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Museum Review: The Hershey's Story; Hershey's Chocolate World

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There is a strong relationship between our national identity and what we consume. Sam Adams wants to be *the* beer that demonstrates the importance of beer to American identity without being perceived as putting sales before quality. But the job of the Boston Beer Company, owner of the Sam Adams brand, is to sell beer. So it should come as no surprise that the brewery tour is a piece of publicity. This is why the brewery uses history to make people proud to drink beer and uses the museum to anchor that pride squarely in Sam Adams beers. For someone like Koch—from a family of German immigrants—and perhaps for many visitors, this yeasty connection to the American Revolution is also a linchpin in American identity. Perhaps there is cultural work afoot beyond public relations. Surprisingly for a marketing campaign, the brewery tour is actually enhancing public knowledge of beer making and the historical role of beer in the U.S. What's more, visitors on this tour cheer.

ELENA GONZALES

Brown University

The Hershey Story. Hershey, Pennsylvania. AMY BISCHOF, museum director. Exhibition design by GALLAGHER AND ASSOCIATES. Building designed by LSC DESIGN. Interactives designed by BOSTON PRODUCTIONS. <http://www.hersheystory.org/>

Hershey's Chocolate World. Hershey, Pennsylvania. STEVE BALLIET, manager. <http://www.hersheys.com/chocolateworld/>

Perhaps it was a mistake to start my visit at Hershey's Chocolate World, but my three-year-old nephew surely didn't think so. He thought he had walked into the board game Candyland, clearly too young to understand the implications of the failed branding effort. Wide-eyed with delight, he ran through the foyer, overwhelmed by the gigantic displays of Hershey products on the hunt through a simulated rainforest for Lollipop Lane. He was mesmerized by the singing cows as we rode a ride that explains the fundamentals of how chocolate is made—complete with the piped-in artificial smell of chocolate. We rode so many times that the kind attendants told us we could just stay in the car and go around again. Liam screamed and cried when I told him we were going to another museum, The Hershey Story, and once there, he didn't last ten minutes. My nephew's reaction dramatically underscores the differences between the two Hershey, Pennsylvania, attractions.

Whereas Chocolate World openly mocks historians in its Really Big 3-D Show, The Hershey Story clearly has an educational mission to tell the inspirational, rags-to-riches tale of Milton Hershey, the companies he founded, the community he built, and his dedication to philanthropy. Chocolate World is bright and colorful, loud and brash, unashamed of its in-your-face commercialism. The Hershey Story is tamer, a typical museum that uses artifacts,



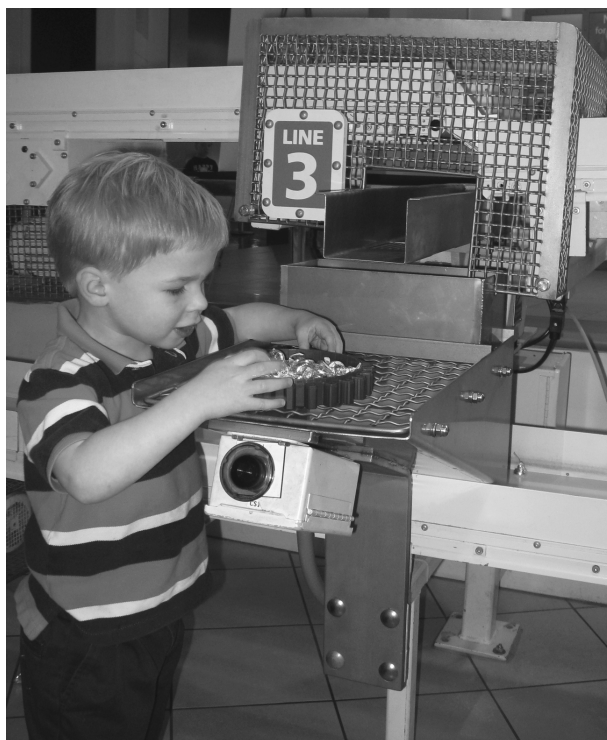
From 1915 to 1970 visitors to Hershey, Pennsylvania, had the opportunity to tour the real Hershey Chocolate factory. The sign now hangs in The Hershey Story museum. (Photo courtesy of the author)

images, interactives, and text to guide visitors through clearly themed galleries. This is not to say that one is fun (vacuous) and the other boring (informational). The two exist as siblings, offspring of the same parent, the Hershey Trust, and they complement each other with very different visitor experiences.

