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Hershey, Pennsylvania, the Sweetest Place on Earth

December 15, 2014 - By [John Christopher Fine](#) - [LINK](#)



Born on a farm in central Pennsylvania in 1857, **Milton S. Hershey** did not seem destined for great things. His father attempted many business ventures. He became estranged from his Mennonite wife and traveled seeking to make a living.

Milton's early childhood saw him in school in Derry Church, then in Lancaster. He never graduated and likely never had more than a fourth grade education.

He spoke Pennsylvania Dutch, the popular regional dialect of German and German Swiss, at home. He was apprenticed to the editor of a German language newspaper.

Fired for dropping his straw hat into the printing press, young Milton was next apprenticed to a candy maker in Lancaster. That he liked. He even set up his own candy business in Philadelphia to cash in on the hundredth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Milton worked hard but didn't make enough money to pay off his debts. He traveled and ended up in Denver, Colorado where he learned that fresh milk was the secret to making good candy. He was 29 years old when he returned to Lancaster. He had no money and his family shunned him. A friend that worked for Milton during his Philadelphia candy venture helped and they began to make caramel candy.

A successful sale to an English company signaled a great success for the Lancaster candy maker. He married Catherine Sweeney in 1898 when he was forty years old. Milton sold his caramel company for a million dollars in 1900. That was a fortune in those days. The candy making enterprise that was to make Hershey his most important and lasting contribution began in 1893 when he visited the World Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Germany exhibited chocolate making machinery which Milton bought and brought back to Lancaster.

He decided that the area around Derry Church would be a perfect site for his new chocolate factory. There was ample water, dairy farms that could supply fresh milk and an industrious work force. The Hershey chocolate factory was completed in 1905. In short order Hershey's candies caught on. With his development of mass production Hershey became a household word.

Derry Church was an area of rural farmland. There was no town to support a factory. Milton Hershey decided to build a town that could house his workers. Plans were drawn up with all amenities including a bank, churches, a hotel, school, golf course and zoo. Milton even constructed a trolley system so workers in nearby towns could get to work. The town was completed by 1913.

When the Great Depression hit in 1929, Milton Hershey kept men working on the hotel, a community building and a senior hall for the boy's school he and his wife founded for orphaned children. These and other projects kept people employed at a time when other factories and businesses were closing their doors and putting people out of work. No one was laid off at Hershey during the depression.

Before Catherine Hershey's premature death in 1915, she and Milton founded the Hershey Industrial School in 1909. It is now called the Milton Hershey School. Perhaps it was the fact that they could not have children of their own that they created a deed of trust that provided for a school that would house, feed, clothe and educate orphaned boys.

Milton Hershey died at age 88 in 1945. His legacy remains in Hershey. The school is now coeducational and prepares almost 2,000 students from pre-kindergarten through high school for college. Some 90% of Hershey High School graduates go on to college. Most students have grants from the foundation to pay for their four year studies as well as money earned at jobs during their school years.

Chocolate is still the mainstay of Hershey. Hershey business enterprises still fund the trust that supports the school. The neat, progressive community continues to be a great place to live and work.

The Hotel Hershey was built in 1933 on a magnificent knoll with expansive gardens. It is considered one of America's most beautiful hotels. The design is in the Mediterranean style Milton Hershey favored. The architecture was inspired by what he saw on his many trips to Europe. The Hotel Hershey has been modernized with a three story spa, heated pool and fitness center. Guests are given a Hershey bar at check in. The **Circular Dining Room** in the hotel remains its flagship restaurant.



Above: The Hotel Hershey under construction in 1933 (photo courtesy of The Hershey Foundation). The Hotel Hershey today with its magnificent Mediterranean facade. Hershey's chauffeur Bruce bids welcome. The hotel provides guests with shuttle service to Hershey Park and other attractions in town. Hershey's drivers are well informed and great ambassadors for the hotel. (Myriam Moran copyright 2014)

The grand restaurant is reminiscent of Spanish colonial style. Large picture windows overlook two ponds and gardens outside. Wrought iron lamps accent the decor. Subdued carpeting and leather chairs at blonde wood tables bordered in dark wood add to the style of the restaurant. Real flowers grace each table set with flickering candles. Menus offer selections of meat and fish and a well-stocked wine case surrounds the entrance way.



Trevi 5 is an Italian restaurant in the hotel. The Spanish tile floors and decorative style invites diners to enjoy homemade pasta dishes. **Harvest** is The Hotel Hershey's farm to table restaurant. Every effort is made to use local purveyors and to serve healthy and nutritious meals. Breakfast buffets are available as are Sunday brunches in The Circular Dining Room.



