

The Parson and the Potato Chip:

A History of Rocky Mountain Snacks

The story of Rocky Mountain Snacks is a unique chapter in American business history, evolving from a local ministry project into a high-tech manufacturing success story.



The Founding Vision (Mid-20th Century)

The narrative begins with **Rev. Richard M. "Dick" Canfield (1921–2016)**, a man of diverse talents: a Baptist minister, a beekeeper, and an entrepreneur. In the mid-20th century, seeking to create jobs and boost the local economy of Pine Bluffs, Wyoming, Canfield established Rocky Mountain Snacks.

Canfield was resourceful; he did not build a facility from scratch. Instead, he acquired an old potato flaking plant in Pine Bluffs and converted it into a functional chip factory. It was a true community operation, with Canfield often balancing his time between his ministries, his bee colonies, and the potato chip production line.



Early Operations and Growth

Getting the converted plant up to speed was no small feat. **Bob Michaud** was the first of the Michaud family to arrive on the scene, stepping in to help Canfield resurrect the factory and get the production lines moving efficiently.

Under their guidance, the company grew into a vital economic engine for the small town. At its peak, Rocky Mountain Snacks employed over 50 people—a significant number for the rural community. They established themselves as a leader in niche snacking categories, eventually becoming the largest manufacturer of organic pretzels in the industry.

1994: The Boulder Canyon Partnership



The company's most lasting impact on the consumer market occurred in **1994**. During this time, Rocky Mountain Snacks collaborated with brothers John and Mark Maggio to help develop the now-famous "**Boulder Canyon**" label. This partnership helped launch what would become a staple brand in the natural food aisle.

The Mid-90s Struggle

Despite these successes, by the **mid-1990s**, the factory faced a difficult future. The manufacturing equipment in the Pine Bluffs plant dated back to the 1950s. It consisted of manual, labor-intensive machinery that simply could not keep pace with modern competitors.

During this period, brothers **Dennis and Jerry Michaud** took the helm to try and save the business. Jerry served as General Manager, while Dennis worked as the Plant Engineer. They quickly realized that purchasing new, automated industrial fryers from existing vendors was too expensive for a small company.

The Great Pivot (1996)

Facing an "innovate or die" scenario, Dennis and Jerry Michaud decided to build their own equipment. They engineered custom automated fryers and processing systems specifically designed for their plant.

The new equipment was highly effective—so effective that other food manufacturers began asking if they could buy the machinery rather than the chips. The brothers realized their custom engineering was more valuable than the snack food itself.

In **1996**, leveraging their new designs, the brothers launched **JD Manufacturing Inc. (JDM)** as a side business to build food processing equipment for other companies.

1999: The Strategic Exit

By **1999**, the equipment manufacturing business had become the clear winner. The brothers made the strategic decision to exit the snack food market entirely. They sold their interest in the Rocky Mountain Snacks brand to focus 100% of their energy on JD Manufacturing Inc.

The Legacy Today

Today, the legacy of the original Pine Bluffs factory continues through JD Manufacturing Inc., which is still based in the same town. They are now a global leader in food processing technology, known specifically for their high-performance batch fryers used by kettle chip producers around the world.

While the "Rocky Mountain Snacks" name eventually faded from the Wyoming landscape, the company's DNA lives on in the machinery that powers the industry and the "Boulder Canyon" chips that still line grocery store shelves.