

Sweet!

by
Mike Prero

Seems like everyone has a sweet tooth, and somewhere along the line "sweets" became synonymous with candy (along with pastries, etc).

Between the 6th and 4th centuries BC, the Persians, followed by the Greeks, discovered the people in India and their "reeds that produce honey without bees". They adopted and then spread sugar and sugarcane



agriculture. Sugarcane is indigenous to tropical South and Southeast Asia, while the word sugar is derived from the Sanskrit word Sharkara. Pieces of sugar were produced by boiling sugarcane juice in ancient India and consumed as Khanda, dubbed as the original candy.

Before sugar was readily available, candy was based on honey. Honey was used in Ancient China, Middle East, Egypt, Greece and the Roman Empire to coat fruits and flowers to preserve them or to create forms of candy. Candy is still served in this form today, though now it is more typically seen as a type of garnish.

Before the Industrial Revolution, candy was often considered a form of medicine, either used to calm the digestive system or cool a sore throat. In the Middle Ages, candy appeared on the tables of only the most wealthy at first. At that time, it began as a combination of spices and sugar that was used as an aid to digestive problems. Digestive problems were very common during this time due to the constant consumption of food that was neither fresh nor well balanced. Banquet hosts would typically serve these types of 'candies' at banquets for their guests. One of these candies, sometimes called chamber spice, was made with cloves, ginger, aniseed, juniper berries, almonds and pine kernels dipped in melted sugar. The Middle English word 'candy' began to be used in the late 13th century. The first candy came to America in the early 18th century from Britain and France. Only a few of the early colonists were proficient in sugar work and were able to provide the sugary treats for the very wealthy. Rock candy, made from crystallized sugar, was the simplest form of candy, but even this basic form of sugar was considered a luxury and was only attainable by the rich.

The candy business underwent a drastic change in the 1830s when technological advances and the availability of sugar opened up the market. Now, candy was also for the pleasure of the working class. There was also an increasing market for children. While some fine confectioners remained, the candy store became a staple of the child of the American working class. Penny candies epitomized this transformation. Penny candy became the first material good that children spent their own money on. [<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Candy#History>]

