Charles Goodyear

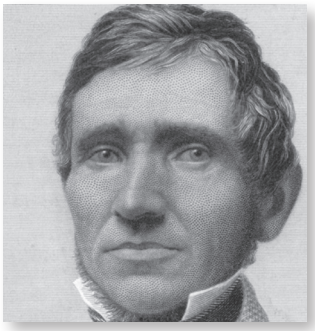
Clan Joel

A Life Obsessed

by Lori Hahn

Some families of early New Haven are intertwined with our Munson forbearers through marriage, business, school, and even church. During the early New Haven days of Thomas Munson, the founder of our Munson family, most likely met up with many interesting characters while living there.

Stephen Goodyear was an original settler of New Haven, and an early, but not original, subscriber to the Fundamental Agreement of 4 June 1639, he was selected as one of two magistrates of New Haven in 1641. He was chosen Deputy Governor of New Haven Colony in 1643 and served until his death. His great-grandson, Theophilus, born in 1731 in New Haven, married clan-head Joel Munson's daughter Sarah Munson, also born in New Haven in 1731 and got married in 1753. The couple had 10 children who lived to adulthood.



Charles Nelson Goodyear (1800-1860)

Their son Amasa, born in 1772 in New Haven county. In 1799, he married Cynthia Bateman. In addition to being involved in the West Indies trade, he was a born inventor, coming up with several gadgets including the Goodyear spring tempered hay and manure pitchfork. He was also an entreprenuer and with his son Charles, they started the first retail hardware store in Philadelphia. Unfortunately, neither of them appeared to be sound businessmen, and let people buy on credit that went uncollected. They went bankrupt three years after starting the concern.

Amasa, his wife, Cynthia, son Amasa Jr. and his daughter-in-law decided to start over in Florida so they moved there in 1841. Within weeks, all of them had typhoid and all of them died except Cynthia.

Charles, on the other hand, stayed in New England and continued to work on his inventions—usually to the detriment of his children and wife. He borrowed money again and again to start his ventures or continue them. He'd invariably bankrupt himself, then ended up in debtor's prison, leaving his family to fend for themselves.

His wife, Clarissa Beecher, was a fine woman. She struggled to feed the children during this time and was often forced to forage in the wild to feed his children when he was broke or jailed. This early deprivation had a serious impact on all of the children.

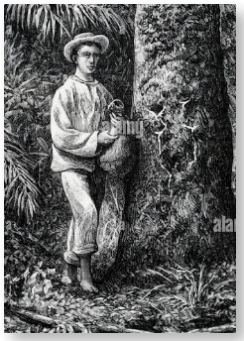
He had a new brainstorm in 1834. He was obsessed with making rubber a commodity that would be stable and commercially usable. He traveled to India and became interested in the production of raw rubber. Rubber was being cultivated in India as well as the tropical regions of southeast Asia and Brazil. Part of the problem with rubber was it was a plant, and regardless of its use, it broke down chemically, like any plant would, once it was harvested. Goodyear hoped to make it more useful and less temporary. When exposed to high heat, it melted. Though just an amateur chemist, he began his experiments to find the secret to making rubber something usable.

In 1836, totally by accident, he finally came across a nitric acid treatment which made defects of his chemical processes. But, he wasn't quite sure how he'd done it. It took until a very long time to reverse-engineer his brilliant yet accidental discovery.

In 1844, he was finally able to get a patent, but other international patents infringed on his ability to make money from his vulcanization process during his lifetime.

While the family was living in London, and he was perfecting his process chemically, his beloved wife died. He married almost immediatley to Fanny Wordell in 1854. They had one child live to adulthood.

He himself died in 1860 in England—completely broke. Long after his death, after multiple years of court cases, his family began collecting the proceeds of his vulcanization process.



Tapping the rubber tree plant

Oddly, there is no connection to the Goodyear Tire Company. The company Seiberling Brothers founded didn't start until 40 years after Goodyear died.

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