The Chocolate Egg Cream

The Chocolate Egg Cream is a beverage dating back possibly as far as the 1890s. It would be an injustice to call it a chocolate soda. It's a cold, fizzy, frothy, silky chocolate experience.

Its origins are obscure. One theory (repeatedly by the Auster family) is that it was created by Louis Auster at his candy store in lower Manhattan. According to this story, a Viennese actor remarked that Auster's drink was better than his similar drink called “chocolat et creme” the actor had tried in Vienna, and the phrase “chocolat et creme” was corrupted to “Chocolate egg cream.” Another theory (repeated by a Freudian descendant) is that the drink was invented by Hyman Freedman at his Manhattan candy store. According to this theory, the original drink contained chocolate syrup, ice cream, an egg and milk and was called “Under Hyman's egg cream.” When the ingredients became expensive during the Great Depression, the drink was modified to its current form, which employs seltzer water, milk and chocolate syrup—but neither egg nor cream.

The chocolate egg cream was perhaps an inevitable invention. Eastern European immigrants in New York brought a tradition of drinking seltzer water (the “champagne of the proletariat”). It was common for someone to order “two cents plain,” meaning a cold glass of plain seltzer costing two cents. A popular New York drink, promoted as healthy for children, was Dr. Brown’s Celery Tonic, made by combining celery seed, sugar and seltzer. Elsewhere, seltzer was combined with various kinds of syrups to make “phosphates,” especially lime and cherry phosphates. A chocolate phosphate was simply chocolate syrup and seltzer.

The chocolate egg cream became popular throughout New York City, especially in Jewish neighborhoods. Immigrants living in crowded tenements

[Image]
and sweating in the summer heat would compensate on the street near the local candy store and drink cold chocolate egg creams. It was easy to make so hundreds of people could be served in an evening.

In its heyday, the drink spread as far as Philadelphia, and its popularity lasted throughout the 1950s. Why did the chocolate egg cream decline in popularity in the 1950s? It probably fell victim to the convenience of bottled and canned soft drinks and the automatic soda dispensers, which eliminated the need for a soda jerk to mix syrup and soda.

Today, there is a chocolate egg cream revival. Light brown in color and at least an inch of pure white foam on the top.

Josephine and other "nouveau" creations, but, to an old-timer, nothing is acceptable but brown chocolate egg creams made with Fox's U-Bet Chocolate Flavor Syrup. This syrup has been manufactured since the early 1890s. The name U-Bet dates from the late 1920s. These seem to be convincing that the perfect chocolate egg cream is as cold as possible, served in a straight, 16-ounce glass or a Coke glass (with the bulging foot) made with whole milk and the ice cream over a cold bowl never with club soda. It should have a dark brown bottom.