Clarence Birdseye Biography

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Biography

Born in Brooklyn, New York, Clarence "Bob" Birdseye attended Amherst College for two years before leaving in 1912 in order to indulge his spirit of adventure by fur-trading and trapping in Labrador, Canada. Birdseye returned to Labrador in 1916 with his new wife and infant. In order to preserve the few fresh vegetables that found their way to Labrador by ship, Birdseye began experimenting with the Eskimo method of quick-freezing foods. He stored fresh cabbages in a barrel with sea water which froze quickly in the subzero Arctic climate. Birdseye also experimented with quick-freezing fish and caribou meat. When thawed, these foods remained tender and fresh-flavored, unlike previous methods involving slow cold storage.

Birdseye returned to the United States in 1917 determined to develop commercial methods of rapid freezing, experimenting with an electric fan, cakes of ice, and salt brine. In 1923 he invested everything he had in Birdseye Seafoods, marketing frozen fish. In 1924 he and three partners founded General Seafoods in Gloucester, Massachusetts, which became the first company to use the technique of rapid dry freezing of foods in compact, packageable blocks.

The Postum Company bought Birdseye's business and 168 patents in 1929 for $22 million. The company renamed itself General Foods and marketed its frozen foods under the *Birds Eye* trademark.

After the sale, Clarence Birdseye continued as a consultant to General Foods and promoted the development of the frozen foods industry by lecturing and writing. He devoted himself to more inventing, obtaining over 300 patents, including ones for an infrared heat lamp, a whale-fishing harpoon, a method of dehydrating foods, and a spotlight for store window displays. When Birdseye died in New York City, he was recognized as the father of the frozen food industry. His name lives on in the *Birds Eye* brand of frozen vegetables.