

# San Jacinto River Authority Kids Page



## What popular American product can be traced back to Mexican President/General Santa Anna?

Just about every Texan relates the “infamous” **Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna** with the defeat of the Texians at the Alamo, but not everyone knows of this man’s extensive history and interaction with what became the United States.

Santa Anna – who significantly influenced Mexican politics for more than 40 years -- was born in February 1794 and died in June 1876. He was a very wealthy landowner and an acclaimed military leader. He served as president of Mexico eleven (non-consecutive) times over a period of 22 years. Some historians suggest that Santa Anna had a charismatic quality about him and possessed a unique talent for dealing with people. Santa Anna truly believed that allowing any group of people – and most especially the Texians – to separate from Mexico would set a bad precedent for his beloved country and should be avoided at all costs.



He sometimes took extreme measures to “cement” his reputation as a patriot. During a military action with the French around 1838, for example, the General lost a leg during the battle. Santa Anna built an entire ceremony around the burial of his limb, turning the amputation into a celebration of his leadership!

Some suggest that even though Santa Anna occupied the presidency so many times, he really didn’t enjoy the “job”. He liked the power but not the responsibility. In spite of his personal appeal, he was repeatedly ousted or overthrown, and in 1845 was actually captured, jailed, and exiled to Cuba. Thanks to his enduring reputation (and a healthy dose of self-promotion) he returned to re-take the Mexican government at the invitation of some rebellious conservatives. After skimming government funds into his own pockets, and selling off a huge amount of territory to the U.S., Santa Anna declared himself “Most Serene Highness” and dictator-for-life. This was just too much for those who helped him resume power. He was tried for treason and ousted once more.

The aging General lived rather comfortably in exile in Cuba, Columbia and St. Thomas, and eventually moved to Staten Island, New York. At age 74 – while he was trying to raise money to to build an

army so he could return to occupy Mexico City – he came up with a very clever idea. Santa Anna knew that Mexican chicle, made from the sapodilla tree, could be used as an additive to natural rubber, which was extremely expensive at the time. He figured that if someone could come up with a way to cut costs of things made from rubber – automobile tires, rain boots, toys, etc. – this could generate a lot of money and personal wealth. He had acquired a large shipment of this substance and went in search of a buyer.

Santa Anna’s attempt at becoming an entrepreneur took an interesting turn. He persuaded an American businessman, Thomas Adams, to purchase a ton of chicle from him to manufacture a cheaper, synthetic rubber. Adams agreed and tried for about a year to come up with just the right formula. He was unsuccessful and was about to give up when he remembered Santa Anna’s gum chewing habit. The General had enjoyed chewing chicle for much of his life. Chewing gum had been around a long time; the ancient Greeks chewed a substance made from the resin of the mastic tree, and Mayans chewed chicle more than 1,000 years ago.

Adams and his son mixed up a batch of chicle gum in their kitchen and sampled it. There were a variety of chewing gums on the market at the time, but they were not very appealing – made from beeswax, spruce sap or sweetened paraffin wax. This “new” chicle gum was softer, smoother and much more enjoyable and tasty in comparison.

Adams rolled the gum into balls, wrapped them in colored tissue paper, and took his colorful product to local drug stores to see if it would sell. In just a matter of days, they were all sold out. CHICLETS were born! Adams invented a special gum making machine and had it patented in 1871. The gum made Adams a wealthy man, but Santa Anna returned to Mexico, where he died penniless in 1876.

**Chiclets are still on the market today!**