Chocolate World opened in 1970, the same year that Hershey stopped offering free formal guided tours of its factory, which had been offered since 1915. Although the public was not allowed access to the whole factory in these tours, they were able to see one of the most dramatic features of chocolate making—the conching process, which refines the texture of chocolate. In the Longitudinal Department, visitors could witness the conching process firsthand, viewing rows of mechanical mixers, blending the ingredients, and curing the chocolate to the proper consistency.

Chocolate World aimed to simulate the conching process with the aforementioned Chocolate Tour ride. Although at its most basic level the ride may impart some of the same technical information about how chocolate is made, there really is no comparison to seeing the real thing in a factory tour. Chocolate World has not changed dramatically in the past several years. In addition to the Chocolate Tour ride and the Really Big 3-D show, it consists of the Factory Works Experience, which gives children a free hat and the chance to package chocolates on a simulated assembly line. Surrounding these attractions are ample retail opportunities for you to splurge on vast amounts of candy and product-themed merchandise.

In contrast, The Hershey Story is a fresh reincarnation of the Hershey Museum. It opened on January 9, 2009, about one mile from its former location



Liam Skelton fills a box of chocolates on a virtual assembly line in the Factory Works section of Hershey's Chocolate World. For \$7.95 visitors can have their pictures taken for an "official" worker ID badge or receive a box of Hershey's Kisses. (Photo courtesy of the author)

near Chocolate World. The three-year, \$23.5 million project was a cooperative effort among Gallagher and Associates, LSC Design, Boston Productions, the museum staff, and, most importantly, the Hershey community. For visitors who may remember the dark confines of the old museum, The Hershey Story is a refreshing change. The custom-built building has a welcoming, light-filled foyer inspired by nineteenth-century world's fair exhibit halls. Brand new exhibits showcase the strong interpretive plan that the museum staff developed. There is a gourmet café where you can sample single country of origin chocolate and an upscale gift shop that includes serious books about the history of chocolate.

Of course all of these changes that mark a modern museum for the out-of-town visitor threatened to alienate the museum's core constituents in the local community. The Hershey Story has the difficult task of balancing its exhibits to appeal to both the local teachers who have been bringing students to the museum for decades with the influx of national and international chocolate lovers who come to Hershey to learn more about their favorite indulgence. Special care was taken to keep the museum's members informed of the transformation, including a special behind-the-scenes preview before the official opening. Despite some early discouragement from the community, the museum was able to maintain its current membership. In fact, total membership



A Hershey Story employee prepares for a class in the Chocolate Lab. (Photo courtesy of the author)

increased by 30 percent over the number of members at their former museum. The Hershey Story had 157,000 visitors in its first year in the new building, not far off their target of 175,000.

According to Director Amy Bischof, the guiding principle for exhibit development was the desire to tell the world about the community of Hershey. Beginning with a biography of Milton Hershey, including his early failures, the exhibits trace the development of the Hershey Company, the creation of the town of Hershey, and the ongoing philanthropy that the Hershey Trust provides to the community.

Throughout the exhibits there is a pervasive sense of civic boosterism, although the community pride does not seem entirely out of place in a museum that is attempting to teach visitors that there is more to Hershey than its founding father and his eponymous company. With the exception of a few mentions of labor disputes, there is minimal critique of the man or the company. Some visitors may be disappointed that the museum does not provide details on chocolate manufacturing, nor does it give information on the modern Hershey Company. Although the exhibits present current information on the Hershey School and other outreach projects, the history of the company mostly stops with Milton Hershey's death.

For an extra fee, children can experience the museum through the Apprentice Program. This self-directed guide challenges young visitors with games, puzzles, and open-ended questions. As children complete the exercises, they can report their findings to a member of the floor staff who pro-

vides rewards in each gallery, such as a commemorative coin or a personalized newspaper. The target age for the program is 8- to 10-year-olds, but even older children may find some of the questions difficult. In addition to the exhibits, the new museum features a Chocolate Lab, which hosts hands-on classes exploring the art and science of chocolate. The lab has been so successful that the museum is already expanding the facilities to accommodate more classes for the summer.

