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*She Felt Sorry  
For 2 Little Boys  
And the Sandwiches  
Daddy Made—So...*

## She discovered how to help homemakers in a “JIFFY”

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Mabel White Holmes

Chelsea — she is diminutive, feminine, attractive...and she started a new world-wide industry because she felt sorry for two little motherless boys whose father made such frightful looking sandwiches they took to school in their lunches.

They came home one day in 1930 with her two boys, and she found excuses for them to lay aside their lunches and eat with her twin sons. Their father must be nice enough, she reasoned, to have such nice sons, but those biscuits!

Mabel White Holmes and her husband, Howard S. Holmes, representing seventh and sixth generations, respectively, in the flour milling businesses, had the kind of close association which shared business as well as family interests.

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HOWARD had been telling his wife that his father, Harmon S. Holmes, a banker as well as a miller, had shown great astuteness in buying this Chelsea milling site in 1908. Now, he said, they would have to turn their study toward better methods of handling the product, since they were approaching the highest quality you could attain in flour.

Mabel Holmes remembered the boys and their atrocious sandwiches. Possibly, she reasoned aloud, they should print recipes on the flour bags and packages, so carefully worded that even a father could make good breadstuffs for sandwiches.

“But, no,” she said, “that wouldn’t be enough. Somehow we’ll have to have packages with everything in them but the liquid, and so perfectly

mixed that even the father of a motherless brood would be able to make good biscuits.”

Her husband thought it was a great idea. He said motherless brood or no, every housewife would appreciate the saving in time and fuss. Not one in ten cooks could make fluffy, delicious, baking-powder biscuits.

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WASN’T IT T. S. Eliot who said: “Between the idea and the reality — between the motion and the act — falls the shadow?”

Well, there was plenty of shadow between the idea and the reality. First, what should go into the recipe? Which type of baking powder would best stand up under the wait between the mixing and the suing? How much should go into each package? What method of blending would insure the perfect mixing?

As to the size of each package, Mrs. Holmes said they should scout around and find out how many biscuits an average family used for one meal. She said the greatest bane of most culinary existences was the amassing of opened packages. Most of

their contents became stale before being used.

What about a name? It would have to be catchy, descriptive, just right. They considered many, but none seemed just the right one.

Then, one night when they were driving home to Chelsea from Chicago in a heavy rainstorm, Mrs. Holmes was at the wheel. She was thinking of the problem of a name. And she remembered how her father loved hot biscuits — and the dawning came!

She could almost hear their cook, Guila, back in Ohio, saying when her father was coming home to lunch and announcing he was in a hurry: “Now, Miss Mabel, you tell your father them good hot, biscuits will be ready in a jiffy!”

“Jiffy.”

“That was it!”

She nearly wrecked the car. Her husband was instantly convinced that “JIFFY” was the name that would sell.

As for a package, they came up with the same one used today, the white-faced box with black and blue lettering and it holds just enough for the average family for one meal.



Howard Holmes Sr.



Howard Holmes Jr.



Dudley Holmes

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**THIS WAS** the beginning, not only of a long line of “Jiffy” mixes – but a whole new industry of cooking short-cuts that now began to appear on the market. Every good idea is quickly pounced upon.

The idea was so new that the Chelsea Milling Co. had to do some demonstrating to get across the new plan. The first large chain store group to take more than a few cases was the C.F. Smith Stores in Detroit.

**Then another plum fell into their lap, in the persona of Dr Royal S. Copeland, who had been born in Dexter. He later was Mayor of Ann Arbor, then dean of Flower Hospital in New York City, the health commissioner of New York City. He wrote a syndicated column on health for several hundred newspapers, and ran a Health Consulting Laboratory for foods.**

He asked to test the “Jiffy” product, and he gave it is unconditional approval.

Dr. Copeland then became Senator Copeland from New York, and “Jiffy” sales soared.

One problem facing Chelsea Milling Company now was more space. Nestled beneath a battery of tall white grain storage tanks was a house that looked every year its age. In the yard were buildings once housing skilled craftsmen long since abandoned to disuse and decay.

