

Milton Hershey

From the sweeties.net wiki

The Hershey Company calls its milk chocolate bar the Great American Chocolate Bar. The man behind it left school early, failed in business before he succeeded, and gave most of his fortune away.

A poor start

Milton Snavely Hershey was born in Pennsylvania on 13 September 1857, into a Mennonite family of Swiss and German descent, and grew up speaking Pennsylvania Dutch. He had no schooling beyond the fourth grade. In 1871 he left school to be apprenticed to a printer, but soon lost the job. His mother then arranged for him, aged 14, to be apprenticed to a confectioner, Joseph Royer, in Lancaster, where he learned the sweet trade for four years.

His first ventures did not last. In 1876 he started a sweet business in Philadelphia. He worked for a confectioner in Denver, where he learned to make caramels with fresh milk, tried his luck in New Orleans and Chicago, and started another business in New York, which closed in 1886.

Caramels, then chocolate

Back in Lancaster, his Lancaster Caramel Company finally succeeded, and by the early 1890s it employed more than 1,300 people in two factories. Then, at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, he saw German chocolate making machinery and decided to go into chocolate. He bought the machines and began coating his caramels in chocolate.

In 1900 he sold the caramel business for \$1 million and kept the chocolate. That same year the first Hershey's milk chocolate bars went on sale. Milk chocolate had been a luxury, and Hershey mass produced it. Hershey's Kisses followed in 1907, first wrapped by hand in foil.

A town called Hershey

Hershey bought farmland near his birthplace and built his factory in the middle of dairy country, where the fresh milk was. Around it he built a town for his workers, founded in 1903, with electricity, indoor plumbing and central heating in the homes, a trolley system, a free school, and later an amusement park, golf courses, a zoo and a hotel. It is still called Hershey, Pennsylvania, and its street lights are shaped like Hershey's Kisses.

The Titanic

In 1912 Milton Hershey and his wife Kitty were booked to sail on the maiden voyage of the Titanic. They cancelled at the last minute because of business, and sailed on a German liner instead. A copy of the cheque he wrote to the White Star Line as a deposit for a first class stateroom survives in the archives of the

Hershey Story Museum.

The school

The Hersheys had no children. In 1909 they founded a school for poor, healthy, white orphan boys, and in 1918, three years after Kitty died, Milton put most of his fortune, including control of his company, into a trust for the school. It later took girls and children of all races, and its trust, worth about \$15 billion, makes it the wealthiest private school in the United States. The trust still holds a majority of the votes in the Hershey Company.

That trust has made its own headlines. In 2002 it tried to sell its control of Hershey to Wrigley for \$12.5 billion. After criticism from the media, the state attorney general and a senior local judge, the sale was abandoned, and ten of the 17 trustees were forced to resign. The school has faced its own criticism too: in 2011 it refused to admit a 13 year old boy because he was HIV positive, then settled a discrimination lawsuit for \$700,000 and changed its policy.

The war bar

In the Second World War, Hershey made chocolate for American troops. The army's Ration D bar had to weigh one or two ounces, resist melting at more than 90 degrees Fahrenheit (32 degrees Celsius), and taste unpleasant enough that soldiers would not crave it. It is estimated that more than three billion ration bars were made between 1940 and 1945. Milton Hershey died on 13 October 1945, aged 88.

Why Hershey's tastes different

People used to chocolate from other parts of the world often find Hershey's tastes odd. The Hershey process is a trade secret, but experts think the milk is partly broken down, which produces butyric acid, the same compound found in Parmesan cheese and butter. It gives a tangy taste that Americans have come to expect, so much so that other American makers often add butyric acid to their chocolate, but many people used to other chocolate find it unappetising. In Canada, Hershey introduced a reformulated bar in 1983.

In 2006 ABC News reported that several Hershey products had been changed to replace cocoa butter with cheaper vegetable oil. The company said it was cutting costs rather than raising prices or shrinking bars. The changed products no longer met the official American definition of milk chocolate, so their labels were changed to chocolate candy.

Hershey and Cadbury

Since 1988 Hershey has held the rights to make many Cadbury chocolate products in the United States, and in 2015 it went to court to stop a British importer bringing in British made Cadbury chocolate, which reportedly angered customers: see [why British Cadbury is hard to buy in America](#).

Cocoa and child labour

In 2021 Hershey was one of several big chocolate firms named in a lawsuit in the United States brought by eight men from Mali, who said they had been enslaved as children on cocoa plantations in Ivory Coast. The case was dismissed in 2022. See [child labour and the cocoa trade](#).

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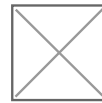
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