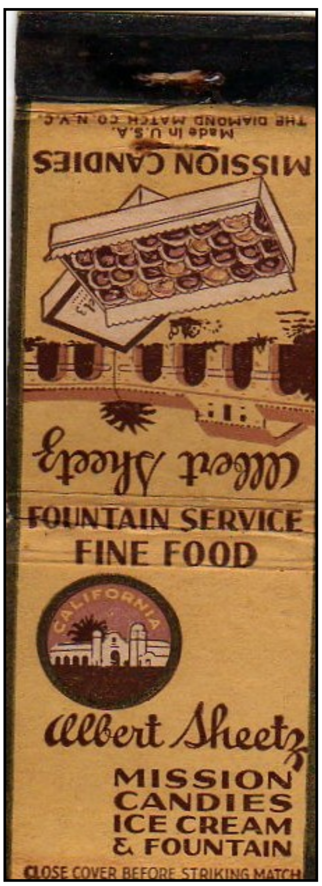
The **history of chocolate** began in Mesoamerica. Fermented beverages made from chocolate date back to 450 BC. The Aztecs believed that cacao seeds were the gift of Quetzalcoatl, the god of wisdom, and the seeds once had so much value that they were used as a form of currency. It was believed to be an aphrodisiac and to give the drinker strength. Today, such drinks are also known as "Chilate" and are made by locals in the South of Mexico. After its arrival to Europe in the sixteenth century, sugar was added to it and it became popular throughout society, first among the ruling classes and then among the common people. In the 20th century, chocolate was considered essential in the rations of United States soldiers during war.

Evidence suggests that it may have been fermented and served as an alcoholic beverage as early as 1400 BC. Pueblo people, who lived in the U.S. Southwest, imported cacao from Mesoamerican cultures in southern Mexico between 900 and 1400. They used it in a common beverage.

Until the 16th century, the cacao tree was wholly unknown to Europeans. Christopher Columbus encountered the cacao bean on his fourth mission to the Americas on August 15, 1502, when he and his crew seized a large native canoe that proved to contain among other goods for trade, cacao beans. His son Ferdinand commented that the natives greatly valued the beans, which he termed almonds. But while Columbus took cacao beans with him back to Spain, it made no impact until Spanish friars introduced chocolate to the Spanish court.



Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés may have been the first European to encounter chocolate when he observed it in the court of Montezuma in 1519. After the Spanish conquest of the Aztecs, chocolate was imported to Europe. In the beginning, Spaniards would use it as a medicine to treat illnesses such as abdominal pain because it had a bitterness to it. Once sweetened, it transformed and quickly became a court favorite. Within about a hundred years, chocolate established a foothold throughout Europe.

The new craze for chocolate brought with it a thriving slave market, as between the early 17th and late 19th centuries the laborious and slow processing of the cacao bean was manual. Cacao plantations spread, as the English, Dutch, and French colonized and planted. With the depletion of Mesoamerican workers, largely to disease, cocoa beans production was often the work of poor wage laborers and African slaves.

In 1729, the first mechanic cocoa grinder was invented in Bristol, UK. Walter Churchman petitioned king of England for patent and sole use of an invention for the “expeditious, fine and clean making of chocolate by an engine.” The patent for a chocolate refining process was later bought by J. S. Fry & Sons in 1761. Wind-powered and horse-drawn mills were used to speed production, augmenting human labor. Heating the working areas of the table-mill, an innovation that emerged in France in 1732, also assisted in extraction. The Chocolaterie Lombart, created in 1760, claimed to be the first chocolate company in France, ten years before Pelletier et Pelletier.

New processes that sped the production of chocolate emerged early in the Industrial Revolution. In 1815, Dutch chemist Coenraad van Houten introduced alkaline salts to chocolate, which reduced its bitterness. A few years thereafter, in 1828, he created a press to remove about half the natural fat (cacao butter) from chocolate liquor, which made chocolate both cheaper to produce and more consistent in quality. This innovation introduced the modern era of chocolate. Known as "Dutch cocoa", this machine-pressed chocolate was instrumental in the transformation of chocolate to its solid form when in 1847 Joseph Fry learned to make chocolate moldable by adding back melted cacao butter. Milk had sometimes been used as an addition to chocolate beverages since the mid-17th century, but in 1875 Daniel Peter invented milk chocolate by mixing a powdered milk developed by Henri Nestlé with the liquor. In 1879, the texture and taste of chocolate was further improved when Rodolphe Lindt invented the conching machine.

Besides Nestlé, several chocolate companies had their start in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Cadbury was manufacturing boxed chocolates in England by 1868. In 1893, Milton S. Hershey purchased chocolate processing equipment at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago and soon began the career of Hershey's chocolates with chocolate-coated caramels.

Due to improvements in machines, chocolate underwent a transformation from a primarily a drink to food, and different types of chocolate began to emerge. At the same time, the price of chocolate began to drop dramatically in the 1890s and 1900s as the production of chocolate began to shift away from the New World to Asia and Africa. Therefore, chocolate could be purchased by the middle class.

Although it was men leading the charge towards mass production of chocolate for everyday people, advertisements also targeted women, who “were charged with providing wholesome cocoa for respectable consumption within the family.” Most early advertising was aimed at housewives and mothers.

Roughly two-thirds of the world's cocoa is produced in Western Africa, with Ivory Coast being the largest source.

Only three to four percent of "cocoa futures" contracts traded in the cocoa markets ever end up in the physical delivery of cocoa. Every year seven to nine times more cocoa is bought and sold on the exchange than exists.