**Holmes approached the owner, who steadfastly refused to sell. The house and the other moldering buildings were all she had left of the work of her husband. Finally, Holmes convinced her she should sell, provided she could live there the rest of her life.**

The company even installed modern plumbing for her and kept the lawn cut. The little tenant was comfortable – until the workmen came to tear down the old woodshed that barely stood against the elements. She tearfully sought out Holmes, and even the woodshed remnants remained.

**In 1933 or 1934, a widely-known artist, Jonathan Taylor, was driving down M-52 (then M-96). He was so impressed with the huge white storage tanks silhouetted against the bright blue sky, and the moldering house and sheds nested in front of them, that he**

**sketched what he saw and called it “An American Cathedral.”**

The Smithsonian Institution Washington was impressed with it and chose it to be one of 27 etchings depicting American Scenes to be hung there. It still hangs there, but a copy of it is in the “Jiffy” offices.

The little woman felt vindicated. Her husband’s work would be preserved, even if the house and buildings should give way after her death.

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**IN 1936,** tragedy struck the Chelsea Milling Co. and its family. Holmes was in one of the towering grain tanks when the elevator malfunctioned and fell. He was instantly killed.

Mabel Holmes became the president of the firm and her twin sons worked closely with her.

By 1940, Mabel White Holmes felt that her sons were ready to handle everything, so she could step down to a less active role.

Howard became president in 1940, and Dudley became secretary-treasurer.

They planned and built an entirely new mill, described as the “newest most modern mill in the United States!”

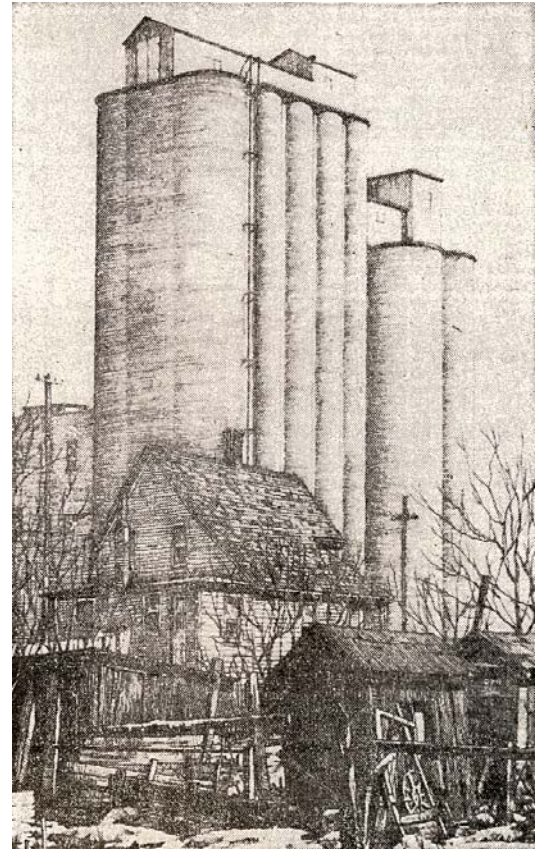
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**WHEN THE CORRECT** blending has been achieved, the mixes flow into bins to be distributed into more than one million packages a day. This process is entirely automated. The flat, blue boxes with the white front are picked up mechanically, lined, and the bottom flap glued by one machine.

They process along a chain belt line to filling machines, receiving half a package of mix, going on until it settles slightly, then receiving the second half.

**The packages continue on conveyors that weigh each down to grams. This weighing continues through three check points, which immediately side track any package that is under or overweight. The same automated process either puts amounts in or takes some out, and the package is again weighted.**

The top of each liner within the box is folded and the flap of the container is glued.



*“An American Cathedral”  
Sketch by Jonathan Taylor of the Chelsea Milling Co. storage tanks towering behind a little lady’s old home and sheds is now hanging in the Smithsonian Institute in Washington.*

All-in-all, there are more than two miles of conveyers.

But amid the automated machinery there is room at the Chelsea Milling Co. for the nostalgic memory of the beginnings of the business.

In one spot is an old desk dating back to 1890, with its cash drawer where both money; and records were kept of farmers buying flour or bringing in their wheat in exchange for wheat and flour.

And surely, Mabel White Holmes may look about her with great pride for having started a worldwide industry from suggestions for a housewife’s short-cuts in getting meals for her family.