

PLATES



Chiles and Spice and Everything Nice

DeWitt Clinton Pendery started selling spices to Texans in 1870; today his descendants sell to the world

By Susan L. Ebert



**PENDERY'S WORLD OF
CHILES AND SPICES**
1407 Eighth Ave., Fort Worth.
Open Mon-Fri 8:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m.;
Sat 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
817-924-3434; penderys.com

Step beneath the top hat logo gracing the dormer over the front porch of Pendery's World of Chiles and Spices in Fort Worth, close your eyes, and breathe deep: Intermingled fragrances from exotic lands flood your olfactories—perfumed Sri Lankan cinnamon; pungent Iranian cumin; sultry Jamaican allspice; smoky Spanish paprika; and chiles, lots and lots of chiles.

"I've been coming here since I was a kid," says David Hollister, the Fort Worth born-and-bred executive chef at Dallas' Gas Monkey Bar and Grill. "I have them make a lot of my proprietary blends such as

barbecue rubs, chili powder blends, and creole seasonings. Every restaurant I've ever worked for, I've tried to get them to switch to Pendery's."

Not just restaurant chefs, but throngs of Texas chiliheads and home cooks favor Pendery's chiles and spices for their freshness and purity. Chili cook-off participants rely on Pendery's fresh-ground chiles for a competitive edge, including Dallas dentist Ted Hume, who won the Tolbert Men's State Open in 1995 and 2001, the Tolbert Texas State Open in 2001, and the Original Terlingua International Chili Cookoff in 2003 and 2012. Hume's "Root Canal" chili blend remains popular with Pendery's clientele.

The Pendery's story began nearly 150 years ago when aspiring spice merchant DeWitt Clinton Pendery came to Texas. "He'd been working in the family tea and grocery business in Cincinnati and decided to join his brother in then-untamed Fort Worth," says Clint Haggerty, the company's general manager and Pendery's great-great grandson. "He cut a fine figure as he disembarked the stagecoach in his long frock coat and silk top hat, with his carefully waxed handlebar mustache. The cowboys jeered at him, and one sent a bullet whizzing through his top hat. DWC casually picked up the hat, dusted it off, placed it back atop his head, nonchalantly gathered his belongings, and continued on his way. According to family legend, this earned him immediate approval and respect."

"With an international appetite for 'all things Texan,' our products sell all over the world."

Look again at the top hat logo, emblazoned with "1870," and you'll see the hole where the bullet sailed through.

Pendery grew his fledgling dry goods business, specializing in "fancy groceries" like preserved, bottled, or canned foods, spices, teas, and other delicacies prized in a frontier town. He also developed a keen interest in regional Texas seasonings, especially the dried-and-ground chile peppers used to impart flavor to tough, range-fed beef. He experimented with ways to dry and grind the fiery chiles and developed his own proprietary blend of chile spices, christening it "Chiltomaline." By 1890, Pendery was advertising Chiltomaline via handbills on stagecoaches and in cafés and hotels, extolling its medicinal benefits. "The health-giving properties of hot chile peppers have no equal," he wrote. "They give tone to the alimentary canal, regulating the functions, giving a natural appetite, and promoting health by action of the kidneys, skin, and lymphatics."

Each generation of the Pendery family followed in their patriarch's footsteps, making Pendery's one of the oldest family-owned-and-operated businesses in Texas today.



FROM LEFT: Colorful spices; Pendery's General Manager Clint Haggerty with a portrait of his great-great grandfather, DeWitt Clinton Pendery.

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