History of The Battle Creek Cereal Industry

Battle Creek is proud of its cereal industry heritage and of the continued growth the companies have experienced throughout the years. Below is a synopsis of each of the company's early beginnings. We hope you enjoy learning more about the Breakfast Capital of the World.

Kellogg Company

Kellogg Company's worldwide leadership of its industry stems from the invention of flaked cereal in 1894– by accident at the Battle Creek Sanitarium.

The San, an internationally famous Seventh Day Adventist hospital and health spa, offered its rich and famous patients a regimen of exercise and fresh air, plus a strict diet that prohibited caffeine, alcohol, tobacco, and meat. Sanitarium Superintendent Dr. John Harvey Kellogg, and Will Keith (W.K.) Kellogg, his younger brother and business manager, invented many grain–based foods, including a coffee substitute, a type of granola and peanut butter.

One day after cooking wheat, the men were called away. Although the wheat was rather stale when they returned, the brothers decided to see what would happen when the tempered grain was forced through the rollers. Instead of the usual long sheet of dough, each wheat berry was flattened into a small, thin flake.

When baked, the flakes tasted crisp and light. Although both brothers were aware that they had invented a good-tasting food that was easy to prepare, they had no way of knowing that they had also invented a new industry.

As a service to former San patients, Dr. Kellogg started the Sanitas Nut Food Company. He put his brother, W.K., in charge of the small business to produce the cereal for mail orders.

Meanwhile, W.K. continued his own experiments, developing the process for flaking corn in 1898. Seeing the potential of cereal products, and recognizing his brother's lack of interest in expanding their own food company, W.K. left his job of 25 years to go into business for himself.

He decided to introduce corn flakes with malt flavoring to distinguish his cereal from the competition. In 1906, he formed the Battle Creek Toasted Corn Flake Company, renamed Kellogg Company in 1922.

W.K. was strongly committed to communicating about health and nutrition and in 1923 he hired Mary Barber to establish one of the industry's first professional home economics departments to develop recipes using Kellogg cereals. Her work with consumers and educators initiated a company tradition of providing the latest information about diet and nutrition.

The company grew quickly, adding such classics as All-Bran and Rice Krispies. Early on, it became an international business, selling Kellogg's Corn Flakes in Canada in 1914, Kellogg manufacturing facilities were built in Sydney, Australia in 1924, and in Manchester, England in 1938.

Amazed with his vast financial success, W.K. Kellogg established a philanthropic foundation in 1930, separate from the company, to help people help themselves. Today the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (located in downtown Battle Creek) is one of the world's largest philanthropic institutions, funding projects in health, education, agriculture, leadership, and youth.

The Kellogg Cereal Company is widely known for its products such as Kellogg's Frosted Flakes, Corn Pops, Special K, Rice Krispies and Product 19. Kellogg's Pop Tarts became a hit in 1964.

Interest in health and nutrition is worldwide, contributing to increased cereal consumption outside the U.S. Kellogg's will continue to enjoy strong opportunities for growth as it meets the demand for ready–to–eat cereals in international markets as well as in the United States.

Post Division – Kraft Foods, Inc.

The history of the Post Cereal Division of Kraft Inc., began in 1895 when C.W. Post invested a small amount of money with some simple machinery and several hundred pounds of grain to make his first batch of Postum, a cereal beverage.

Two years later in 1897, he developed his first ready-to-eat cereal, Grape Nuts. Manufacturing of this product is one of the most interesting and unique on the market. Soft wheat and malted barley, flours, salt, yeast and water are blended (to a soft dough) and fortified with eight vitamins.This mixture goes to the proofing room where under a controlled environment the dough is allowed to rise.

Loaves are automatically formed from the dough, dropped into loaf pans and baked in gas heated ovens and dried slowly in large dryers prior to packaging. After baking, the pieces are cooled, ground and sifted to uniform size.

In 1899, C.W. Post also organized the Battle Creek Paper Co., which later grew into the Carton and Container operation. It operated until 1997.

In 1904, Post Toasties, which was originally called Elijah's Manna, was the first flaked cereal developed by Post. The Toasties are made from selected hybrid corn, broken into uniform "grits", mixed with flavoring syrup, niacin and iron and cooked in steam cookers.

The cooked grits are reduced to a uniform moisture content by drying and tempering and are then rolled between large steel rollers. Flakes are then dropped into a toasting oven, a 30-foot perforated metal cylinder heated with ribbon-like gas burners. This oven rotates, tossing the flakes around as they toast.

During the next 34 years, Jell-O, Maxwell House, etc., produced a varied line of products and joined the original company. In 1929, to reflect its product diversity this group incorporated under the name of General Foods.

The Post Plant utilizes state-of-the-art equipment in five major production buildings, and includes various other service buildings such as engineering and research. In addition, the original building that Post used to make the Postum has been preserved on the existing site and its now the Health Services Department.

Many of your favorite cereals continue to be produced at Post in Battle Creek including: Alpha-Bits, Honeycomb, Super Golden Crisp, Grape-Nuts, Post Raisin Bran, Fruity and Cocoa Pebbles and Honey Bunches of Oats.

Ralcorp

To trace the source of Ralcorp in Battle Creek through the maze of the early cereal companies, one must look back to 1901 when the Cero-Fruto Company was organized.This company manufactured a wheat flake flavored with sugar, salt and sprayed apple jelly.

After operating for nearly two years, though, the business began to falter and the company was sold. In 1906, the Hygenic Food Company purchased the defunct Cero-Fruto Factory. The following eight years were filled with difficulties because of a lack of finances. In 1914, the company was reorganized and the name changed to Maple-Flake Mills.

In 1917, Maple-Flake Mills was sold to the Armour Grain Company of Chicago. Products manufactured by Armour Grain were Maple-Flakes and its Corn Flakes. In addition, they also packaged numerous private label brands. Although the business was successful, it was completely overshadowed by the rapidly growing Kellogg Company and Post Cereals.

The Armour Company had great plans for expansion in the macaroni and spaghetti business, so in the latter part of 1917, construction began on two new buildings which are now known to Ralcorp as the #1 and #3 Buildings. The #3 Building was to be used for manufacturing and the #1 Building for packaging and storage. Upon their completion in the fall of 1918, production was started. However, sales were disappointing in 1922 and the products were discontinued.

Early in 1927, the Armour Grain Company ran into trouble with the Chicago Board of Trade because of unethical grain trading. With its subsequent loss of its seat on the Exchange, it was forced to liquidate some its properties, among which was the Maple-Flake Mill.

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On April 7, 1927, the buildings, assets and business were purchased by the Ralston Purina Company of St. Louis, Missouri, for one dollar and other valuable considerations.

Ralston's whole wheat cereal called Purina Wheat had been manufactured in St. Louis since 1898, and the Company had acquired the Ry-Krisp Plant in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in June of 1927. This purchase in Battle Creek was made because of the Company's determination to expand further into cereal and grocery products.

Currently, the Battle Creek Plant employs approximately 150 people and manufacturers only ready–to–eat cereal. The Company phased out pet food production in 1975. In 1994 Ralston Purina Company became Ralcorp. The local plant produces Wheat, Corn, Rice and Bran Chex, Wheat & Raisin Chex and Corn Flakes. For their private label customers it produces Corn Flakes, Sugar Frosted Flakes, Raisin Bran Flakes, 40% Bran Flakes, Almond Delight and Sun Flakes. Besides its downtown production, it also maintains a warehousing operation just off of West Columbia Avenue in Battle Creek. The Company's headquarters are located at Checkerboard Square in St. Louis, Missouri.

Source: History brochures from all three local cereal companies.
Compiled by:

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