

We're Forever Blowing Bubbles

WHILE CHEWING GUM has been around for ages—literally—bubble gum is a relative newcomer.

The ancient Greeks chewed the resin of the mastic tree, and New England settlers picked up the habit of Native Americans of chomping on the same from spruce trees.

In 1848, commercial chewing gum was first made from spruce sap, soon followed by gum with a paraffin-wax base.

Modern chewing gum was developed in the 1860s, when chicle was imported from Mexico. This latex from the sapodilla tree was supposed to replace rubber, but found its niche as gum instead. Chicle-based Chiclets debuted in 1906.

In the early 1900s, Frank Fleer, of the Frank H. Fleer Company, Philadelphia, experimented with gum that could be used to blow bubbles. His first attempt, Blibber-Blabber, had a texture like Silly Putty and was brittle and too sticky—and splatted when the bubble burst, instead of snapping back. It was never marketed.

An accountant in the company, Walter Diemer, continued to work with the bubble-gum recipe. In 1928, Diemer developed a batch that made bubbles but didn't stick to his face.

He gave it to people around the office to try, and they enjoyed it. But the next day, the rest of the batch was hard and wouldn't blow bubbles.

He continued his experiments for months and finally came up with a recipe that worked. He flavored it with wintergreen, peppermint, vanilla and cinnamon and added pink coloring because it was the only color he had.

The result was Dubble Bubble bubble gum. The company sold \$1.5 million worth of it in the first year.

Diemer was promoted to a senior vice presidency and taught salesmen how to blow bubbles. In '29, the Depression hit, but some people could still afford a penny for a piece of gum.

The Topps Company, Inc. came out with Bazooka bubble gum after WWII, familiar for its red, white and blue logo and the Bazooka Joe comics, which were introduced in '53.