

"NOT HOW CHEAP...BUT-HOW GOOD"

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PHILIP WUNDERLE, Founder Back in September, 1871, a young German immigrant named Philip Wunderle started making gumdrops in a third-story room in a building at Germantown Ave. and New Market Streets in Philadelphia. And now, in September, 1946, four of Wunderle's children and one of his grandchildren are marking the seventy-fifth anniversary of the

establishment of the firm. The Wunderles—Blanche, Fred, Philip, Horace and Philip, 3rd—are co-partners in a confectionery manufacturing business whose products are known from coast to coast. The father and founder of the firm died in his eighty-fourth year in 1929, and his descendants have carried on the business along the precedent of hard work set by the elder Wunderle. Fred and Horace Wunderle were full of reminiscences as they discussed the long history of the firm and the full life of their father with a representative of Confectioners Journal. “My father’s business motto was, in effect, “It’s not how cheap you can sell it but how good you can make it,” recalled Fred Wunderle, “and that has been the slogan of the firm from 1871 until the present day.” The Wunderles pointed out that shortages of vital materials like sugar and corn syrup have substantially reduced the firm’s output at the present time—but that the quality of their products has never been cheapened. The history of their father is a typical story of the immigrant who came to America almost penniless and worked against odds to found and maintain a prosperous business. Here is the story as the present Wunderles related it: Philip Wunderle the first arrived in this country from Gernsheim, Germany, in December, 1865. He was twenty years old and his funds were meagre when he stepped off the boat in New York City. Perhaps his principal asset was that trait of character exemplified by his having chosen on his departure from Germany as his life motto the Latin adage, “Si fractus inlabatur orbis inpauidum ferient ruinae.”—“If the whole world falls to pieces the fearless man will carry the ruins.”

Wunderle, who could speak English, but not very well, came to this county equipped with an excellent classical education. But his first job was one as a day laborer on the Croton Dam at Peekskill, N.Y., with a group of other immigrants. That job came to an end when the paymaster absconded with the payroll and Wunderle trekked the 40 weary miles back to New York City by foot. After that experience, Wunderle worked for a while in a New York hat factory but had to quit that when a doctor advised him that the climate was aggravating a throat condition contracted from the dust and lint of the factory. **ENTERS CANDY BUSINESS**

And so, in 1867, Philip Wunderle came to Philadelphia and took a job with the old Sundermeyer Candy Company on Second Street above Race. He got \$7.50 a month and his board and lodging and worked seven days a week. It was about this time that Wunderle decided to take the advance of an older immigrant, a friend of his family who had been in this country for some time. "Forget about your classical education," advised the friend. "Pick out a trade and learn it thoroughly. That is the way to get ahead in America." And so, while working at Sundermeyers, Wunderle decided to make the candy business his life-time work. For a starter he learned to make gum drops at Sundermeyers using starch as a base instead of the traditional hard and chewy gum arabic. To get more experience, Wunderle moved to New York and shortly afterward obtained a position with the now defunct Empire Chocolate Company—rising finally to factory superintendent. While in New York, he met Henry Heide, then a salesman for the Empire firm and later the founder of the

famous company that bears his name. Heide was also a German immigrant with personal qualities and ambitions akin to those of Wunderle. Some years later with such men as Henry Heide and Herman Hoops, a founder of the well-known house of Hawley and Hoops, Wunderle collaborated in the formation of the National Confectioners' Association. For reasons of health, Wunderle returned to Philadelphia and in September, 1871, rented the room which housed his first venture as a candy manufacturer. In that room Wunderle made gumdrops—the traditional “hard” or chewy gum Arabic goods and the new soft, jelly-like kind—for two years. His first employee was Jack Carson who delivered the goods on a pushcart and finally wound up 50 years with the firm as foreman of the marshmallow department. In 1873 Wunderle moved from Germantown Avenue and set up shop in a full-fledged factory building at 128–130 Pegg Street near the Delaware River water-front. And there the business stayed until 1927, occupying, as it expanded, five adjoining buildings from 118 to 132 Pegg Street and 443–445 New Market Street. From 1871 on, it was a question of gradual growth during which Wunderle added new lines of confections. There were plenty of problems to be solved and twice the factory was badly damaged by fire. His first innovation after gumdrops were marshmallows, in which he also switched from the old chewy gum arabic base to the soft egg-white marshmallow, trademarked Sun Brand, which today is such a familiar confection. At this point, Fred Wunderle interrupted to tell about George Renninger, who started work for his father in 1876, the

