

The Myth of the Mexican Brown Sugar Cones

Over the years I have had many discussions with people, merchants, and sutlers regarding the authenticity of those small, Mexican, 8 oz. brown sugar cones in colonial American life. It has often proven very frustrating to me, and no doubt to them as well.

For clarification I offer here a few paragraphs on the subject.

In the 16th, 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, once sugarcane had been harvested the cane juice was pressed out of the stalks, then boiled several times. Temper, a very strong well-burnt quicklime was added to reduce acidity. The cane juice was then filtered several times to remove impurities. After these steps had been completed, the liquid sugar was poured into a trough, barrel, or conical-shaped mold that had a small hole in the bottom plugged with twists of paper, leaves, or rags. Once the sugar solidified in this container, the plug was removed and the dark syrup and non-crystalline matter, called molasses, drained into another container called a receiver. These molds were only temporary and facilitated the removal of the molasses.

The smallest, and finest, and whitest sugar loaves came from Madiera, and only weighed 3-4 lbs. They were perhaps 5” in diameter and 5” high. These loaves were extremely expensive due to prolonged repeating of the whitening process.

The process of making the Mexican Brown Sugar Cones can be seen in a YouTube video that makes it very clear that this sugarcane juice is not refined at all, but poured straight into the little molds, molasses intact. You can watch this process at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aiagAObCtx0>



The 8 oz. Brown Sugar Mexican Candy cones, often called Piloncillo, Panella, or Brown Sugar Cones, weigh about 8 oz., measure about 2” across the bottom and are about 4½” high and are identical to what is sold by a certain sutler. When this sugar cone is placed next to Brown Sugar Mexican Candy cones it is impossible to tell them apart.

Sometimes the result of the first boiling, called muscovado, was sent in loaf form to refineries in Europe and the colonies to be refined. There is no record of these muscovado loaves being sold otherwise. White sugar loaves were wrapped in expensive blue sugar paper used for product packaging to enhance the whiteness, and the value, of the sugar. Inferior sugar loaves were wrapped in inexpensive pale brown paper.

I have found no record of this expensive black paper being used to wrap sugar loaves, nor have I found 18c black shop paper offered for sale.

Note that the wax seal was used in African sugar production, particularly Morocco, not in the colonies or Europe.

Caveat Emptor!

Let the Buyer Beware!