

# Budlong Pickle Company

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The **Budlong Pickle Company** was an American company based in Chicago that made and marketed pickles from its own cucumbers. Founded in the late 1850s, it was sold in 1958 to a company which was later acquired by Dean Foods. The Budlong pickle legacy has recently been revived as the namesake of a hot dog restaurant in Chicago.

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Lyman A. Budlong, founder of Budlong Pickle Company. Collection of the Chicago Public Library.

## Background

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In the 19th century, Chicago was a powerhouse of American agriculture. The Union Stock Yards was the center of American meatpacking, and the Chicago Board of Trade provided financial support for investment in agricultural commodities.<sup>[1]</sup>

In addition to its dominance in meatpacking and the grain trade, Chicago was a center of American pickle industry in the late 19th century.<sup>[2]</sup> Among the reasons for Chicago's pickle prominence were ample supplies of salt and a robust rail infrastructure.<sup>[3]</sup>

The Budlong family, an old Rhode Island family and the namesake of Budlong Farm, were established farmers and picklers on the East Coast, with a large operation in Cranston, Rhode Island.<sup>[4][5]</sup>

## Early history

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In the late 1850s, Lyman A. Budlong (1829–1909) started a large farm in Chicago—in an area now named Budlong Woods—called the Budlong Nursery.<sup>[6][7]</sup> Dates of the Nursery's establishment vary, but it must have been in 1857, the year that Lyman first came to Chicago, or later.<sup>[6]</sup>

The Nursery, nicknamed the "village of glass" after its many greenhouses, produced large quantities of cucumbers, onions, and other vegetables.<sup>[7]</sup> It also grew flowers.<sup>[8]</sup> Approximately 700 acres (2.8 km<sup>2</sup>) in size, the center of the farm was at what is now the intersection of California and Foster Avenues in the Budlong Woods section of Chicago's Lincoln Square community area.<sup>[9][10]</sup>

The Budlong Pickle Company, founded in 1857 or 1859, was initially part of the same enterprise as the Nursery.<sup>[9][11][12]</sup> In 1903, the *Chicago Sunday Tribune* called Budlong's the largest pickle farm in the world;<sup>[10]</sup> as of 1928, the *Tribune* called "one of the largest pickle factories in the world".<sup>[13]</sup> It sold approximately 100,000 bushels of pickled cucumbers per year during the late 19th century.<sup>[11]</sup> In 1899, Joseph J. Budlong—Lyman's brother—patented a vegetable sorting device "particularly applicable to the sorting or grading of pickles according to size".<sup>[14]</sup>

The factory was located at the intersection of Lincoln and Berwyn avenues,<sup>[8]</sup> and a special "pickle train" ran on the Chicago and North Western line to pick up its employees.<sup>[10]</sup> The farm employed a number of laborers who had immigrated to the United States from central and eastern Europe.<sup>[10]</sup> As of 1903, workers earned an average of \$1.25 per day, or approximately \$36 today; some earned as little as 25 cents, or around \$7.<sup>[10]</sup>

The Nursery property was a golf course by the late 1920s, but the Pickle Company continued operations thereafter.<sup>[3]</sup> Lyman Budlong had reportedly made at least \$1.5 million (approximately equivalent to \$42,683,000 in 2019) from the Nursery as of his death c. November 1909.<sup>[6][15]</sup>

## Mid-century and sale

George L. Hathaway was Budlong's longtime president.<sup>[16]</sup> In 1945, Hathaway was presented with an award by the National Pickle Packers Association for demonstrating "outstanding fairness ... in procuring pickles for the armed forces".<sup>[17]</sup>

Budlong had operations in Columbia, Mississippi, as of 1936;<sup>[18]</sup> and in Ora, Indiana, as of 1940.<sup>[19]</sup>

In 1958, it merged with a Green Bay, Wisconsin–based food company specializing in pickles, which was later acquired by Dean Foods (now part of Dairy Farmers of America).<sup>[16][20][21]</sup>

## Present day

Although the Nursery and Pickle Company no longer exist, a Chicago-based hot dog restaurant and food truck has taken on the Budlong name.<sup>[22][23]</sup>

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**This page was last edited on 20 August 2020, at 04:05 (UTC).**

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