

Recipe goof led SC man to invent first candy bar

Gibson, Ross
A VICTORIA CREAM candy bar was the prize in most Easter baskets before World War II. It made Santa Cruz world famous as the birthplace of the candy bar, so the Historic Preservation Commission is recommending honoring inventor Frazier Lewis in the name of an alley where his landmark store once stood.

In 1888, Patty Reed Lewis began running the Camp Capitola hotel, cottages, campground and roller-skating rink. With money tight, daughters Martha and Helen assisted, while her hunter/fisherman son Frazier supplied free meat for their home and hotel, even making his own bullets. Frazier opened a summer ice cream, soda and candy shop in 1892 with a branch store at the rink. Candy sales provided the siblings cash to see them through the winter.

Author James Houston learned that around 1900 the Lewises ruined a batch of candy when it turned to sugar. Unable to afford the loss, Frazier tried to salvage it with cream and flavoring. The resulting candies were so large they had to charge a nickel, and the family feared it would take time to get rid of them. But they had all sold by the end of the day, with orders for more. After improving the recipe, Frazier named it the "Victoria Cream" after the capital of British Columbia, where he'd first tasted walnut creams.

Gordon Richards recalled Frazier tried selling his recipe in 1907 to an Oakland candymaker with wide distribution. But the firm mainly supplied general stores, where penny candy was sold from glass canisters, requiring long shelf life and resistance to



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 THEN AND NOW

melting in summer heat. Only hard bricks of "baking chocolate" were stocked. They said his nickel candy wouldn't sell, and would stick together when piled in glass canisters. Frazier hoped to prove there was a market for them, and shipped out individually wrapped samples to generate orders.

The response was amazing, so in 1910 he opened the ground floor of the new Trust Building at Pacific and Soquel avenues as his candy and ice cream store, with his coffee shop to the east, and candy factory in back. The white-trimmed red brick structure built for Heald Business College upstairs, suggested an Ivy League college through its colonial details. But it was a better known symbol of the famous candy factory, even becoming a National Register Landmark. Former Heald students still recall with delight how, at certain hours, the classrooms would suddenly fill with the aroma of baking chocolate!

In 1911, nickel "ballpark candy bars" were introduced in wrappers by another company as a way to sell chocolate at sporting events. Many of these candy bar's names are still familiar today. Frazier Lewis had pioneered a whole new industry.

Lewis' store window was an attraction in

itself. In 1913, he displayed an Easter nest with 20 golden eagle eggs, valued at a total of \$90, and a photo of two eaglets. These had been found in 1888 by William Shattuck on his ranch. One eaglet was given to the Lewises that year, remaining a family pet for decades. The eagle eggs weren't fertile, but the eagle was just as happy hatching chicken eggs for them.

On Lincoln's Birthday, 1911, he displayed a family heirloom. The troop register from the Blackhawk War had belonged to Frazier's grandfather, James Frazier Reed, and was handwritten by his friend, Abraham Lincoln. In Lincoln's hometown of Springfield, Ill., Reed helped organize in 1846 the ill-fated Reed-Donner Party, which brought the family west. When the party became snowbound, Reed went for help while his wife and daughter stayed, unaware some in the party had resorted to cannibalism. The daughter was the candymaker's mother, Patty Reed Lewis.

The Victorias were distributed statewide, even carried by "United Cigar" stores. The odd out-of-state location stocked this "California treat," and when Lewis' Chinese cook Hui Kim returned to China, he opened a Frazier Lewis Candy Store there. Yet even while shipping hundreds of pounds at a time, Lewis personally mixed his secret formula with two garden spades before allowing his employees in to make the bars.



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 Gibson collection
 The 1910 Trust Building at Pacific and Soquel avenues had the entire ground floor for its famous candy factory, store and restaurant.

ing. Many bid for the recipe, but according to Birdy Goslinger, it was purchased by movie star ZaSu Pitts.

ZaSu was an avid candy-maker who grew up in Santa Cruz, where her brother once prepared rum-soaked walnuts for Lewis' Victorias. She remembered a local teacher who kept a drawer full of Victorias to reward student achievement. But ZaSu couldn't use liquor in candy on the general market, so she concocted her own version, marketed as the "ZaSu Bar." Some of her recipes were published as "Candy Hits by ZaSu Pitts." When she died in 1963, the candy bar faded into history. But Buckhart's windmill-topped candy store near the old Lewis House, still makes its version of Victoria Creams, as a tribute to the world's first candy bar.

Secrecy had become important with offers for his recipe coming from major candy companies, including Hershey.

He left his Pacific Avenue location in 1928, when he bought a cupola-topped house on the east bank of Schwan Lake as his home and candy factory. Broken-hearted when poor health forced him to retire in 1941, this lifelong bachelor committed suicide in 1943. But his secret recipe didn't die with him, but was willed to the Native Sons of the Golden West at the Trust Build-

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