

Spring 2016

Historical Journal



LITITZ HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

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A Salute to the Wilbur Chocolate Company

Cory Van Brookhoven

Editor's Note:

With the closing of the 48 North Broad street plant, we thought we would devote most of this issue to the history and legacy of the Wilbur Chocolate Company in Lititz. The full story, most of which is excerpted in this issue, originally appeared in the Lititz Record Express newspaper in January, 2016.

The story of Wilbur Chocolate originally began in Philadelphia in 1865, when Henry Oscar Wilbur entered into a candy making partnership with Samuel Croft. As Croft, Wilbur & Company, they primarily produced hard and molasses candy for almost 20 years.



The business was very successful, which led them to move their original operation from 125 North Third Street to a much larger factory at 1226 Market Street. Then, in 1884, the partners split their business into two entities. Croft

continued to manufacture candy with a new partner, and named this business Croft and Allen; while H. O. Wilbur & Sons, as their name suggested, started a chocolate-making effort between Wilbur and his two sons Harry and William. Bertram, Wilbur's oldest son, became a partner when son Harry passed away in 1900.

By 1887, the company decided that a much newer facility was needed to keep up with demand, so the business moved to Third, New and Bread streets in Philadelphia. This was also the same year that the "stirring cupid" (the company's logo) was introduced.

Continued on page 3 inside...

Annual Plant Exchange Slated for May 1st

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The Lititz Historical Foundation will hold its Annual Plant Exchange on Sunday, May 1st at 1:30 PM. The event will be held in the Mary Oehme Gardens behind the museum buildings at 137-145 East Main Street in Lititz, rain or shine.



The plants to exchange must be perennials and must have identification tags for each plant. Each plant must be placed in a container for transportation.

Upon arrival, a ticket will be handed out for each plant. The plants will be placed in categories including: Sun, Shade, Exotic, Bulbs, Herbs and Ground Cover. These tickets can then be redeemed for another plant after all plants are placed in their categories and the attendees have some time to explore the Plant Exchange categories.

An announcement will be made at approximately 1:30 PM to select plants in exchange for your tickets.

The Lititz Garden Club members will be on hand for assistance and to help answer gardening questions. You can bring 1, 2, 5, or more plants and enjoy the afternoon in the Foundation's Gardens!



Our Museum Opens May 6th!

We are excited to announce that our museum opens for the season on Friday, May 6th! It will continue to be open Fridays and Saturdays from 10am-4pm. Then, beginning Memorial Day, our museum will be open 6 days a week along with guided tours of the 1792 Johannes Mueller house. Remember: Members in good standing receive FREE ADMISSION to the Mueller House.

Come discover all that is new in our museum and gift shop this upcoming season!



Spring 2016

HISTORICAL JOURNAL

A Salute to the Wilbur Chocolate Company Con't:



Then, in 1894, history was made. H. O. Wilbur, while looking for ways to sell more of his chocolate, created a process where the warm liquid was “dropped” into a uniquely-shaped mold that resembled a flower bud. It proved successful, and the Wilbur Bud was born!

Meanwhile in Lititz in 1900, the Kendig Chocolate Company was formed. They were sold two years later, and the name changed to the Ideal Chocolate Company. Soon after, a newer plant was built at 48 North Broad Street in Lititz, next to the Reading and Columbia railroad station. This location proved very beneficial, as ingredients could easily be received by rail. Then on Valentine’s Day in 1902, their name was changed to the Ideal Cocoa and Chocolate Company. Products such as nut lunch and almond bars, chocolate cigars, and Ideal-brand cocoa powder were among their items for sale. Then in April of 1913, it was announced that due to the increasing demand of their products, a five-story addition to the plant would be constructed.

Ideal remained in business until 1927 until it merged with the Brewster Chocolate Company of Newark, New Jersey. This new company was renamed the Brewster-Ideal Chocolate Company.

Back in Philadelphia in the late 1920's, H. O. Wilbur and Sons began business discussions with the Suchard Societe Anonyme of Switzerland to secure the rights to sell Suchard chocolate. By 1928, the rights were purchased, and Wilbur changed its name to the Wilbur-Suchard Chocolate Company. A few years later, they joined together with Lititz’s Brewster Ideal Chocolate Company. It was via this merger that Wilbur’s operations were relocated to Lititz in August of 1930. The move was fully completed by 1933.

In late 1958, the name was changed to the Wilbur Chocolate Company; and on October 18, 1968, the company was purchased by the MacAndrews and Forbes Company. Finally, between 1980 and 1992, the company was sold four different times, with the present owner (Cargill) purchasing it in 1992.



Continued on page 4...

