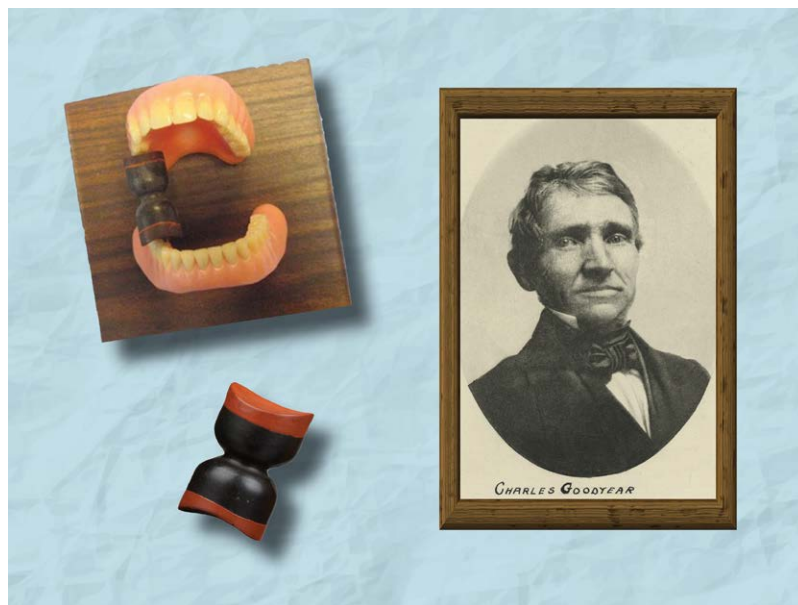


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ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS FROM THE WOOD LIBRARY-MUSEUM

Mouth Props: Vulcanite Takes a Bite Out of Dental Anesthesia



Unassuming in appearance yet essential for dental anesthetics, the mid-nineteenth century mouth prop (*upper and bottom left*) could not have made its mark without Charles Goodyear (1800 to 1860, *right*) and his creation of vulcanized rubber. Even when expertly placed, early wooden mouth props quickly splintered under the pressure of clenched jaws. A durable alternative was needed. Before the “Good” years of vulcanized rubber, North American rubber products would often melt in the summer and crack in the winter. Determined to develop an enduring material for life preservers, Goodyear heated rubber and sulfur to “vulcanize” the compound. As the popularity of anesthetics for “painless” dental extractions generated significant demand for affordable dentures, dentists became key consumers of vulcanized rubber. “Vulcanite” was easy to implement as bite block material. Eventually, the wealthy Goodyear Dental Vulcanite Company began to enforce patents and collect high royalties. Tensions culminated in the 1879 murder of its financial director by a dentist. Taking the hint, the company did not renew its denture patents. By the turn of the twentieth century, vulcanite dentures and mouth props enjoyed near-ubiquity in dental practices. (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists’ Wood Library–Museum of Anesthesiology, Schaumburg, Illinois.)

Melissa L. Coleman, M.D., Penn State College of Medicine, Hershey, Pennsylvania, and Jane S. Moon, M.D., University of California, Los Angeles, California.