

Curtiss Candy Company Farms, Cary, IL

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Ronald F. Eustice

Curtiss Candy Company

The Curtiss Candy Company was founded in 1916 by Otto Schnering in Chicago. Otto Schnering was a visionary businessman and philanthropist devoted to the values of hard work, education and family values. Schnering's first confectionery item was Kandy Kake, refashioned in 1920 as the log-shaped Baby Ruth candy bar. The second confectionery item introduced in 1926, was the chocolate-covered peanut butter crunch roll, which was named Butterfinger.

By 1928, Curtiss Candy was producing one billion bars per year in three Chicago factories. By the 1940s, Baby Ruth, Butterfinger, chewing gum, mints and fruit drops were generating over 70 million dollars in sales for the Curtiss Candy Company.

Otto Schnering was a "city kid" who developed a love of agriculture. In later life, he wanted to help the farming community, particularly the dairy farmers who supplied his company with tanker trucks full of milk and cream for his candy business.

his architects to study the design of structures in France and England. Schnering and his family took an active role in the daily operations of Curtiss Farms, and all decisions went through the family. It was not uncommon for Mr. and Mrs. Schnering to take evening walks through the barns to see their beloved cows, and everything had to be ready for inspection at all times, and it was.

Eventually, the Curtiss Candy Company owned dozens of farms totaling nearly 10,000 acres of land scattered across northern Illinois, near the towns of Algonquin, Arlington, Cary, Grays Lake and Marengo.

Over the succeeding years, Otto Schnering built his scattered farming interests into a business monolith that sold confectionary products to all parts of the U.S., and to Japan, Europe and South America.

During the 1940s, in one of the most ambitious agricultural endeavors ever undertaken on North American shores, Mr. and Mrs. Schnering began



Curtiss Candy main dairy barn

"The cattle earn their keep in the farm's vast and profitable artificial insemination program. The trout are tended by groundskeepers whose salaries are paid with revenue from the sale of trout. When Farmer Schnering surveys his domain and says, 'Isn't it pretty?' Businessman Schnering happily replies, 'Yes, and it pays for itself.'"

Following Otto Schnering's death, Bob Schnering, the oldest son, told the employees that the farms were costing the company more than 1 million dollars a year and would be sold. By the end of 1954, the only piece of Schnering's empire that remained was Curtiss Breeding Service.

The Curtiss Candy Holstein Herd

Montvic Renown, purchased in Ontario, was the foundation sire of the Holstein herd. Curtiss bought him for \$14,100 in Trailend (George Clemons) dispersal in 1942.

"Renown was sought after as no other bull of our breed has been in many, many years," wrote Maurice Prescott, editor of Holstein World. "He brought the highest price since his progenitor, Johanna Rag Apple Pabst (JRAP), was sold to Mount Victoria Farms for \$15,000 in 1926."

JRAP was the bull that founded the Rag Apple bloodline. And Renown, Reserve All-Canadian Junior Yearling Bull in 1942, had a deep Rag Apple pedigree that attracted a lot of interest. His dam, MONTVIC BONHEUR PIETJE B, had topped the Mount Victoria sale at \$6,500.

She was an All-American show cow with several big production records. Of even greater interest to Del Kingston, she was member of the kind of cow family that he liked to build upon.



Montvic Renown was purchased by the Curtiss Candy Company for \$14,100 in 1942 at the Trailend Dispersal in Ontario. This was the highest price paid for a Holstein since 1926.

Curtiss Candy Farms: In 1942, Mr. Schnering purchased a picturesque 650 acre farm overlooking the Fox River Valley near Cary, Illinois. The farm had been owned by John Hertz, the multi-millionaire owner of Yellow Cab Company and the founder of Hertz Rental Car Company. Hertz had used the place as a horse farm, complete with stables, amphitheater and a racetrack. While owned by Hertz, the main barn had been the home to two Kentucky Derby winners (Count Fleet and Reigh Count).

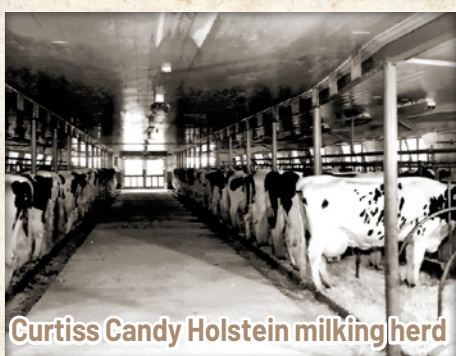
After Schnering purchased the property, he sent

stocking the farms with many types of livestock and poultry.

Nothing about Curtiss Candy resembled the "normal." Curtiss Candy Farms was a gigantic operation, holding some of the most valuable livestock of the times. Schnering owned Guernseys, Ayrshires, Brown Swiss, Jerseys, and Holsteins. The Curtiss Candy herd was an array of excellence in which the accomplishments of the colored breeds surpassed those of the Holsteins. In addition, Curtiss Candy had herds of Angus, Beef Shorthorn, Shropshire sheep, Duroc, Hampshire and Yorkshire hogs, as well as Belgian and Hackney horses and Shetland ponies. There was also a poultry farm with half a million broilers, as well as turkey and duck operations, a mink farm and a commercial trout farm.

