

NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions

By Ned Hémard

Does Your Chewing Gum Lose Its Flavor...

The St. James Hotel in the 300 block of Magazine Street is one of New Orleans' luxurious boutique hotels. Located in the historic Banks' Arcade, a three-story structure built by Thomas Banks in 1833, it is also home to the highly acclaimed *Restaurant Cuvée*.

The first St. James Hotel was also situated in the Banks' Arcade, once the center of the Caribbean coffee and sugar trade in the 19th century. It had a glass-roofed court combined with an auction mart, a saloon and commercial features very much like a modern office building.

Banks' Arcade gained its renown as witness to one of the pivotal moments of the Texas Revolution. On October 13, 1835, powerful representatives of New Orleans mercantile houses met there and backed the Texian forces against General Antonio de Padua María Severino López de Santa Anna y Pérez de Lebrón, better known simply as Santa Anna. As a result, capital from the Crescent City (\$250,000 in loans), along with New Orleans men and arms (two companies known as the New Orleans Greys), were sent to support Stephen Austin and others in Texas' fight for independence.

Recognizing the importance of securing both popular and financial support from New Orleans, this important group of financiers and businessmen formed the Committee on Texas Affairs. The New Orleans Greys took their name from their city of origin and the color of the uniforms they would wear. The members of the two companies formed that day would go on to write their names large across the battlefields of Texas, taking heavy losses at the Battles of Bexar, the Alamo and Goliad.

After rebelling in late 1835, the Texas department of the Mexican state of *Coahuila y Tejas* had declared itself independent on March 2, 1836. Santa Anna marched north to bring Texas back under Mexican control. On March 6, 1836, Santa Anna's forces killed the valiant defenders at the Alamo and twenty-one days later executed more than 350 prisoners at the Goliad Massacre.

But in April, Sam Houston would turn things around by defeating Santa

Anna at the Battle of San Jacinto. Captured, Santa Anna signed a treaty in his official capacity as head of the Mexican nation, acknowledging "the full, entire, and perfect Independence of the Republic of Texas". In exchange, the newly formed Texas government guaranteed Santa Anna's life and transport to Vera Cruz. But that was not the end of Santa Anna.

Exiled to numerous countries during his turbulent political and military career, by the late 1860s Santa Anna found himself on Staten Island, New York, where he was to meet a photographer and inventor named Thomas Adams (1818-1905). Like many of his countrymen, General Santa Anna chewed chicle, the dried sap of the Mexican sapodilla tree. While in New York, he gave some of the chicle to Mr. Adams.

Adams attempted to make rubberized toys, masks, rain boots and bicycle tires out of the chicle, but every experiment failed. Finally, he observed a little girl who entered a drugstore and asked for a chewing gum for one penny. It was made of paraffin wax and called "White Mountain". Thinking of the chicle Santa Anna chewed, Adams asked the druggist if he would be interested in marketing an entirely different kind of gum.

"OK," he agreed.

Going to work in his warehouse of Front Street, Adams made chewing gum that had chicle as an ingredient, large quantities of which had been made available to him by Santa Anna. Adams and his son decided on the name of Adams New York No. 1 and the slogan, "Snapping and Stretching". It was made of pure chicle gum without any flavor, rolled in little penny sticks and wrapped in various colored tissue papers. Adams opened the world's first chewing gum factory, and (in February 1871) his gum went on sale in for a penny apiece.

After success with pure chicle gum, Adams soon added some flavoring. His licorice-flavored gum was called "Black Jack". It was the first gum to be sold as a stick not in chunks, and was popular with the public. But there were problems with the flavor lasting. In 1880, William J. White (of Cleveland, Ohio) experimented with flavors and solved the problem by adding sugar and corn syrup to the mix. The first flavor he employed was peppermint and it remained in the gum during chewing.

