

# This Day in History... September 13, 1857

## Birth of Milton Hershey

Businessman and philanthropist Milton Snavely Hershey was born on September 13, 1857, in Derry Township, Pennsylvania. After several failed attempts at business, he built a profitable caramel company, then used its sale to pursue a larger goal: making milk chocolate affordable for ordinary Americans.

Hershey was the only surviving child of Henry and Fanny Snavely Hershey, members of Pennsylvania's Mennonite community. His parents moved frequently, partly because his father struggled to keep businesses going. As a result, Milton attended several schools and received little formal education after the fourth grade. His mother stressed hard work, thrift, and practical skills.

At age 14, Hershey began an apprenticeship with a Lancaster printer. He disliked the work and lost the position after accidentally dropping his hat into a printing press. His mother and aunt then arranged a new apprenticeship with Joseph H. Royer, a Lancaster confectioner. From 1872 to 1876, Hershey learned how to make candy, operate equipment, and manage a small shop.

His first businesses did not succeed. In 1876, he opened a candy business in Philadelphia, but it failed after six years. He later worked in Denver, where he learned to make caramels with fresh milk rather than the paraffin then used by some candy makers. He tried other ventures in New York City and Chicago, but those also failed. The failures were costly, yet they gave him experience in recipes, machinery, and sales.

Hershey returned to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and established the Lancaster Caramel Company in 1886. Its caramel business grew quickly. Fresh milk from nearby farms gave the product a rich texture and became one of the company's advantages. An order from an English buyer helped the young company gain financial stability. By the 1890s, the Lancaster Caramel Company employed more than 1,300 people and sold candy in the United States and abroad.

At the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Hershey saw German chocolate-making machinery. He bought equipment and began producing chocolate coatings for his caramels. In 1894, he created the Hershey Chocolate Company as a subsidiary of his caramel business. He became convinced that milk chocolate, then largely an expensive European product, could be made and sold on a broad scale in the United States.

In 1900, Hershey sold the Lancaster Caramel Company for \$1 million—an enormous sum at the time—to the American Caramel Company. He retained the chocolate business. That year, he introduced the first Hershey's milk chocolate bar, which sold for five cents. Hershey's Kisses followed in 1907, and the milk chocolate bar with almonds appeared in 1908.

Hershey built a large chocolate factory near his birthplace in Derry Township, where dairy farms could supply the fresh milk his formula required. The factory opened in 1905. Around it, he developed the town of Hershey, Pennsylvania. Unlike many company towns of the era, it included homes, schools, a bank, a trolley system, parks, and recreational facilities. Hershey Park opened in 1906, initially as a place for company employees and their families to relax.

In 1898, Hershey married Catherine "Kitty" Sweeney. The couple had no children. In 1909, they established the Hershey Industrial School to provide a home and education for orphaned boys. Its original admissions policy reflected the era's racial restrictions, but the institution later expanded and is now the Milton Hershey School, serving boys and girls from low-income families.

Catherine died in 1915. Three years later, Hershey transferred his Hershey Company stock—then valued at about \$60 million—to a trust for the school. That decision ensured that much of the wealth created by the chocolate business would support the school after his death. The trust remains a major source of the school's funding today.

During World War II, the Hershey company produced special chocolate rations for the US military. The Ration D bar was designed to withstand high temperatures and provide emergency energy. It was deliberately made less appealing than ordinary candy so troops would save it for emergencies. Later, the company developed the better-tasting Tropical Bar for troops serving in hot climates. Hershey produced more than three billion ration bars during the war and received five Army-Navy "E" Awards for production excellence.

Milton Hershey died of pneumonia on October 13, 1945, at age 88. His chocolate company, town, school, and charitable foundations continued after his death, all shaped by his belief that business success brought responsibilities beyond profit. In the years since his death, Hershey's birthday has been celebrated as International Chocolate Day; though there are other days throughout the year recognized as World Chocolate Day and National Chocolate Day.



*Issued on Hershey's 138th birthday.*



*Fresh milk had to be processed quickly before it spoiled. At Hershey's factory, workers condensed skim milk with sugar to remove excess water, creating a stable ingredient for large-scale milk-chocolate production.*



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