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# The Hershey Company

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## Introduction

Few brands in the world conjure as immediate a sense of nostalgia, joy, and American heritage as The Hershey Company. With its instantly recognizable brown-and-silver wrappers and the distinct, rich taste of its milk chocolate, Hershey holds a singular place not only in the history of confections, but also in the broader story of American innovation and entrepreneurship. This book, "The Hershey Company: The Story of An American Company," aims to explore the multifaceted journey of a business that grew out of one man's determination, evolved through decades of experimentation and expansion, and ultimately became an icon of both industry and philanthropy.

At the core of Hershey's history is the extraordinary vision of its founder, Milton S. Hershey. Raised in rural Pennsylvania amid financial woes and modest means, Hershey's youth was characterized by setbacks and failed ventures. Yet it was precisely these early hardships that forged his tenacity, setting the stage for his ambitious foray into the world of caramel and eventually chocolate. Milton Hershey's determination to make milk chocolate accessible to the masses was a milestone in industrial food production, democratizing what was once an expensive European delicacy, and introducing it to millions of Americans.

But the story of The Hershey Company is not merely one of candy bars and confections. It is a reflection of broader societal shifts in America—of industrialization, the rise of consumer culture, and the responsibility of business to give back to its community. From the creation of a thriving model town in central Pennsylvania to the establishment of a school for disadvantaged children, Hershey's legacy extends far beyond commerce, embodying a rare blend of capitalism and compassion.

Through this book, readers will discover how the Hershey Company has grown, diversified, and adapted to ever-changing tastes and expectations. From its earliest caramels to its most recent forays into healthy snacking and plant-based alternatives, the company's product portfolio mirrors both the creativity of its teams and the shifting demands of the marketplace. We will also explore the company's global ambitions, marketing ingenuity, and enduring commitment to sustainability—chronicling how Hershey balances growth and profit with ethical sourcing, environmental stewardship, and social responsibility.

Today, Hershey stands as an enduring symbol of American enterprise, its story shaped by ingenuity, resilience, and goodwill. As we trace this remarkable journey through twenty-five chapters, we will uncover not just the making of a global confectionery powerhouse, but also the principles and people—past and present—that guide its course. The Hershey Company's narrative is not just about sweet treats; it is a

testament to the idea that business can be a force for good, nourishing both body and spirit, and leaving a legacy that spans well beyond its products.

This book is both a historical account and a thoughtful analysis of Hershey's current position in the global marketplace. It aims to offer a comprehensive review of how a single company's devotion to quality, community, and continual reinvention helped it become one of America's most beloved brands—and what the future may hold as it continues to shape the tastes, values, and social fabric of generations to come.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: The Hershey Legacy: A Sweet Beginning**

The story of The Hershey Company is, at its heart, the story of an enduring American legacy, one deeply rooted in the singular vision of its founder, Milton Snavely Hershey. Born on September 13, 1857, near Derry Church, Pennsylvania, Hershey's early life hardly hinted at the sweet empire he would one day build. His beginnings were humble, marked by the simple, strict tenets of his mother Fannie's Mennonite faith and a childhood characterized by frequent relocations and a remarkably limited formal education, which concluded after just the fourth grade. These formative years, despite their challenges, undoubtedly instilled in him a resilience and a drive that would prove indispensable in his later pursuits.

Milton Hershey's journey to confectionery titan was not a linear path to success. Before he ever perfected the iconic milk chocolate bar, his career was dotted with a series of entrepreneurial attempts that, for various reasons, simply didn't take off. Philadelphia, Chicago, and New York all served as backdrops for these initial, less-than-successful candy-making ventures. Many would have been deterred by such repeated setbacks, but Hershey possessed an innate stubbornness and an unwavering belief in his abilities, a trait that would ultimately distinguish him from countless other hopeful entrepreneurs of his era.

It was in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, a city already known for its rich agricultural bounty and a burgeoning industrial spirit, that Hershey finally tasted his first significant success. In 1883, he established the Lancaster Caramel Company, a business that, unlike its predecessors, found its footing and began to flourish. This venture marked a crucial turning point, providing him with the foundational experience in candy production and sales that would later inform his monumental shift into chocolate. The caramels, rich and creamy, quickly gained popularity, laying a solid financial groundwork and instilling confidence in Hershey's business acumen.

While the Lancaster Caramel Company thrived, Milton Hershey's innovative spirit remained restless. The turning point that would forever alter his trajectory—and the course of American confectionery—arrived in 1893, at the grand spectacle of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. This global fair, a showcase of technological marvels and cultural achievements, captivated Hershey's imagination, particularly a display of German chocolate-making machinery. He was utterly fascinated by the intricate workings of the equipment, immediately recognizing its transformative potential.

Without hesitation, Hershey purchased the machinery and had it transported back to his Lancaster plant. It was a bold move, a significant investment based on an intuitive understanding of a market yet to be fully realized in America. At that time, chocolate was largely a European luxury, often bitter and enjoyed primarily by the wealthy elite. Hershey, however, envisioned something different—something democratic and accessible. His famous declaration, "Caramels are a fad but chocolate is permanent. I am going to make chocolate," perfectly encapsulated his foresight and his absolute conviction in the future of this relatively unexploited commodity.

