

**MR. PEANUT
AMADEO OBICI AND MARIO PERUZZI**

WHEN? 1906

WHERE? Wilkes-Barre, PA

EVENT Mario Peruzzi and Amadeo Obici started the multi-million dollar Planter's Peanut company in Wilkes-Barre



AMADEO OBICI



MARIO PERUZZI

(The following information was taken from Bridging Change by Sally Teller Lottick. She generously gave her permission to copy her research on Obici for use on this site.)

Amadeo Obici's innovative ideas for roasting peanuts, packaging them, and marketing his product created a new industry. Peanuts, sometimes called goobers, were not even a recognized cash crop in the late 1890s. By 1940, the lowly peanut had become the second most important cash crop in the South (cotton was the first) and one of the six largest cash crops in the United States. The story behind the growth includes Obici, boll weevil, and the inventive genius of George Washington Carver. He was a scientist at the Tuskegee Institute and one of the first black Americans to win fame for his achievements. He developed nearly three hundred products derived from peanuts.

By 1914, the cotton farming in Alabama was in trouble due to the boll weevil infestation. Carver began to promote the planting of peanuts as an alternative. Eventually the peanut industry took off due to Carver's expertise and Amadeo Obici.

Obici was born in Italy in 1887. In 1889, his widowed mother faced with raising four children, sent Amadeo by steamer and train to an uncle in Scranton. His destination was put on a label tied through his buttonhole. Italian was still his primary language though he attended school in Scranton. He worked with his uncle, a tailor, and then went to work in a cigar factory. At fifteen he moved on his own to Wilkes-Barre where he worked for friends selling fresh fruit at a street stand for six dollars per month plus board.

Obici used his savings to open his own fruit stand and peanut roaster. There were a number of them in Wilkes-Barre, but Obici's was said to have been the first with a whistle attached to the pipe where the steam escaped. In three years he had saved enough money to bring his family from Italy.

By 1906, at the age of twenty-nine, Obici had decided that there was a future in the peanut business. He persuaded Mario Peruzzi, the head of the confectionary department of C.P. Wentz Co. in Scranton, to borrow some money to form a new company. They decided to call it Planter's Peanuts. They rented a small factory for \$25 a month, installed two large roasters and some machinery, and employed six people.

"One major asset of the company was a process Obici had discovered for roasting peanuts so that they could be readily blanched of their red skins before salting, without breaking in half. Its major

premise was that people preferred whole blanched salted Virginia peanuts to the small, red-skinned Spanish nuts that at that time dominated the market. (Fortune, April 1938)”¹

Mr. Peanut—that elegant trademark with his top hat, cane, and spats---became the universal symbol for Planters. He got his start in Wilkes-Barré and then literally walked the streets of cities all over the United States giving out bags of peanuts. Single page cartoon stories about “Mr. Peanut’s Nutty History” were printed in millions of comic books. Coloring books, stamp albums, and the Mr. Peanut mechanical pencil were also part of the appeal as well as the addition of chocolate. Obici also introduced see-through bags so that Planters was merchandizing prepackaged peanuts. In 1960 Planters was purchased by Standard Brands, Inc. for nearly \$20 million.

The above information was taken from Bridging Change pp. 185 to 191 with the author’s permission.

CHECK IT OUT ONLINE:

1. [Mr. Peanut Mascot](#)
2. [Planter's Peanut history](#)

PRINT SOURCES

Lottick, Sally Teller. *Bridging Change: A Wyoming Valley Sketchbook*. Wilkes-Barre: Wyoming Historical and Geological Society, 1992.

MR. PEANUT



SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES and QUESTIONS

1. Why did Amadeo Obici come to the U.S.?
2. How did the peanut industry impact the U.S.?
3. Why is historic preservation important to a community?
4. What is the connection between George Washington Carver, peanuts, and the boll weevil? (There is a statue to the boll weevil in Enterprise, Alabama—odd reason—find out why!)
5. How did the character of Mr. Peanut come into being?

VOCABULARY

Blanched
Mechanical pencil
Sanitarium
Tuskegee

ENDNOTE

1. Lottick, p. 188