

## 2.2: The History of Wheat Flour

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Archaeologists who did excavations in the region of the lake dwellers of Switzerland found grains of wheat, millet, and rye 10,000 years old. The Romans perfected the rotary mill for turning wheat into flour. By the time of Christ, Rome had more than 300 bakeries, and Roman legions introduced wheat throughout their empire. Improved milling processes were needed because even when wheat was milled twice and bolted (sifted) through silk gauze, the result was still a yellowish flour of uneven texture and flecked with germ and bran.

In the second half of the 19th century, there were great changes in the flour milling process. An American inventor, Edmund LaCroix, improved the process with a purifier to separate the middlings (bran, germ, and other coarse particles) from the particles that form smooth-textured white flour. In recent years, the demand for whole grain milling has increased because whole grain food products have proved to be more nutritious than products made from white flour. (More information on whole grain and artisan milling is provided later in this section.)

In Canada, large-scale wheat growing didn't occur until after the Prairies were settled in the 1800s. Hard wheat, such as Red Fife, Marquis, and Selkirk, earned Canada a position as the granary for Britain and many other European countries. Today, most of the wheat grown in Western Canada is the hard Red Spring variety. Soft wheats, such as soft red and soft white, are primarily grown in Quebec and Ontario. Many of the original wheat growers have passed on their farms to the next generations, while others branched out to organic farming and milling. One of these farms, Nunweiler's, has a heritage that goes back to the early 1900s when the original wheat in Canada, Red Fife and Marquis, was grown on this farm.

Today, the major wheat growing areas of North America are in the central part of the continent, in the Great Plains of the United States and the Canadian Prairies. From Nebraska south, winter wheat can be grown, while to the north through Saskatchewan spring wheat dominates. Many American states and some Canadian provinces grow both kinds. In fact, there are very few states that don't grow some wheat. Kansas, the site of the American Institute of Baking, could be said to be at the heart of the U.S. wheat growing area, while Saskatchewan is the Canadian counterpart.

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