchase from the McCadam Cheese Company, something the Michaels have been doing for six generations," says Bill Michaels, co-owner of the Mill. "We purchase "Summer Cheese" made with milk from cows that are out on pasture because it tastes and ages better than other seasons."

To develop the Extra-Sharp flavor profile now preferred by customers the aging process takes three to five years which means the aging facility generally holds 15 – 20 tons at a time. Forty-pound blocks are cut down to random weight pieces and hand wrapped in plastic then covered in white butcher's paper. "We continue the process of white-wrapping because it just looks right. It just wouldn't be Michaels' cheese without it," says Bill.

The Mill also smokes the Cheddar on-site using its orchard's apple wood trimmings for great smoky flavor.
In addition to Cheddar the Mill sells fresh Cheese Curds and many other styles of Cheese.

Tips to enjoying the Mill's Cheese:

- For best flavor always serve at room temperature.
- Re-wrap after every opening.
- If mold happens to develop, simply remove and continue to enjoy.
- The small "crunchies" in the cheese are calcium lactate crystals which are a sign of well-aged cheese.
- If your cheese "weeps" at room temperature or arrives with liquid this is the process known as "syneresis." Proteins in the cheese release moisture as they age and allows the cheese to reach its next stage of maturity. Simply wipe off any excessive moisture, wrap the cheese in new plastic wrap, and store it in the refrigerator.

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