Centennial year, became factory superintendent for Wunderle and died in 1944 after 68 years with the firm. Renninger collaborated with Wunderle to produce the third Wunderle product—the original “Butter Cream” in 1888. This wasn’t the chocolate-coated butter-cream of later origin, but the creamy morsels of which onetype is the well-known “chicken corn” originated by Renninger, an exceptionally able confectioner who, throughout the remainder of his busy life, showed exceptional artistic talent and originality in conceiving and carving unique molds for which the Wunderle line has been justly famous. During the ‘80’s, the Wunderle firm developed a glace fruit department, cream department, lozenge department, pan department (sugar-coated almonds, etc.), a cocoanut department and a fancy goods department (bon-bons, almond pastes, and the like). And that was the setup when Wunderle purchased a three story building at Eighth and Somerset Streets, Philadelphia, in 1927. “Because of the war,” explained the Wunderles, “we’ve had to confine ourselves since 1942 principally to a comparatively few products – marshmallows, gums and jelly goods, sugar-coated Jordan almonds and glace fruit.” “We don’t expect our production to increase much this year.” Said Horace Wunderle, “but the supply situation should be better generally in 1947 with anticipated improvement in sugar rations and decided increase in corn products – dextrose, corn syrup and corn starch – consequent upon the harvesting this fall of a record corn crop.” Returning to the story of his father, Wunderle went on to say that the elder Wunderle was the sole proprietor of the firm up to the time of his

death in June, 1929. From the father's death until January, 1931, the company was operated by his estate. In December, 1930, Wunderle's children—Philip, Fred, Horace and Blanche – organized a corporation under the name Ph.Wunderle, Inc., which persisted until it's liquidation in June, 1944. The five stockholders of the company – the four children and Philip,3rd, a grandchild, formed a co-partnership in '44 and Wunderle's is still running under their joint direction. **AN INDUSTRY PIONEER** The elder Wunderle met a number of men who later became America's greatest candy manufacturers. For example, there was Milton Hershey, founder of the chocolate empire, who was just getting his start in Philadelphia a few years after Wunderle commenced business. At one time, Hershey was Wunderle's sales agent in New York City. And Wunderle was also a friend of Stephen Whitman, founder of the firm whose packaged candy is known throughout the world. Some people ask us why the name of Wunderle is not publicized more outside the candy trade," Fred Wunderle commented. "And the reason is that we do very largely a bulk business which directly concerns only the trade. "When father started in business he began by selling bulk goods to the trade and throughout his lifetime bulk goods were his major interest. Despite the steadily increasing trend toward consumer packaging, we have experienced, ever since the depth of the last depression, a steadily increasing demand on the part of the trade for quality goods in our chosen field, and we feel that, having weathered three major depressions – those of '73, '93 and the 1930 decade – future prospects for this business are

bright.” It’s clear that the policies of the immigrant Wunderle have been indelibly stamped on the candy business which bears his name. His two sons emphasized that their father had built up the firm on the basis of thoroughness, painstaking attention to detail—and constant work and planning. “He used to come to the plant from his home in Edge Hill every day almost until the day of his death,” Horace Wunderle said, “and his diligence and foresight coupled with the faithful and capable cooperation of a host of associates throughout his long business career, are primarily responsible for our firm’s seventy-five year history.” As the interview drew to a close, Horace Wunderle dug down into his files and brought out a fistful of old copies of “The Confectioner’s Journal.” He spread out one of the yellowed sheets. And there – in the issue of December, 1880, was this advertisement – adjacent to an ad inserted by young Milton Hershey- “Ph. Wunderle. Manufacturer of Arabian Gum Drops, Fig Paste and all kinds of Gum Goods. 128-130 Pegg Street.” “It’s 1946,” said Fred Wunderle, “and we’re in the Confectioners Journal again.”

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