



Will Keith Kellogg

Kellogg Company Founder

Will Keith (W.K.) Kellogg was born April 7, 1860. W.K., along with his brother, Dr. John Harvey Kellogg, was the co-inventor of flaked cereal. Although he lacked a formal education beyond the sixth grade, W.K. Kellogg forever changed the way we eat breakfast. When he died on October 6, 1951, at the age of 91, he had amassed a fortune and enriched the lives of people in his hometown of Battle Creek, Michigan, and millions of others around the world.

The future world-renowned benefactor and cereal industry pioneer became a traveling broom salesman at the age of 14. At age 20, he started as a clerk at the Battle Creek Sanitarium, also known as the San, where his older brother, John Harvey Kellogg, was physician-in-chief. It was there that he discovered the process for making cereal flakes. W.K. Kellogg would eventually become bookkeeper and manager of the world-famous hospital, which put virtually any task outside of medicine under his purview.

For years, he assisted his brother in research aimed at improving the vegetarian diet of the San's patients, especially in the search for a wheat-based granola. Their many experiments with grains would lead them to stumble upon a major food innovation. In 1894, W.K. Kellogg accidentally left a pot of boiled wheat to stand and become tempered. When it was put through the usual rolling process, each grain of wheat emerged as a large, thin flake. W.K. persuaded his brother to serve the food in flake form, and it was an immediate favorite among the patients.

Soon the flaked wheat was being packaged to meet hundreds of mail order requests from guests after they left the San. Because John Harvey Kellogg had little interest in such matters, his brother added another task to his long list of responsibilities: that of managing the



burgeoning packaged food enterprise. In 1906, W.K. Kellogg entered the cereal business, as American eating habits began shifting from heavy, fat-laden breakfasts to lighter, more grain-based meals.

W.K. discovered that a better flake was produced by using only the corn grit or “sweet heart of the corn.” To help consumers distinguish *Kellogg’s Corn Flakes*[®] cereal from the products of the 42 other cereal companies in Battle Creek, Michigan, W.K. put his signature on each package, saying that these Corn Flakes were the “The Original.” The company succeeded because it believed the entire populace, not just those on special diets, might be interested in wholesome cereal foods, and because it continually improved its product line and packaging techniques to meet the needs of an ever-changing and evolving consumer base.

Using his sense of economics, an understanding of marketing techniques and hard work, W.K. constantly increased production, advertising budgets and sales. He expanded his business to Australia in 1924, guided the cereal company through the Great Depression (he increased advertising while others cut back), and brought Kellogg's cereal into England in 1938.

While growing the business overseas, W.K. continued to expand Kellogg’s facilities in Battle Creek. During this same period, Kellogg initiated the first food fortification efforts by a cereal manufacturer with the goal of improving overall health and preventing nutritional deficiencies. By 1940, glaucoma had robbed W.K. of his eyesight, but he was able to stay active with his correspondence and business affairs with the help of Elsie Hoatson, his nurse who also doubled as a personal secretary. He constantly telephoned company executives in Battle Creek to maintain his contact with day-to-day business activities.

W.K. Kellogg was 46 years old when he founded Kellogg Company. Despite the fortune he was to amass, he was never completely comfortable with his riches, and so continued to live a comparatively modest life. As his wealth grew, Kellogg gave generously to various charitable causes. He became convinced that the most good, however, could be accomplished by helping young people. So, in 1925, he established the Fellowship Corporation, which helped to build an agricultural school and a bird sanctuary, and established an experimental farm and reforestation project. Kellogg also donated nearly \$3 million to hometown causes, such as the Ann J. Kellogg School for handicapped children, a civic auditorium, a junior high school and a youth recreation center.

In 1930, President Herbert Hoover named W.K. a delegate to a White House conference on Child Health and Protection. He returned from the conference determined to help. In June of that year, the W.K. Kellogg Child Welfare Foundation was established, and soon after became the beneficiary of W.K.'s assets valued at \$45 million. A few months later, W.K. broadened the focus of the charter, and renamed it the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

Through his philanthropic work, Mr. Kellogg demonstrated great compassion and caring and acted on his belief that the greatest good came from helping people to help themselves – giving them the opportunity to do what was important to them to lead happier, healthier lives. Kellogg worked at the Foundation until just before his death in 1951. Consistent with the way in which he led his life, W.K.'s grave in Battle Creek's Oak Hill cemetery is marked by a simple monument of stone. His legacy, however, lives on in the company and foundation he created to better the lives of people around the world.