



A defeated general led to the invention of chewing gum.

Thomas Adams (1818-1905)
The Chewing Gum Man

Nearly everyone has heard of the Battle of the Alamo where a small group of brave defenders held out for 11 days against 4,000 troops of General Santa Anna. While the General claimed victory at the Alamo, he was defeated in a later battle and left Mexico for Staten Island, New York. There he stayed in the home of Thomas Adams.

As an inventor, Thomas tinkered with lots of ideas but did not have the money to carry them out. Santa Anna suggested that cheap and plentiful chicle from Mexico might make good rubber. A cheaper, stronger, more durable rubber would make Adams a fortune.

Thomas thought this was a great idea. Santa Anna still had friends in Mexico. He arranged for a large quantity of chicle to be shipped to Thomas Adams.

Thomas rented a warehouse to store the chicle. He worked day and night to come up with a cheaper kind of rubber. He tried making toys, and boots, and bicycle tires. Nothing worked. The rubber split and came apart. It would not keep its shape. After months of work Adams decided the best place for all that chicle was at the bottom of the East River.

Many inventions come from accidental discoveries. Wondering what to do with all the chicle in the warehouse, Thomas broke off a piece and popped it in his mouth. He enjoyed chewing the chicle. Maybe other people would enjoy it, too. Adams told his sons about his idea. They made up boxes of the chicle gum. A local druggist agreed to sell the gum. It was a hit!

Two years later Thomas invented a machine to make the gum and opened the first chewing gum factory in the country. Before long factory workers were adding different flavors to the gum, and it became popular throughout the nation. Adams had finally found success as an inventor, thanks to a defeated general.

Blunder or Brainstorm?