One of the most innovative galleries is the interactive map room. Through touch screen computer kiosks visitors can select buildings on a large tabletop map of the town of Hershey. Clicking on the images reveals historic photos, miscellaneous facts, and in some cases 360-degree panoramic views of the interiors. These images are simultaneously projected onto large screens on the walls of the room, creating an inviting area of conversation among the visitors. Although simple to use, the interactive is not particularly intuitive. Everyone I observed in the room, myself included, had to have some level of introduction in how to manipulate the map. This was usually done by an enthusiastic visitor eager to share discoveries.

Beyond the new public spaces, the move also allowed the museum staff to take a good look at its collection and evaluate its needs. The collection has been eclectic from its origins with Milton Hershey's initial American Indian Museum, established in 1933, and his purchase of a large Pennsylvania-German collection in 1936. After Hershey's death in 1945, his personal items were auctioned rather than bequeathed to the museum. For the past fifty years, the growth of the museum's collection has been primarily through donation and occasional acquisition without the backing of a strong collecting plan, resulting in a disparate collection. Although the new building includes 4,100 square feet of dedicated modern storage space, the staff used the move as an opportunity to deaccession over 2,000 objects not related to their clarified mission. Milton Hershey's two original collections remain, along with artifacts that tell the history of the community, but many extraneous military artifacts and furniture are being transferred to other institutions.

For public historians who may cringe at the brash commercialism of Chocolate World or question the boosterism of The Hershey Story, examining the two projects side by side is a good lesson in cooperation and compromise. Almost all museums struggle with the balance between funding and content. For Hershey those questions are at every decision point. Chocolate World and The Hershey Story are just two of several enterprises supported by the Hershey Trust, the majority owner of voting stock in the publicly traded Hershey Company. Every Kit-Kat, Twizzlers, or Hershey Kiss you buy helps support the museum, admittedly through a complicated corporate trust structure.

In a roundabout way, The Hershey Story needs Chocolate World to sell the Hershey image so that the museum is free to tell the Hershey history. The Hershey Company benefits from the museum promoting a positive corporate image. The dueling experiences give the visitor multiple entry points into un-

derstanding a century of Hershey. Chocolate World may seem like an extended shopping outlet, but there are nuggets of facts buried in the small exhibits. The space welcomes children, and most of its activities are free. The Hershey Story has great exhibits, but it also has an admission fee. Without the free samples or animated characters, The Hershey Story holds little interest for young children. The two enterprises juxtapose different sides of Hershey. By offering these separate and distinct experiences, the Hershey Company captures a broader spectrum of its consumers and meets the visitors on their own terms.

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Levi Strauss & Co. Corporate and Americas Division Headquarters. San Francisco, California. Lobby exhibition space. STACIA FINK and LYNN DOWNEY, curators. Design by the WEST OFFICE EXHIBITION DESIGN.

An unexpected gem for tourists visiting San Francisco is a trip to Levi Strauss. No, not the retail store that you find in any mall, but the lobby exhibition space in their headquarters building at 1155 Battery Street. It is easy to find, just ride a historic trolley car (I rode one from Milan) and get off at the Levi Plaza stop. A short walk brings you to the Levi Strauss urban campus of red brick buildings. A front-desk guard prevents visitors from going up to the corporate offices, but the sprawling glass-enclosed lobby presents an interesting face of the company. During my visit the lobby had three different exhibits—a moderately interesting visitor center, the obligatory (but well done) timeline, and an excellent peek into the company's archives called *The Vault*. At publication of this review the first two exhibits had been ripped out, but more about that later.

History seems important to the identity and marketing agenda of Levi Strauss, and it is an honor rightly earned. The founder, Levi Strauss, immigrated to the United States in 1853 and opened a dry goods store in San Francisco. But the real roots of the enterprise started twenty years later when Jacob Davis, a Reno, Nevada tailor, wrote Strauss seeking a collaboration on his invention of riveting the pocket corners of work pants. Levi Strauss & Co. has done a lot in 150 years, and the company story is filled with interesting stories about fashion, business, and social responsibility.

The highlight of my visit was the exhibit titled *The Vault*. Curated by Stacia Fink and Lynn Downey and designed by West Office Exhibition Design, *The Vault* is an impressive display of vintage Levi's apparel and ephemera. It includes everything from clothing and advertisements to neon and archival records. As one might expect from a hip apparel company, *The Vault* is executed in a trendy style. The three computer interactives are housed in white Macs sitting on sleek modern tables. Taste abounds. Sensitive to conservation issues, much of the material is in drawers which visitors can pull out and examine through Plexiglass lids. Not particularly interpretive, *The Vault* celebrates