

Oval Wood Dish Company

Tupper Lake, New York in 1916-1964.

The community welcomed news of the Oval Wood Dish Company. The local newspaper reported that the firm would employ 300 men and 200 girls. New construction would be needed to house the influx of workers and their families. Oval Wood Dish revitalized the small logging town. Its owners held company picnics, built the first ski hill, and donated land for the Tupper Lake Country Club golf course. Oval Wood Dish also employed large numbers of women (unusual for its time), advertising that “Tupper Lake Girls Do Better Here.” Female workers were offered “light pleasant work...the factory is clean, light, well ventilated, and warm in Winter.”

Although the firm struggled during the Depression, the company rebounded with the introduction of the “Ritespoon” and “Ritefork” in 1937. The equipment needed to manufacture the new products was designed and tested in the Tupper Lake plant. The *Tupper Lake Free Press* announced the new line of Riteshape products: “They are the only wooden spoon on the market with a bowl, and the only ones shaped like a metal spoon. Both products are made from selected white birch, and are smooth and sanitary. There are no rough edges or splinters, and they are not rendered useless by heat, oil, or moisture...even when used in hot drinks.” The Ritefork was shaped like the spoon, but with three short tines—the equivalent of the modern “spork.” Both utensils were “packed in cellophane packages which display the contents but prevent contamination.”

The Riteshape line of wooden tableware proved a success. By 1940, Oval Wood Dish employed 539 workers in Tupper Lake, fulfilling predictions that the new line would revitalize the company: “The equipment already in service to turn them out is being worked 24 hours a day.”

The woodenware division was sold in 1964 to Roger Sullivan and local attorney Adam Palmer. The woodenware division had been manufacturing clothespins, bowling pins, tongue depressors, furniture pieces, commercial veneer, hardwood flooring, ice cream and popsicle sticks, and, well into the 1960s, the small, flat spoons many remember from childhood: “Five hundred million wooden spoons alone are produced annually, and the chances are that the wood spoon that comes with your cup of ice cream ...brings silent greetings from Tupper Lake.”