The History of Chocolate

Find out how chocolate became America’s favorite candy treat

Vocabulary

delectable: delicious
colonies: areas settled and controlled by people from another country, as Europeans settled in the Americas
immigrants: people who move to a new country to live there
flocked: gathered in a crowd; went in large numbers
captivated: delighted, fascinated, charmed
It all started with a smell—sweet and delicious.

The year was 1893. Milton Hershey was visiting a big fair in Chicago. Part of the fair was an exhibit of new and amazing inventions from around the world.

From the moment Hershey entered the exhibit hall, he was struck by a delectable scent. It filled the air. In a back corner of the hall, men from a German company were making chocolate.

The men had machines that changed bitter cocoa beans into sweet chocolate candies. Hershey watched with amazement.

Hershey was already a leading candy maker. He had created the largest caramel factory in the country. But he became convinced that the future of his business would be chocolate.

**Chocolate History**

Inside a cacao fruit are bitter little seeds. Around 400 B.C., Indians living in today’s central Mexico found that the seeds could be roasted, ground, and eaten.

By the year 400 A.D., Maya Indians had created a chocolate drink. They mixed cocoa powder with water and spices. Over the centuries, chocolate drinks spread to Europe and the colonies in America.

**Treat Trends**

Hershey built his caramel company in the 1880s. Back then, there was plenty of candy in the U.S. But it was expensive and hard to make. Plus, the quality wasn’t always great.

America’s most popular treats at that time were “penny candies.” These were peppermints, lemon drops, and other small sweets sold from large jars. Recipes for many of these treats had come from European immigrants.

Italians were known for making hard candies, like jawbreakers. Germans specialized in candies made from almond paste and spun sugar.

America’s first candy makers worked in tiny home kitchens. But by 1893, there were dozens of large companies, like Hershey’s.
Made in the U.S.A.
At the fair in Chicago, Hershey bought chocolate-making equipment. He had it shipped back to his caramel factory in Pennsylvania. Then he hired two chocolate makers. Soon the company was churning out chocolate candies in more than 100 shapes.
Still, Hershey wasn’t satisfied. Yes, his chocolates were tasty. But he wanted to make a chocolate that was lighter and creamier.
The trick, he knew, was to add milk. Swiss companies were making milk chocolate. But their recipes were secrets. If Hershey wanted to sell milk chocolate, he would have to figure out how to make it first.

Marvelous Milk
Finding a way to mix chocolate and milk was very difficult. Hershey’s team worked 16 hours a day, month after month.
Milk, which is 90 percent water, and cocoa butter, which is mostly oil, don’t blend together easily. Time after time, Hershey’s milk chocolate experiments ended in oily messes.
But finally, in 1900, Hershey succeeded.
He sold his caramel business. Then he bought 1,200 acres of land in Pennsylvania. There, he built the world’s biggest chocolate factory. He also built a town, named Hershey, for his workers and their families.
By 1915, Hershey’s milk chocolate bars were the No. 1 candy in the nation.
Visitors flocked to Hershey, Pennsylvania. They admired the tidy streets and giant factory. But what made the town really special was its smell—a chocolaty breeze that filled the air. It was the same heavenly scent that had captivated Milton Hershey many years before.
—Lauren Tarshis
Making a Candy Hit
How a little alien helped Reese’s Pieces soar

It was the late 1970s. The Hershey chocolate company was hungry for a new hit. The company had fierce competition from Mars. That’s the company that makes Milky Way, Snickers, and M&M’s.

Hershey’s leaders decided to build on the success of Reese’s Peanut Butter Cups. Their idea was to create a candy like the M&M. Instead of chocolate in the center, they would use peanut butter. It was hard to get the recipe right. At first, the oily peanut butter caused the candy shell to become greasy.

Finally, Hershey’s scientists created the perfect mix of peanuts and sugar. It was smooth and tasty and stayed put within a thin candy covering. Hershey came out with the new candy, Reese’s Pieces, in 1978. Sales were strong at first but soon sagged.

Would Hershey’s newest candy fail?

Then came an offer from Hollywood. A film company needed a candy for a new movie about an adorably odd-looking alien named “E.T.” An 8-year-old boy gives the candy to the alien and they become friends.

In the original script, that candy was M&M’s. But Mars would not let its candy be used in the movie. So the filmmakers called Hershey. They offered the chance to have Reese’s Pieces star in the 1982 movie. Hershey’s leaders didn’t know what to do. If the movie flopped, Reese’s Pieces might flop too. The candy might never recover.

In the end, Hershey said yes. The movie was a smash hit. Almost overnight, Reese’s Pieces became America’s most famous candy. Today, it is one of the top-10 best-selling candies in America. And for that, Hershey can thank a delicious recipe—and a cute little alien.

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Compare and Contrast

Use the story on this page and the article “The History of Chocolate” to answer the question. Write your answer on a separate piece of paper.

Milton Hershey believed that a person had to be willing to fail in order to succeed. How do the stories of Hershey’s milk chocolate and Reese’s Pieces show that this can be true? Use three details from each story in your explanation of what happened.