The Goodyear Story: An Inventor's Obsession and the Struggle for a Rubber Monopoly. *By Richard Korman*. San Francisco, Encounter Books, 2002. 230 pp. Cloth, $25.95. ISBN 1-893-55437-6.

Reviewed by Michael French

Few inventors offer more vibrant evidence of the obsessive, poverty-stricken pursuit of an idea or ambition than Charles Goodyear. Goodyear's significance stems from his role in the development of vulcanization—namely, the transforming effects of exposure to heat—and other techniques for making crude rubber pliable, durable, and useful in manufacturing. This new biography, the first in decades, retells the stories of Goodyear's career and the evolution of his identity as an inventor embarked on a relentless quest. Its broad sweep extends from Goodyear's origins in Connecticut to the international recognition he received for the display of his multitude of rubber goods at the 1851 Great Exhibition in London and later in Paris.

Goodyear had the benefit of an inventive father, and early on he gained experience in blacksmithing and retailing. His subsequent career lurched through successive financial disasters and imprisonments for debt, but he had an extraordinary ability to obtain loans and credit from relatives, friends, and acquaintances. Richard Korman charts the chaotic sequence of pawning, borrowing, and scraping by that characterized Goodyear's domestic and business life. Since the basic chronology and facts have been recounted before, the book's principal contribution is to identify the contacts Goodyear made within the fledgling rubber industry and to elucidate the complexities of the patent systems of the United States and Europe. Korman neatly locates Goodyear's sustained, though haphazard and at times confused, experiments within the international networks of similar tinkerers, researchers, entrepreneurs, gamblers, and adventurers who attempted to unlock the commercial potential of rubber during the 1830s and 1840s in Britain and the United States. He also assesses the question of how, and by whom, vulcanization was discovered. As so often occurs, the precise contributions remain uncertain, not least because the subsequent patent cases provided so many competing and self-interested presentations of the "facts."

Charles Goodyear's patent, number 3633, drawn up first in 1842 and granted in 1844, was the key statement of his claim to have discovered vulcanization. The patent was extended to 1865, outlasting Goodyear himself; even then the family made a vain effort to persuade Congress that his efforts and hardships warranted a longer life span for the now lucrative patent. Goodyear's efforts to exploit the patent by adding to its terms, extending its life, earning royalties, gaining both moral and financial credit from its existence, and selling off interest in its rights to others make fascinating reading. To carry out this extended, convoluted campaign, Goodyear employed the services of two gifted attorneys: William Judson, who masterminded the idea of a pool based on Goodyear's patent, and Daniel Webster, who portrayed Goodyear in the ensuing trial as a classically destitute, farsighted inventor.

The patent cases and bankruptcy data are the main sources for this narrative. In places the materials are too sparse, especially on the domestic side, to reveal motives and business connections, and the account of the early firms adds little to existing studies. Goodyear's wife, Clarissa, and children remain shadowy, hapless figures, distinctly subordinate after 1834 to the inventor's research. In some cases, like Clarissa's death, the author indicates in footnotes how he imagines the events unfolding. Andrea Tone's recent study, *Devices and Desires: A History of Contraceptives in America* (2001), suggests that Korman could have enriched his tale by consulting Dun and Bradstreet records. Surprisingly, he did not draw on William Woodruff's *The Rise of the British Rubber Industry during the Nineteenth Century* (1958) or Peter Payne's *Rubber and Railways in the Nineteenth Century: A Study of the Spencer Papers* (1961) for the sections on the Goodyear patents in Britain. Nevertheless, this is an engaging general biography of an inventor that carefully traces the main events in the history of technology in the rubber industry.

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