

## The history of Candy Canes



Almost everyone alive grew up familiar with the hard red-and-white candy with the curved end known as a candy cane, but few people realize just how long this popular treat has been in existence. Believe it or not, the origin of the candy cane actually goes back hundreds of years to a time when candy-makers, both professional and amateur, were making hard sugar sticks as a favorite confection.

It was around the beginning of the 17th century that Christians in Europe began to adopt the use of Christmas trees as part of their Christmas celebrations. The trees were often decorated using foods such as cookies and sometimes sugar-stick candies. The original Christmas tree candy was a straight stick and completely white in color.

### Cane Shape

The first historical reference to the familiar cane shape though goes back to 1670. The choirmaster at the Cologne Cathedral in Germany first bent the sugar-sticks into the shape of canes to represent a shepherd's staff. The all-white candy canes were then given out to children during the long-winded nativity services.

The clergymen's custom of handing out candy canes during Christmas services would eventually spread throughout Europe and later to America. At the time, the canes were still white, but sometimes the candy-makers would add sugar-roses to further decorate the canes. In, 1847, the first historical reference to the candy cane in America appeared when a German immigrant named August Imgard decorated the Christmas tree in his Wooster, Ohio home with candy canes.

### Stripes

About 50 years later, the first red-and-white-striped candy canes appeared. No one knows who exactly invented the stripes, but based on historical Christmas cards, we know that no striped candy canes

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appeared prior to the year 1900. Illustrations of striped candy canes didn't even show up until the beginning of the 20th century. Around that time, candy-makers began adding peppermint and wintergreen flavors to their candy canes and those flavors would soon become accepted as the traditional favorites.

In 1919, a candymaker named Bob McCormack began making candy canes. And by the middle of the century, his company, Bob's Candies, became widely famous for their candy canes. Initially, the canes had to be bent by hand to make the "J" shape. That changed with the help of his brother-in-law, Gregory Keller, who invented the machine to automate candy cane production.

## **Legends and Myths**

There are many other legends and religious beliefs surrounding the humble candy cane. Many of them depict the candy cane as a secret symbol for Christianity during a time when Christians were living under more oppressive circumstances.

It has been claimed that the cane was shaped like a "J" for "Jesus" and that the red-and-white stripes represented Christ's blood and purity. The three red stripes were also said to symbolize the Holy Trinity and the hardness of the candy represented the Church's foundation on solid rock. As for the candy cane's peppermint flavor, it represented the use of hyssop, an herb referred to in the Old Testament.

However, no historical evidence exists to support these claims, although some will find them pleasant to contemplate. As noted earlier, candy canes weren't even around until the 17th century, which makes some of these claims improbable.

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