



Building a Palace in Pennsylvania: The History of The Hotel Hershey

"The more beautiful you make something which people can see and use, the more enjoyment they will get out of it," Milton S. Hershey said in the 1930s. "At least, that is the way it looks to me."

More than 75 years ago, Mr. Hershey began what we know today as his "Great Building Campaign." The project was designed to keep townspeople employed during the Great Depression and included the construction of many buildings in the town of Hershey throughout the 1930s. **The Hotel Hershey** was one of these building projects.

Though many people thought Mr. Hershey was foolish for wanting to build such a luxurious hotel, the \$2 million dollar project started in October 1931 and was completed on May 23, 1933.

A driving force behind Mr. Hershey's original vision for the Hotel was his wife Catherine, whom he called "Kitty." The couple had dreamed of building a hotel similar to one they visited in Egypt, called the Heliopolis Palace Hotel. But after Mr. Hershey learned that re-creating the Heliopolis would cost almost \$5 million, he scrapped the idea. The couple put their hotel plans on hold, and Kitty died in 1915.

By the time Mr. Hershey resurrected plans for a hotel in the early 1930s, his ideas had changed. He directed his architect-builder, D. Paul Witmer, to design a hotel based on a small Mediterranean property where he had once stayed. The end result was a 170-room property with a Mediterranean flair. (The property now features 278 rooms.)

The Hotel's Fountain Lobby was inspired by Mr. Hershey's love of Cuba, a country where he owned sugar plantations and mills and where he created a model sugar-mill town called "Central Hershey," which was much like the town he was developing in Pennsylvania. And Mr. Hershey's own desire for a grand dining room without any corners resulted in the property's famed Circular Dining Room.

It was in that dining room that Mr. Hershey addressed his first guests at a celebratory dinner on May 26, 1933. "I am but a simple farmer. I like to utilize nature's beauty for the pleasure of men. This hotel where you are assembled has been a dream of mine for many years," he is reported to have said. "When we farmers go to the city, we are impressed by the fine hotels we see there. So I thought I'd impress the city folks by building a fine hotel on one of our farms. I am of the opinion that there will be a need for this hotel someday, although the prospects do not look very encouraging at the present time."

And impress them he did. Noted travel journalist Lowell Thomas visited Mr. Hershey's Hotel in 1933 and described it as "a palace that out-palaces the palaces of the Maharajahs of India."

Today **The Hotel Hershey** continues to represent the luxury, charm and elegance it possessed when it opened in 1933. To commemorate its diamond anniversary in 2008, the Hotel embarked upon "The Grand Expansion," a modern-day building campaign that was completed in December 2009. The project included the introduction of 10 Cottages that house the Hotel's most premium room offerings; construction of a new restaurant; the addition of a recreation campus that features a full aquatic facility, ice-skating rink and a variety of other offerings; improvements to the front exterior to allow for a more satisfying sense of arrival; renovation of the check-in lobby; and the addition of seven boutique shops.