



# The Real McCoy : Elijah McCoy

From the Underground Railroad to Railroad Riches

1844 - 1929

Mechanical Engineer

Entrepreneur

Inventor

Businessman

American Hero





# From the Underground Railroad...

Sometime around 1837, McCoy's parents, George and Mildred, escaped from slavery in Kentucky via the "Underground Railroad." Fearing the Fugitive Slave Act, they kept heading north and settled in Ontario, Canada, where Elijah was born free, raised and educated.

What was the Fugitive Slave Act? What did it do?

In 1847, McCoy's family returned to the United States and settled in Michigan. At the age of 15, Elijah was sent away for an apprenticeship in mechanical engineering.







## ... to Railroad Riches

In his home-based machine shop, Elijah performed highly skilled work that led to improvements of mechanical systems. In the process, he invented an automatic lubricator for oiling the steam engines of locomotives and ships.

At first, McCoy lacked the capital with which to manufacture his inventions in large numbers himself. So, he typically sold his patent rights to his employers or to investors. In 1920, toward the end of his life, he formed the Elijah McCoy Manufacturing Company to produce lubricators bearing his name.





# Educated in Scotland

When the McCoy family settled in Michigan, they were extremely poor. Nonetheless they saved money for their son to get an education. In 1860, he was sent to a boarding school in Edinburgh, Scotland to study mechanical engineering.



[Elijah McCoy @ University of Edinburgh](#)



# Facing discrimination and finding opportunity

After the Civil War, McCoy returned to North America and settled in Michigan. Despite his education, McCoy faced racial discrimination and was only able to find work as an oilman on the Michigan Central Railroad.



In 1872, McCoy drew on his observations as an oilman to invent an oil cup, which automated the oiling process and allowed trains to lubricate without stopping, which greatly improved how quickly trains could reach their destinations.





# Opportunities on the job

Have you ever had a job?

Have you ever looked around and had ideas for better, more efficient ways to do things at work?



# Mechanical Engineer & Inventor

Elijah McCoy was granted at least 57 patents in his lifetime.