In 1888, Adams' firm introduced "Tutti-Frutti", the first gum to be sold in a vending machine. Adams Sons & Company was the nation's most prosperous chewing gum company by the end of the century (building a monopoly in 1899 by merging with the six largest and best-known chewing gum manufacturers in the United States and Canada).

The American Chicle Company was the name of this new chewing gum trust, which was incorporated on June 2, 1899. With a market capitalization of \$9,000,000, the business was composed of Adams, W.J. White & Sons (of Cleveland) and other large chewing gum concerns. The corporation operated factories and gum forests in the

Yucatan Peninsula.

The American Chicle Company even had operations in New Orleans from 1911 to 1918 in an impressive Italian Renaissance building at 8300 Earhart Blvd. (actually the entrance was 1130 Fig Street) producing chewing gum made with the chicle harvested by Mexican *chicleros*.

American Chicle's competitor (William Wrigley Jr. Company) was founded on April 1, 1891, originally selling products such as baking powder and soap. In 1892, Wrigley decided to pack chewing gum with each can of baking powder. The gum was so popular, it overshadowed the other products. Along came "Juicy Fruit", "Spearmint" and "Doublemint®" (and the rest is history). "Juicy Fruit" gum launched the use of UPC codes as the first product to be scanned with a laser scanner.

"Chiclets" is another old-time classic chewing gum brand that has been available for generations, and it's obvious where the name originated. Frank H. Fler (famous for baseball cards packed along with the gum) based his brother Henry's product idea on a confection that was popular around the turn of the Twentieth Century, candy coated almonds (the pre-cursors of "M & Ms"). Peppermint "Chiclets" were introduced in 1906 and are the original candy coated gum. In 1906, Fler also introduced the world's first bubble gum. In 1909, Fler sold his chicle chewing gum company to the Sen-Sen Company, which (renamed as the Sen Sen Chiclet Company) merged with the American Chicle Company in 1914.

In 1916, "Dentyne" chewing gum ("The Gum That Cleans the Teeth") was acquired from Sterling Gum Co. After World War II, "Clorets" was added in 1951 to the American Chicle line as a breath-freshening gum containing chlorophyll and a formulation called "Actizol". In 1953, researchers at American Chicle began work on developing a good tasting sugar-free gum. Nine years later, "Trident" was introduced on a limited basis (selling nationwide in 1964).

American Chicle, which ceased its New Orleans operations in 1918, was eventually purchased by the Warner-Lambert Company. Becoming part of Pfizer in 2000, the company was most recently acquired by Cadbury Schweppes. Many of American Chicle's brands, however, are out of production.

During World War II, every GI had gum in his ration kit and gave sticks out to kids in war-torn Europe. The demand was so great that a synthetic substitute for chicle was invented, such that Mayan villages and their *chicleros* suffered financial hardship.

Today the century-old three-story American Chicle chewing gum factory at 8300 Earhart (later known as Marine Paint and Varnish) has turned into an ideal headquarters for Landis Construction

Company, with excellent fenestration and the natural light that employees had missed in their previous Jefferson, Louisiana, location. For the building's renovation, CEO Jim Landis and Executive Vice President Jim Lewis (along with architect Creed Brierre) have gone green by incorporating numerous environmental elements (including high solar-reflective index roofing, special paint and motion-activated lighting). The obvious green advantage, though, was to use the magnificent existing building. With its exposed beams, high ceilings and wide pine floors overlaid with oak, the new headquarters is a gem.

The 27,000-square-foot red brick building, listed on the National Registry of Historic Places, was of such an impressive architectural design that it served as a model for the nearby Walgreen's drug store and Robért's grocery store (at the intersection of Claiborne and Carrollton). Robért's continued the same design for their renovation in West Lakeshore on Robert E. Lee Boulevard.

From financing the Texas Revolution that defeated Santa Anna to environmentally retrofitting an old chewing gum factory into a model corporate headquarters, New Orleanians have done it all. Time to enjoy a stick of gum.

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