

CHOCOLATE

A Rich Massachusetts Tradition

by Marjorie R. Williams



Exploring the topic of chocolate is like entering a universe of its own. A staggering number of varieties, sellers, and techniques have transformed once easy choices—Milk or dark? Plain or with almonds?—into a dizzying array of temptations. Fine chocolate now shares the status of cheese and wine, with connoisseurs discerning differences in taste among producers and even among cacao growers. Distinctions like “single origin” have come into vogue as the international market has boomed. And with the abusive labor and environmental practices of some plantations coming under scrutiny, Fair Trade Certified and organic chocolates have gained more presence on the shelves. The options for chocolate are endless, and so too the appetites. Happily, one needn’t travel far to satisfy them.

Within the United States, chocolate history began in Massachusetts. The first chocolate manufacturing started in a converted sawmill on the banks of the Neponset River in Dorchester. In the fall of 1764, Dr. James Baker teamed up with a young and down-on-his-luck Irish immigrant named John Hannon who knew how to make chocolate. Harnessing the power of the river to grind cocoa between massive circular millstones, they created chocolate “hard cakes,” which were more like bricks in weight. Customers scraped and then boiled the chocolate in

water to concoct a sweetened drink. After the Boston Tea Party, patriots drank it instead of tea. With the outbreak of the American Revolution, Baker and Hannon smuggled cocoa beans from the West Indies through the web of Royal Navy warships patrolling the eastern seaboard. Walter Baker—grandson of the original Dr. Baker—continued the tradition and renovated the mill into a state-of-the-art chocolate factory, which produced the world-famous Baker's Chocolate along the Neponset until 1965, when it moved out of state. But the heritage remains a vivid memory to many who lived or simply passed through the area. Michael Hart, co-publisher of *edible* South Shore, fondly remembers visiting relatives in nearby Milton Lower Mills when he was a child. "The Neponset looked like flowing chocolate, and the aroma was astonishing. We called it the Chocolate River."

Other local chocolate legends abound. In 1855, a chef at the Parker House Hotel decided to top a cream pie with a chocolate glaze, inventing the now historic Boston cream pie. And the chocolate chip cookie was accidentally developed by Ruth Wakefield in 1933 in Whitman, Massachusetts. She owned the Toll House Inn, which was a haven for road-weary travelers and also a popular restaurant. Her policy was to give diners an extra helping of their entrée to take home, along with several homemade cookies. There are conflicting stories about her discovery. One version is that she was baking chocolate cookies but ran out of chocolate powder. She substituted broken pieces of semi-sweet chocolate, assuming they would melt and mix into the batter. They did not, and the chocolate chip cookie was born. Later she sold the recipe to Nestle in exchange for a lifetime supply of chocolate chips.

Every bag of Nestle chocolate chips sold in North America still includes her recipe on the wrapper. During World War II, soldiers from the area wrote their families asking them to send Toll House Cookies. As the GIs shared their care packages, the cookie's popularity spread through the armed forces. Soon began the nationwide craze. The competing version of the story claims that Mrs. Wakefield, who was an accomplished chef, knew very well that chocolate pieces would not melt into the batter. But one day while mixing a batch of sugar cookies, the vibrations from her electric mixer caused bars of chocolate stored on the shelf above to fall into the mixing bowl. Mrs. Wakefield was about to discard the batch when, out of frugality, she decided to proceed.

Numerous candy companies originated in Massachusetts, many of them clustered near the wharves where sugar and rum, both slave-powered trades, came into the ports. Only a few remain, such as NECCO (New England Confectionery Company), now located in Revere and the oldest continuously operating candy company in the United States, and Cambridge Brands, Inc., makers of Charleston Chews and Tootsie Rolls. They struggle to compete

against major players such as Mars, Hershey, and Nestle.

A young up-and-coming Massachusetts company—and the only one that specializes in actual "bean-to-bar" chocolate making—is Taza, located in Somerville. Being "bean-to-bar" means they control the entire process of making chocolate, starting with roasting raw cacao beans all the way through to hand-wrapping each chocolate bar in foil and paper. Taza sources its beans mostly from the Dominican Republic, but it's in Somerville where the beans are roasted, then broken into small pieces and their shells removed (referred to as winnowing), and then stone-ground in old-fashioned grinding machines (called molinos) straight from Oaxaca, Mexico. Minimally processed and somewhat coarse in texture, Taza chocolates pack an intense flavor. The company uses 100% certified organic ingredients and buys directly from small farm cooperatives at prices above fair trade.

Far easier to find than bean-to-bar manufacturers are the traditional confectioners and chocolatiers who buy bars of chocolate (known as couverture), re-melt them into unique blends to achieve certain flavors and colors, and then create delicious sweets. The southeastern part of Massachusetts boasts some of the best.