Spring 2016

HISTORICAL JOURNAL

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Through the years, all of the companies would do heavy advertising. From specially-inserted cards containing flags from around the world to collectible "soldiers of the allies" cut outs to tins of all shapes and sizes, many times, they strived to give their customers a small freebie or bonus with every purchase. One year, the Ideal company even placed a small booklet on the history of Lititz in each package of specially-marked boxes of their assorted chocolates.

Many who grew up years ago in the Lititz area no doubt remember visiting Santa Claus. More often than not, the big friendly fellow would reward each child with an orange and a box of Wilbur-Suchard chocolates. Sponsoring youth baseball teams, employee bowling leagues, and advertising on large billboards were several other ways that the company would advertise throughout the community and beyond.



Due to the high quality and delicious taste of their product, it's no surprise that the company eventually caught the eye of savvy marketers--in 1978, a large crowd gathered in front of the building as Muhammad Ali himself stood at the door and introduced his new Crisp Crunch Bar—a peanut butter-flavored bar containing crisp rice.



But this wouldn't be the last time Wilbur Chocolate would be affiliated with national sports. In 1982, a gentleman came up with the idea to market a chocolate bar with crisp rice for the Milwaukee Brewers. The product was an instant sell-out all over Wisconsin, especially when the team advanced to the World Series. A few years later, the same person came up with the idea to create a bar for the Cleveland Indians. Where were both of these successful candy bars produced? None other than Wilbur Chocolate in Lititz!

The company would continue to catch the eye (and palates) of celebrities--from country music sensation Randy Travis to the Food Network's Alton Brown, (both of whom have been spotted shopping on separate occasions), who knows what other stars have flew under the radar and visited the store undetected? And who can forget then presidential hopeful Barack Obama, who, in 2008, visited the retail store with news reporter Dan Rather amid a swarm of the press and public.

A Salute to the Wilbur Chocolate Company Con't:

"Sweet" Facts:

-After the Wilbur plant in Philadelphia closed, the property was eventually renovated into "The Chocolate Works," a 5-building apartment complex.

-A special Liberty Bell-shaped glass jar was filled with candy and sold by Croft, Wilbur, and Company at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876. This unique keepsake was the very FIRST glass candy container ever produced.



-Mickey Mouse appeared on an early toasted nut and chocolate Wilbur-Suchard candy wrapper in the 1930's.

-Rumor has it that Milton Hershey, when trying to make a go at the chocolate industry, modeled his Hershey Kiss after H.O. Wilbur's creation on purpose, so customers would think that they were actually purchasing the tried and true Wilbur Bud, which was introduced 13 years earlier.

-In 1972, Penny Buzzard, (the then wife of the company's president) created the Candy Americana Museum inside the Lititz retail store.

-In 1982, in nearby Mount Joy, Wilbur purchased a second facility from the Bachman Candy Company in an effort to expand operations to keep up with demand.

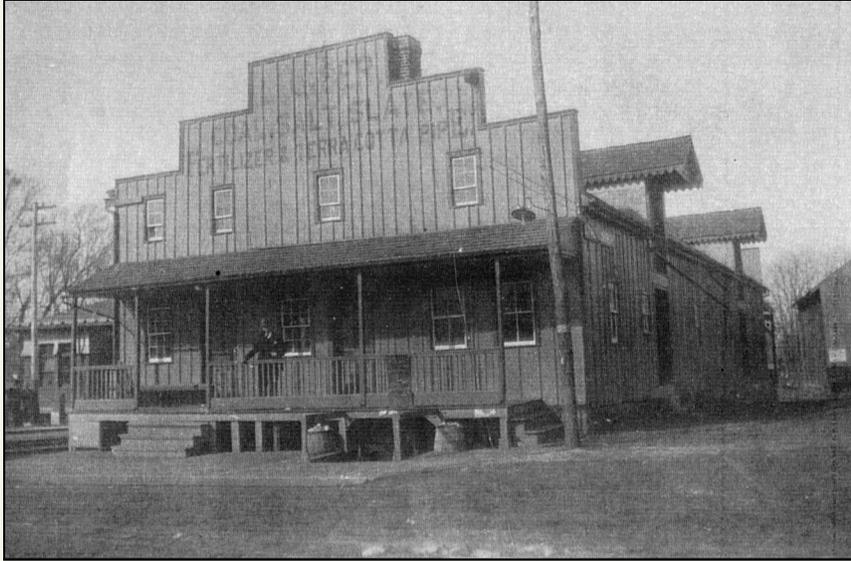
-Many years ago in New York City, Wilbur chocolates were available in subway station vending machines for a penny a piece--what a bargain!

Despite the plant closing, it is hoped that the retail store, as well as the Candy Americana Museum, will remain in the Broad street building.



DID YOU KNOW...?

Martin & Muth's coal and lumber yard on Broad street was considered the most desirable location for a new chocolate plant. It was purchased in 1902 for \$15,000.



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