Above: The fountain lobby in the early days at the The Hotel Hershey. (Courtesy of Hershey Foundation). The fountain lobby at the Hotel Hershey today. The hotel is beautifully decked out for Christmas. (Myriam Moran copyright 2014)

Hershey Park and **ZooAmerica** are among the most beautiful entertainment and recreation areas in America. Visitors to Hershey can enjoy **The Hershey Story**. Located on West Chocolate Avenue the modern building houses artifacts from Milton and Catherine Hershey's lives.

There are fascinating documentary photographs and exhibits. An actual candy wrapping machine can be turned on that shows how Hershey chocolate kisses were wrapped. The exhibits are fun. There is a room where visitors can apply for work in the Hershey factory.



Before automation, women were employed to wrap Hershey kisses by hand. They were paid by the piece earning ten cents for every 525 kisses they wrapped - the number that a five pound box contained. Factory work was tough. Men in the roasting department had the hardest job working close to hot ovens that kept the temperature at 120 degrees. Roasters were paid the most in the early days at fifteen cents an hour.

The genius of Milton Hershey is evident as the Hershey story is revealed. Steps from his boyhood to his great philanthropy and moral responsibility for his employees are described. Not to be missed is the large Apostolic clock that graces the first floor of the Hershey Story building. Built in 1878 by John Fiester, it was bought by Milton Hershey in 1935. It is only run on the first weekend of every month and features a procession of Christ's twelve apostles.

Annexed to the Hershey Story is **Cafe Zooka**. There are many activities to take advantage of including a **chocolate making lab**. Cafe Zooka offers **chocolate tasting** for \$9.95 with six tastes of different mixtures of chocolate from all over the world. It is recommended that tasters start with the sweetest milk chocolate and go toward the highest 72% cocoa content chocolate.

Hershey Park and the zoo are lots of fun. The 1919 Philadelphia Toboggan Company carousel is not to be missed. Milton Hershey bought it in 1944 and installed it in the park. There are 42 magnificently carved jumping horses, 24 stationary horses and two carved chariots. Music from its Wurlitzer Military Band organ with 164 pipes, drums and bells adds to any experience at the Park. There are roller coasters and bumper cars, an aerial tram that gives a bird's eye view of the park and a tall tower ride that rotates.

Christmas in Hershey Park is special. There are lights and choral groups, magical decorations and a festive holiday spirit. There is fun for all ages. A bridge connects the park to the zoo where wolves and alligators can be viewed along with lots of North American game animals.



Down the drive from The Hotel Hershey are magnificent **gardens**. During the Christmas season visitors can drive through **Sweet Lights**. A whole area is dedicated to amazing decorations in the festive holiday spirit. **Hershey Gardens** cover 23 acres. Catherine Hershey loved roses. There are her special rose gardens along with many other themed gardens like the Japanese garden and herb garden. There is an arboretum, butterfly house and a children's garden.

Dining in Hershey is a gourmet experience. The Hotel Hershey's restaurants are supervised by **Executive Chef Ken Gladysz**. Executive **Pastry Chef Cher Harris** creates taste sensations that tempt the palate. **Chocolate-Covered February** is special. It is a whole chocolate month in Hershey with treat sensations prepared by skilled chefs. **(Left: Chef Gladysz & Chef Harris)**



For beer lovers **Troegs Brewery** on Hershey Park Drive offers brewery tours and tastings. It is a popular place. Their long tables and booths are usually crowded with diners sampling their food and tasting Troegs ales and beers. Troegs Snack Bar offers everything from pretzels and popcorn to oysters on the half-shell and mussels along with interesting and innovative salads.

Seafood lovers will enjoy the dining experience at **Devon Restaurant**. Devon is located next door to the Hershey Story on Chocolate Avenue. Fish is flown in daily and entrees include the fresh catch as well as tuna, salmon, Opah from Hawaii, Barramundi from Bali, trout, lobster and Nantucket Bay scallops. Devon's wine list is complete and will satisfy most every palate. They feature Wagner Family wines from Napa's Caymus Vineyards.

Save the best for last since **Chocolate World** is the simulated tour of the Hershey Chocolate Factory. Moving cars take visitors on a tour of chocolate making. No actual Hershey factory tours are given today since the creation of Chocolate World. Everything about the chocolate making story is told in this simulated popular exhibit. Visitors are let out into Hershey's chocolate store where shopping is a very sweet undertaking.

Hershey is fun any time of year. Christmas holidays are special with many events and beautiful decorations to be enjoyed by the whole family.

For more information visit www.visithersheyharrisburg.org or call their visitor bureau toll-free at 1-877-727-8573 or 717-231-7788. For information about The Hotel Hershey and Hershey Park visit www.thehersheyhotel.com or call them at 717-533-2171. Other websites that offer information are www.hersheystory.org and www.hersheypa.com.

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