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Chewing Gum

People have been chewing gum-like substances for more than 6,000 years. The oldest ever discovered was one made from birch bark tar¹ dating back 6,000 years. That was in Finland. The Mayans and Aztecs also chewed a natural tree gum called chicle². Even the ancient Greeks chewed gum made from the mastic tree³. Chicle and mastic are tree resins.

The modernization and commercialization of chewing gum mainly took place in the United States. Native Americans chewed resin made from the sap of spruce⁴ trees. Europeans who settled in New England picked up that practice. In 1848 John B. Curtis developed and sold the first commercial chewing gum called The State of Maine Pure Spruce Gum. Around 1850 a chewing gum made from paraffin⁵ wax was developed and soon became more popular than spruce chewing gum. To make the gum sweet, the user would often dip the gum into a plate of sugar. On December 28, 1869 William Semple filed the first patent for chewing gum.

The first flavored chewing gum was created in the 1860s by a Louisville, Kentucky pharmacist named John Colgan. He mixed powdered sugar with tolu⁶, a powder obtained from an extract of the balsam tree. These he formed into small sticks which he called "Taffy Tolu". Colgan also led the way in the manufacturing of chicle-based chewing gum.

Modern chewing gum was first developed in the 1860s when chicle was brought from Mexico by the former President, General Antonio Lopez de Santa Ana to New York. He was the Mexican general who attacked and defeated the Alamo in Texas. He gave it to Charles Adams for use as a rubber substitute. Adams did not use it as a rubber substitute, but instead he cut it into strips and sold it as Adams New York Chewing Gum. One brand, Black Jack which came out in 1884, was flavored with licorice and I remember chewing it as a child. Chiclets was another popular brand that appeared in 1899 and I also chewed it as a child. Perhaps the most popular and successful chewing gums were those made by William Wrigley, Jr. in 1891. Since the 1960s chewing gum was no longer made with chicle but a butadiene-based synthetic rubber because it is cheaper.

Chewing gum is still popular with many people and it seems especially popular with some baseball players. Baseball players have long chewed something when playing the sport and up until the 1970s many players chewed tobacco. That was a dirty habit because it produced a lot of juice which they then had to spit out. At least with chewing gum they don't need to spit!

¹樺樹皮樹脂

²チクル

³樹脂のために生育された地中海地域の常緑低木

⁴トウヒ

⁵パラフィン

⁶トルーバルサム