For example, Fedele's shops in Plymouth and Pembroke make their own confection centers, such as chewy caramels and cream fillings, which they dip in chocolate. Ron Fedele explains, "What sets our handmade chocolates apart is their taste. They leave a smooth, silky feeling." By contrast, commercially mass-produced brands contain wax and additives to extend their shelf-life and hold up in widely ranging temperatures. One of Fedele's most popular items is fudge. In addition to traditional flavors, Ron and Kathy Fedele experiment with other kinds, such as cranberry-walnut, pumpkin, and even a sugar-free variety. Another reason customers keep coming back is the friendly service. Ron, who previously worked as a quality-control manager in a plastics plant, enjoys selling a product that makes customers so happy. He and Kathy opened their first candy shop eighteen years ago "for the love of it."

A deep love of the family-owned business is shared by other local confectioners. Judy Hilliard McCarthy and her husband Charles McCarthy run Hilliards Candy, which was started in 1924 by Judy's grandparents. They uphold the quality standards and follow the time-tested recipes that have been handed down for generations. They use natural ingredients and no preservatives. An old-fashioned favorite is chocolate turtles (chocolates, nuts, and caramel), but they also offer new items such as caramels dipped in chocolate with a sprinkling of sea salt on top for a delectable sweet-salty combination.

The Chocolate Bar of Plymouth is a relative newcomer onto the

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scene, now in its third year. Owner Pam Matteson's background as a pastry chef suits her well as she whips up a variety of sweet creations. The specialty is truffles, in some unusual flavors such as Sam Adams and Smores. Pam says, "Using imported chocolates for the blends that the confections are dipped in gives our candy their high-quality taste. There's no comparison to the commercial varieties after trying these."

Dorothy Cox's Chocolates is another exceptional local confectioner and in continuous operation for eighty years. They are known particularly for their buttercrunch as well as "panned" chocolates, which are created by hand-dipping each center over and over again in gourmet chocolate until a delicious morsel emerges to delight the palate. Favorites include chocolate-covered cranberries, raisins, and nuts.

Gowell's Home Made Candy has been family-run for almost fifty years. Among their best sellers are the turtles and the dark almond bark—a favorite of John Wayne's, who ordered their candy monthly.

What these local confectioners have in common is their use of high-quality ingredients and the time-honored practice of producing small batches in copper kettles. They will ship individual candies as well as made-to-order boxes, party favors, seasonal items, and corporate gifts.

For those willing to explore elsewhere in Massachusetts for their sweet teeth, some other excellent choices are Burdick Chocolates, which is particularly known for wood box assortments containing chocolate mice, Phillips Candy House, which many seek out for their chocolate turtles, and Serenade Chocolatier, which steepes itself in the Viennese tradition and makes outstanding truffles. If more extreme measures are needed to satisfy that chocolate craving, an over-the-top experience certain to delight the most ravenous chocolate lover is the Chocolate Bar Buffet at the Langham Hotel in Boston on Saturday afternoons, an all-you-can-eat extravaganza featuring over 125 treats including whoopee pies, chocolate cotton candy, and chocolate crepes.

If you're suddenly finding your appetite for chocolate increased, avoid the big commercial brands and opt instead for the slightly more expensive but significantly more pleasurable and healthier small-batch chocolates. Quality chocolate is one of life's more affordable luxuries. Debbie Shields, manager of natural and specialty foods at Lees Market in Westport, reports that sales of chocolate remain strong even in tough economic times. Fortunately, there are many rich, local options near at hand.

Fudge swirls to perfection.





Ron Fedeles creates links of nonpareils.

Is Chocolate Bittersweet?

The Emergence of Fair Trade Certified Chocolate

Recent reports of child slave labor on West African cocoa estates reveal a stark contrast between the delicious treat we enjoy and the often deplorable circumstances of those who produce it. Fair Trade certification offers a way around this problem, so you can feel good about your chocolate purchase and support cocoa workers at the same time. It ensures that farmers and workers receive a fair minimum price for their product, helping them support their families and communities. It also creates direct trade links between farmer-owned coops and buyers. Abusive child labor and forced labor are prohibited on fair trade farms, and environmentally sustainable production methods are required. Inspections occur regularly to monitor adherence.

By guaranteeing farmers a stable and sufficient price, Fair Trade helps farmers invest in post-harvest techniques that bring out the individual flavors of the particular regions. Cocoa importers work with these farm cooperatives to experiment with fermentation levels and ensure high-quality, flavorful beans. Additionally, most Fair Trade Certified chocolate is certified organic and shade-grown, which helps maintain the biodiversity of cocoa-cultivating ecosystems, provides shelter for migratory birds, and uses less energy than conventional farming.

Fair trade certification of chocolate and cocoa began in 2002. Those products are marked with the “Fair Trade Certified” and Fair Trade Federation labels. Some companies that sell Fair Trade Certified chocolate bars are Dagoba, Divine Chocolate, Sjaak’s, Theo, Equal Exchange, and Lille Belle Farms.

