

Candy Canes

traditional Freeman family recipe

4 cups sugar
3 T. vinegar
1 1/4 cups water
1/4 t. cream of tartar
1/2 cup white corn syrup



Stir until dissolved. Bring to a boil. Boil 2 minutes with the lid on. Then, remove lid and cook to “hard crack”. Pour on candy stone. Add flavor. Pull on hook until it springs back. Add stripes and make into canes.

Samuel Freeman was born nearly 200 years ago, 4 March 1806, in Olney, Buckinghamshire, England. He and his wife, Elizabeth Ann, had three children before she died at a young age. One of these children, Richard, born in 1835, was my great-great grandfather. Samuel remarried and had another son named Thomas.

Now, young Thomas had a real fondness for sweets. He, and probably the other children, also, liked to hang around at their father’s sweet shop. There Samuel sold biscuits, sweets, powders for drinks, and jams. Thomas was particularly fond of hard candy, called rock candy. Because of this, he soon earned the nickname, Tommy Rock. It is unclear whether Samuel made the rock candy he sold himself, but it seems likely that he did.

Years later, Samuel’s son, Richard grew up, married, and had seven children. His health was always

bad, apparently due to a bout with tuberculosis. He also had poor eyesight. This made it difficult for him to work at his trade of shoemaking. Therefore, his family was often short of money. In order to supplement the family income, Richard operated a stall at fairs and holiday celebrations in Olney and in surrounding villages and towns. In Olney, the fair consisted of “Flash George’s round horses” (merry-go-round), swishbacks (like a small roller coaster) and about a dozen stalls. At Richard’s stall, a gun was used to shoot darts at a target. Prizes for the winners were various shapes and sizes of rock candy. To insure a greater profit, Richard made the candy himself. Some prizes were square chunks, some round like marbles, some straight sticks and some candy canes. Some were plain and others were striped.

To make the candy, Richard cooked it in a large iron pot before pouring it out onto a piece of smooth slate about 30 inches square. The surface of the stone was thinly coated with butter to prevent the candy from sticking to the stone. Next he put in the flavoring before folding the candy together with a knife. He left a little candy back while he took the rest and pulled it over a large hook until it turned white and opaque. He took the remaining candy, which was clear, golden brown, and twisted the two colors together as he pulled it into long strips to form the desired shape of candy.

Richard Freeman’s son, George Richard, didn’t sell candy or use it for prizes at a stall, but his children recalled that he would sometimes help them make homemade sweets using the old family recipe. He used a few drops of peppermint or anise oil for the flavor. When he decided to bring his family to the United States in 1901, the recipe came with them. The fifth of their seven children was my grandfather, Ernest Freeman.

After coming to America at the age of seven, Er-

nest spent his whole life in Utah except for the time he was in France during World War I. When he returned from the war, he married Ruby Kotter and settled down to raise a family. It wasn't long before three children were added to the family. Like all children, they loved candy, so the family recipe was carried on for another generation. Ernest usually pulled his candy into long striped sticks and then cut them into bite-sized, pillow-shaped pieces with scissors. He stored them in metal cans with tight-fitting lids.

His daughter, Roma, loved the little candies. Unfortunately for her, she suffered terribly from eczema. It seemed that her condition became worse near Christmas time. Based on this information, her doctor decided that her problem had to do with eating too many sweets. What an imposition it seemed to her to be restricted from eating any of the delicious candy! After a time, it was clear that candy was not the culprit; so, she was allowed to eat it again. Ernest's three children grew up, married, and had families of their own. All the grandchildren knew that there was a special can up in Grandpa's cupboard with the best peppermint candy in town. We were not allowed an unlimited supply, but we tried to make sure we got one a day. Even when great-grandchildren appeared, the candy can was always ready.

Roma grew up to become my mother. She brought her candy recipe with her when she married my dad. Every winter we made candy canes and candy pieces. Older children and adults usually made the canes while smaller children were given scissors to cut little pieces.

Dad worked for a large pharmaceutical company in an area where they did research on colorings and flavorings for various liquid medications. His lab was

filled with flavoring samples provided by the numerous sales representatives who visited him to promote their products. He often brought home unneeded samples for us to try in our candy. This is when we first acquired an affinity for new and exotic flavors. At first we didn't have a candy stone to cool our candy on, so we used two large cast iron skillets. Between batches we put the skillets out in the snow to cool off more rapidly.

When we got married, my cousin Rebecca gave us a candy thermometer. Grandpa and Grandma Freeman gave us a marble candy stone and a candy hook. It wasn't too many years before our own children were anxious for the Christmas season to come so we could make candy canes. Because the pulling and shaping of the candy needs to be done quickly before the candy hardens too much, it is necessary to make it a group project. When the children were too young to help much, we often invited other families to help us. Now the children are big enough to be useful as well as ornamental.

People often ask us how we make candy canes and how we get the stripes on them. Usually we just answer "very carefully". In truth, making candy canes is a process easier shown than explained. Nevertheless, I will try.

While I start mixing and cooking the ingredients, Roger and the children set out trays and coat the candy stone and hook with a thin layer of butter to keep the candy from sticking. My kids think peppermint candy canes pretty mundane. They spend considerable time discussing the flavor and color of the candy. Recent flavor favorites include root beer, pineapple, coconut custard, tangerine, wintergreen and raspberry. Since two stripes are put onto each cane, they can both be the same color or two different colors.

The ingredients are cooked until they reach “hard crack” or 300 degrees. Then the mixture is poured onto the polished marble candy stone to begin cooling except for a small amount which is reserved to make the stripes out of later. As the candy begins to cool, the edges are lifted with a knife and turned to the middle. When the candy cools enough to form a soft mass, a few drops of flavoring are added to the middle. After a little more cooling and turning, the candy is cool enough to be handled for brief periods of time. It is then taken to the candy hook where the candy pullers take turns pulling the candy. It is still too hot for one person to hang on to it for very long. As it is pulled, the candy turns from a translucent, golden color to a shiny, opaque white.

While everyone else is busy pulling the candy, I take the reserved candy in the pan and add food coloring to it. If two different colored stripes are desired, the reserved candy is divided in half and put in two separate pans. After the color is mixed in, the candy is poured out in two little puddles to cool. When both parts of the candy are ready, the white portion is taken off the hook in a big blob. One stripe is placed on each side of it. Then I begin twisting and pulling the candy to form a strip as big around as my finger. I use scissors to cut off lengths about six inches long. These are given to the helpers to roll and shape into candy canes. Of course, a few pieces always get “dropped” and must be eaten.

Every year, friends are treated to bunches of brightly colored candy canes in a variety of flavors. They make great Christmas gifts.

My sister, Eileen, makes candy canes, also. Her son Scott included a candy cane in his lunch once. His friends all thought he should give it to them. Finally

he told them he would sell it for a quarter. In the midst of screams of “highway robbery”, he shattered the cane and offered all the boys little tastes. The next day they were all waiting for him, quarter in hand. Until Christmas break, a faithful group met him every day as he got off the school bus. When vacation started he found he had made \$75!

A couple of years ago, our candy hook disappeared. I looked for it everywhere with no success. With the candy season almost upon us this last year, I gave up. Roger made a drawing of the hook and took it to a metal shop to have a new one made. The price was so reasonable that we got one made for each of our children. I expect homemade candy canes will continue in the family for generations to come.



Samuel Freeman



Richard Freeman



*George Richard
Freeman*



Ernest Freeman



Roma Freeman



cooling candy



pulling candy



adding stripes



finished canes