In 1894, acting on this conviction, Milton Hershey established the Hershey Chocolate Company as a subsidiary of his thriving caramel business. This marked the official genesis of what would become a global powerhouse. By the following year, various chocolate confections, likely in rudimentary forms compared to today's standards, began to appear on the market, signaling Hershey's serious commitment to his new endeavor. This period was one of intense experimentation and learning, as Hershey and his team grappled with the intricacies of chocolate production, refining techniques and developing recipes.

The success of the Lancaster Caramel Company continued, but Hershey's focus had irrevocably shifted. In 1900, he made a decision that would prove to be one of the most pivotal of his career: he sold the highly profitable Lancaster Caramel Company for a staggering \$1 million. This was an immense sum for the time, and it allowed him to dedicate his full, undivided attention and considerable resources to his burgeoning chocolate business. It was a clear, unambiguous statement of his belief that chocolate, not caramel, was the true future.

At the turn of the 20th century, milk chocolate was predominantly a Swiss specialty, known for its smooth texture and rich flavor, but also for its high price and limited availability. Milton Hershey was resolute in his ambition: he was determined to develop a formula for milk chocolate that could be mass-produced efficiently and economically, thereby making it accessible to a much broader audience. This was a challenging undertaking, requiring countless hours of relentless experimentation, as he sought to perfect a recipe that could be scaled for industrial production while maintaining a superior taste.

His breakthrough came with a revolutionary approach: using fresh milk directly in the chocolate-making process. This was a groundbreaking innovation at the time, as many existing methods relied on powdered milk or other less effective substitutes. Hershey's use of fresh milk not only allowed for mass production but also contributed to a distinctively creamy and notably tastier milk chocolate, setting his product apart from the competition and establishing the signature flavor that would become beloved by generations. This perfection of the milk chocolate recipe was not just a culinary achievement; it was a strategic masterstroke that would define The Hershey Company

for decades to come.

With a perfected milk chocolate formula in hand, Hershey's vision expanded beyond just the product itself. He began to dream of creating a self-sufficient, utopian community for his factory workers, a place where they could live and thrive. In 1903, he broke ground on what was destined to become the world's largest chocolate manufacturing plant. The location he chose was deliberate and deeply personal: Derry Township, Pennsylvania, the very area near his birthplace. This decision reflected not only practical considerations for raw materials and transportation but also a desire to invest in his roots.

Around this sprawling new factory, an unincorporated community began to develop organically. Initially referred to as Derry Church, the area quickly grew, fueled by the influx of workers and the burgeoning industrial activity. In 1906, in a fitting tribute to its benevolent founder, the community was officially renamed Hershey, Pennsylvania. This simple renaming cemented the inextricable link between the man, his company, and the town he was building, a connection that remains profoundly strong to this day.

Milton Hershey's approach to industrial development stood in stark contrast to many of his contemporaries. While other industrialists of the era often constructed utilitarian "company towns" characterized by bare-bones housing and limited amenities, Hershey envisioned something far grander. His aspiration was to create a "real hometown," a vibrant and desirable place to live. He poured resources into developing a community complete with tree-lined streets, comfortable family homes designed for quality of life, and a wide array of recreational and cultural opportunities that were uncommon for industrial towns of the period.

His commitment to this vision was so profound that building projects within the town of Hershey continued even during the dire economic conditions of the Great Depression. This sustained construction provided much-needed employment, offering a lifeline to countless families during a time of widespread hardship. These efforts transformed what had once been a sleepy rural area into a bustling and thriving American town, and, perhaps surprisingly, a major tourist attraction. The town itself became an embodiment of Hershey's philanthropic spirit, showcasing his belief in a holistic approach to employee well-being and community development.

Among the numerous projects undertaken to enrich the town, several iconic landmarks emerged, each contributing to the unique character of Hershey, Pennsylvania. Hersheypark, which first opened its gates in 1906, was initially conceived as a leisure spot for employees and their families, a place for relaxation and enjoyment after long hours at the factory. Over the decades, it has expanded exponentially, evolving into Pennsylvania's largest and most popular amusement park, drawing visitors from across the nation and beyond.

Another significant construction during the challenging years of the Great Depression was The Hotel Hershey. This grand Mediterranean-style hotel, perched majestically overlooking the town, epitomized luxury and offered a serene escape. Its construction, like other projects during this period, served the dual purpose of providing employment and solidifying the town's reputation as a destination. The Hershey Theatre, which debuted in 1933, quickly became a vital community center, hosting performances, events, and gatherings, further enhancing the cultural fabric of the town.

The philanthropic spirit extended to sports and entertainment facilities as well, with the construction of Hersheypark Arena in 1936 and Hersheypark Stadium in 1939. These venues provided additional recreational and entertainment options for residents and visitors alike, solidifying Hershey as a hub of activity. The Hershey Country Club, established in 1930, offered a retreat for golf enthusiasts, showcasing another facet of the town's commitment to a high quality of life.

The financial sustainability of the town and its mission was carefully structured. In 1927, the profits generated from the various non-chocolate entities within Hershey's portfolio, such as the amusement park, hotel, and other recreational facilities, were formally separated from the core chocolate manufacturing operations. These entities were consolidated under the umbrella of the Hershey Entertainment & Resorts Company. This strategic separation ensured that the success of these ventures would continue to directly support the town of Hershey and its foundational mission, a testament to Milton Hershey's enduring commitment to his community, long after his active involvement in the daily operations of the chocolate factory ceased.

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