

Wally Trabing's

Mostly about People

12-12-79



Makin' Candy At Buckharts

Dave Clark stood at the head of the production line, working a 25-pound lump of fused red, green and white hard candy, kept soft by a gas heater.

As he pulled off a ribbon of the stuff from one tapered end, his wife, Laurie, divided it into "pillows" by an ancient "Buttercup Candy Cutter" and passed the dented strips on to Dave's mother, Carol, for breaking up.

Some of the strips were folded into traditional ribbons. If you should buy some of these ribbons which appear rather drunk— those are my efforts.

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The Clark family has been carrying on the old Buckhart traditions for the past eight years in the windmill-topped building between 17th Avenue and Schwan Lake.

More than 100 varieties of candies are still made in this small, neat, kitchen. Buckharts started in Watsonville around 1902; the store was moved to Pacific Avenue, then out here during the Great Depression, to be near the tourist trade. Clark said not much profit is made from hard Christmas candy, but people have come to expect it for so many years, he keeps making it by hand.

Throughout the year, old-timers come here. Travelers from afar. They come to show their grandchildren the old taffy hook where they would be invited to have a pull and buy pieces for five and 10 cents.

Nostalgia is a large part of the business. Not many stores continue to make their own candy, much of it by hand.

The last of the hand chocolate dippers— Clair, in her 80s, and elderly Billie, have passed on. Now the chocolate creams are covered by mechanical means.

The most popular cream is still the original Victoria, a rum and brandy flavored butter cream with walnuts and covered with chocolate.



ered with chocolate.

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The Clark family makes its own candy canes, some up to seven feet high, the latter on special order.

I was with them in the morning. That afternoon Clark had nutrolls, fudge, barks and macadamia clusters to make. The day before he turned out peanut brittle and mint sandwiches. My sweet tooth ranneth over.

This morning, it was hard holiday candy. Clark and his wife lifted a vat of 340-degree bubbling sugar off the flames and poured it out over a great steel-topped table. It ran like lava. He worked quickly, cutting the great "pancake" into three sections while Laurie dabbed red coloring on one section and green on another, leaving the third clear.

With sanitized gloves, Dave slapped the clear section onto the wall taffy hook and started a rigorous pulling and folding.

As we worked folding the other two sections, they cooled and we formed them into loaves which finally were pressed together to make the tri-color. The big lump looked like a large multicolored flounder as Dave started pulling off the ribbon like one pulling rough yarn from raw wool.

Some of their equipment is more than 80 years old. The hard candy covered the table in a colorful mass.

Candy makers are hard workers. They couldn't begin to handle the requests they have for other retail outlets.

There are candy connoisseurs, you know. Let the Clark family change the traditional ingredients of one line, and they hear about it pronto.

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I was curious about the old art of hand dipping chocolate creams, so Clark set it up.

I sat before a table on which was poured a gallon of glorious liquid chocolate.

"Get your hands in it and work it around," he said.

I plunged. It was the thrill of the month. It was like working at a giant finger painting.

Then, I made balls from marzipan and rolled them around in a handful of the "best chocolate you can buy."

You set the dipped balls on wax paper. The rich goo ran off the sides. Then I let the excess chocolate drip off a finger to make the fancy curlicue on the top.

Moving your hands around in a pool of pure chocolate is probably therapeutic.

If so, I have discovered myself.

Power Plant

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Final approval has been granted for a \$112 million, 140-megawatt underground generating plant on the San Joaquin River, Pacific, Gas and Electric Co. officials say.