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Where to Find Local Chocolate

Taza Chocolate

Available in specialty stores.
(617) 623-0804 and online at www.tazachocolate.com

Fedele's Hand Dipped Chocolates

"Let's Do Chocolate"

The Village Landing Marketplace, 170 Water St. in Plymouth;
and at Anderson Plaza, 95 Church St. (Rte 139) in Pembroke
(800) 464-0669 or www.fedeleschocolates.com

Hilliards House of Candy

316 Main St. (Rte 138) in North Easton;
The Village Shoppes at 95 Washington St. in Canton;
and 122 Webster St. (Rte 123) in Hanover
(800) 286-8533 or www.hilliardscandy.com

The Chocolate Bar of Plymouth

18 Court St. in Plymouth
(800) 947-0170 or www.thechocolatebarofplymouth.com

Dorothy Cox's Chocolates

115 Huttleston Ave. (Rte 6) in Fairhaven
(800) 701-0578 or www.dorothycox.com

Gowell's Home Made Candy

727 North Main St. in Brockton
508.583.2521 or www.gowellscandy.com

Burdick Chocolates

Made at their Walpole, NH headquarters
Also sold at their Chocolate Shop and Café
at 52 Brattle St. in Cambridge
(800) 229-2419 or www.burdickchocolate.com

Phillips Candy House

818 Morrissey Blvd. in Boston
Also at the South Shore Plaza in Braintree
(800) 722-0905 or www.phillipschocolate.com

Serenade Chocolatier

Located at 5 Harvard Square in Brookline Village
Also at South Station, Boston
(617) 739-0795 or www.serenadechocolatier.com

Chocolate Bar Buffet at the Langham Hotel

250 Franklin St. in Boston
Saturday afternoons from Sept until June. Reservations
at (617) 451-1900 or www.boston.langhamhotels.com

Original Toll House Chocolate Cookies

- 2 ¼ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 cup (2 sticks) butter, softened
- ¾ cup granulated sugar
- ¾ cup packed brown sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 2 large eggs
- 2 cups (12-oz package) semi-sweet chocolate morsels
- 1 cup chopped nuts

Preheat oven to 375 degrees.

Combine flour, baking soda and salt in small bowl. Beat butter, granulated sugar, brown sugar and vanilla extract in large mixer bowl until creamy. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Gradually beat in flour mixture. Stir in chocolate morsels and nuts. Drop by rounded tablespoon onto ungreased baking sheets.

Bake for 9–11 minutes until golden brown. Cool on baking sheets for 2 minutes. Remove to wire racks to cool completely.

Slice and Bake Cookie Variation:

Prepare dough as above. Divide in half; wrap in waxed paper. Refrigerate for 1 hour or until firm. Shape each half into 15-inch log; wrap in wax paper. Refrigerate for 30 minutes. (May be stored in refrigerator for up to 1 week or in freezer for up to 8 weeks.) Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Cut into 1/2-inch-thick slices; place on ungreased baking sheets. Bake for 8–10 minutes or until golden brown. Cool on baking sheets for 2 minutes; remove to wire racks to cool completely.

Makes about 5 dozen cookies.

Rockin K Organic Brownies

- 1¼ cups organic flour
- 1 cup Equal Exchange organic cocoa
- 1 tsp organic baking powder
- 1 cup of organic butter, softened
- 1½ cups organic sugar
- ½ cup organic light brown sugar
- 1 Tbsp pure vanilla extract
- 4 organic free-range eggs

Pre-heat oven to 350 degrees

Combine flour, cocoa, and baking powder in a large bowl.

In a small bowl cream the butter w/sugar and vanilla.

Beat eggs and fold into sugar mixture.

Add butter/sugar mixture to flour/cocoa mixture and combine thoroughly but do not over mix.

Spread in a greased 9x13 inch brownie pan.

Break up one bar of your favorite Equal Exchange chocolate and place pieces on top, pushing them gently into the batter.

Bake for approximately 20-25 minutes.
Cool completely before cutting.

Recipe courtesy of Rockin K Café

Hot Chocolate

- 6 oz high-quality bittersweet chocolate, (plus some for shaving)
- 1 qt whole milk
- 1¾ cups plus 1 Tbsp high-quality cocoa powder
- 3½ Tbsp sugar
- 1 Tbsp vanilla extract

Cut the chocolate into small chunks. In saucepan, combine the milk and cocoa, and place over medium heat. Bring to a simmer, whisking until smooth. Stir in the sugar. Reduce the heat to very low, and stir in the chocolate a little at a time, until melted, 3–5 minutes.

Strain through a fine mesh strainer, and stir in the vanilla. Serve in mugs, with a few chocolate shavings over the top.

Yield: 6 Servings

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46 Depot St.
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1421 Washington St.
617.266.9911

www.foodies-urban-market.com

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