Curtiss Candy Farms purebred dairy herds were in business for a little more than 11 years but during that period, the Curtiss herd produced three national Grand Champion Guernsey females and four Ayrshire Grand Champions, including the iconic bull Netherhall Swanky Dan.

Life magazine reported in a 1952 story on the farm:



Curtiss Candy Holstein milking herd



Montvic Renown

But let's get back to Renown's \$14,100 price tag. Curtiss had just paid \$2,300 – a lot of money in 1942 – for ABEGWEIT SPARKEE, the top-selling cow in the National Blue Ribbon Sale. Several other sale-toppers, Guernsey and Holstein alike, had been purchased elsewhere. Most of them made headlines.

Word had gotten around. Curtiss wasn't backing away from spending whatever it took to buy foundation stock it wanted. Big money! Mr. Schnering and Del Kingston caught themselves wondering if bidding would be less spirited if would-be buyers didn't know whom they were bidding against.

So, they dusted off the "candy man approach." A candy company executive went to Canada to do the bidding. It didn't take an expert

judge to do that. And things worked out as planned – up to a point. Nobody knew who the candy man was. The sale manager, never dreaming that the stranger was there to spend thousands, didn't even offer him a ride to the farm. So, the man from Curtiss took a cab and started bidding – and kept bidding.

Who was this guy? The worried auctioneer actually stopped the sale to find out. And as the world soon found out, Renown and his selling price helped put Curtiss on the Holstein map. He wasn't an all-time great, but he sired a lot of good ones. Curtiss Candy Jolly Jack, the bull that bred the first "outside" cow Curtiss inseminated on March 21, 1949, was one of them.

Not too long after that, Curtiss came up with another son of Montvic Bonheur Pietje B. His name was Creston Twenty Grand. He had several daughters with good records-in-progress. And he came within \$500 of living up to his name when Curtiss bought him for \$19,500 in the Buth (Creston Farm) dispersal in Michigan.

The Pietje B cow had been resold twice for \$20,000 and for \$21,000 – by that time. Glen Householder of the Holstein Association called her "the best damn cow on the planet right now."

Source: McCarry, Miles R., *CURTISS: Histories of Curtiss Candy Company Farms and Curtiss Breeding Service*.

Otto Schnering

Born: October 9, 1891, Chicago, IL ~ Died: January 10, 1953, Cary, IL

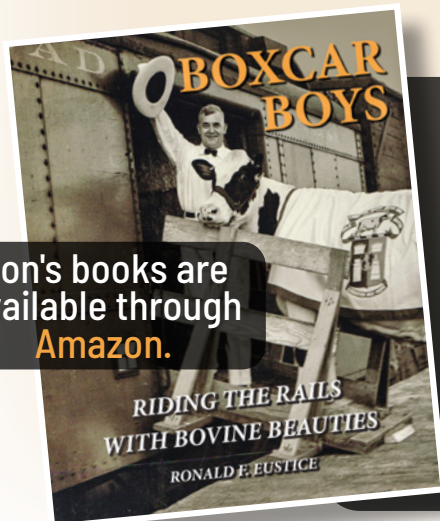


Otto Schnering was the son of a German-born father, Julius, and an American mother – Helen Curtiss – who came from a well-to-do New England family.

From 1909 to 1913, Otto Schnering attended the University of Chicago, earning a degree in philosophy. It's a bit of an unorthodox educational background for a candy mogul, but it's not hard to see how a philosopher's perspective contributed to Schnering's later exploits more than a traditional business degree might have. The philosophy of "Strategic Branding" and innovation, it turned out, would be one of Otto Schnering's lifelong talents.

Otto Schnering founded the company in 1916 and named the business after his mother, supposedly as a loving tribute. But the name likely had more to do with the reduced marketability of a German name like Schnering during World War I. Otto Schnering died January 10, 1953, at the age of 62.

In 1964, Curtiss Candy was sold to Standard Brands for \$7.5 million (approximately \$102 million in 2020). It was merged with Nabisco, Inc., in 1981. In 1990, the Curtiss brands were sold to Nestlé, and the Baby Ruth and Butterfinger brands continue to be made and sold by the company.



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Beginning with the earliest days of the railroad, transportation of livestock was important for farmers, businesses related to agriculture and to the railroads themselves. At first, livestock was transported in boxcars to packing plants at major terminals.

Once herd books were established for purebred livestock, shows and fairs became an important way to promote. From the 1890s until the late 1960s, show cattle were transported by rail. It was common for as many as 100 carloads of cattle to arrive at larger shows.

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Ron has written other books including: They Saw Red! (with a BC connection) and Polled Pioneers.

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