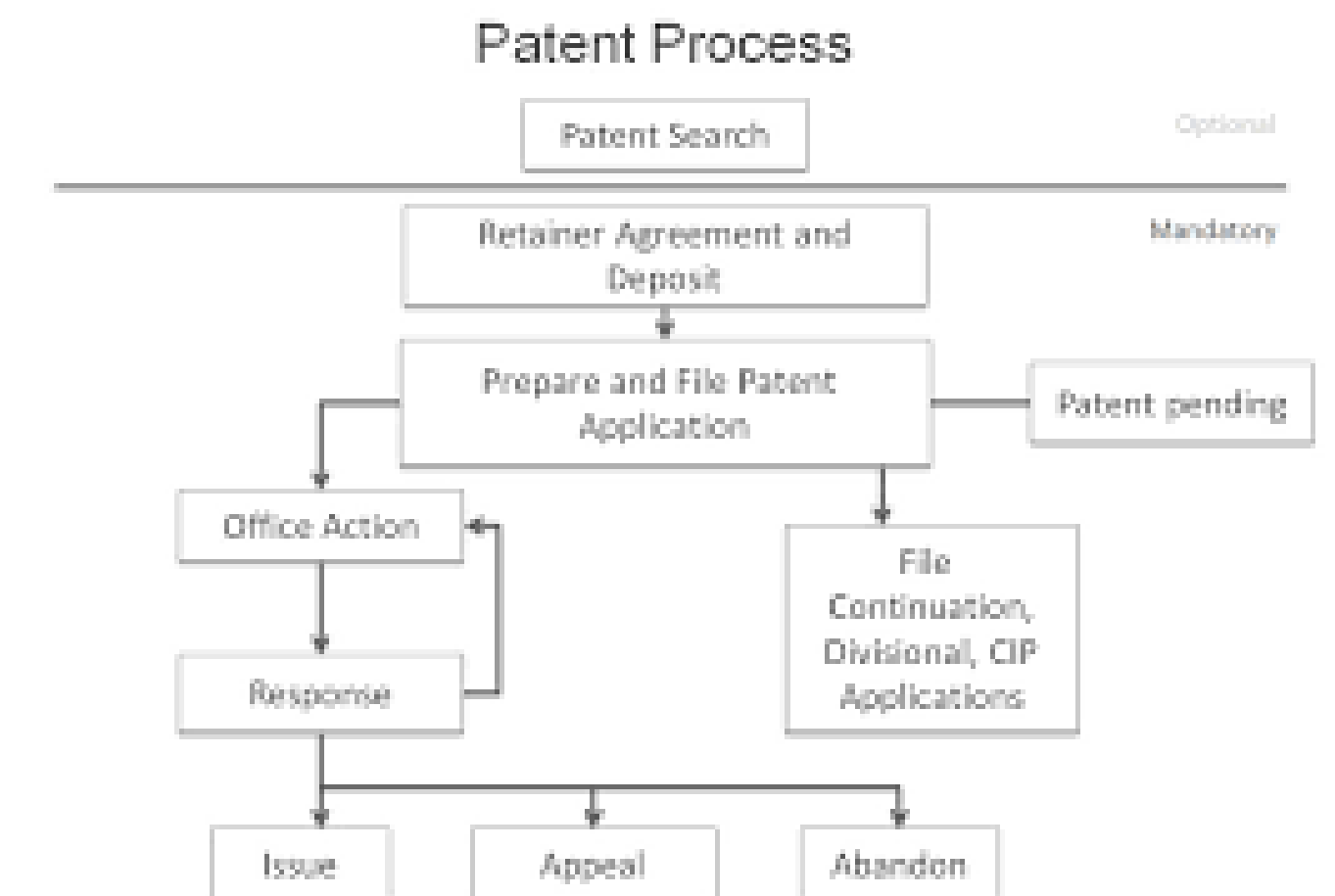
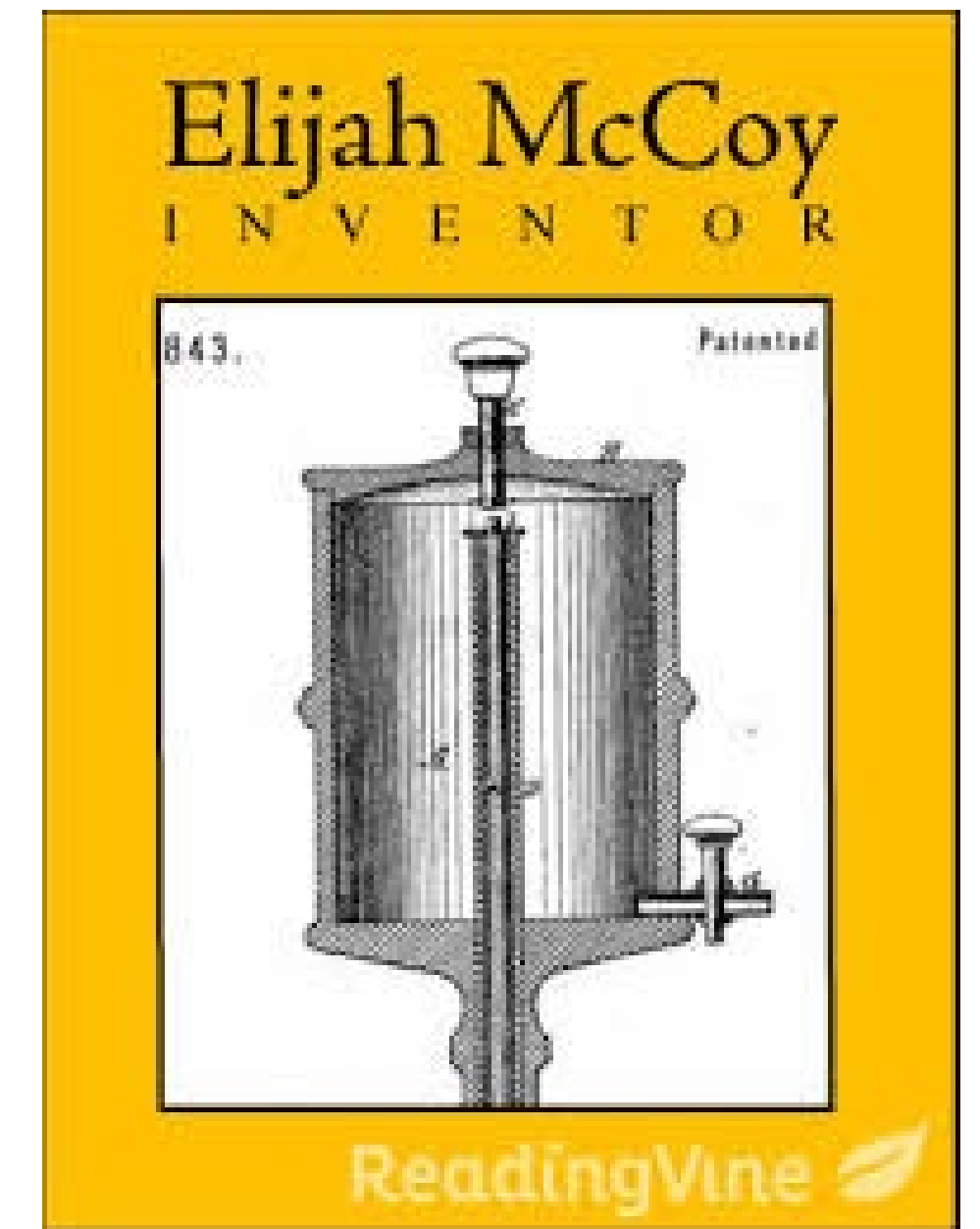
Do you know what a patent is?

How do you get a patent? What is required?

Can you name a patented product?

Are there any patented products in this room right now?

How can you tell?

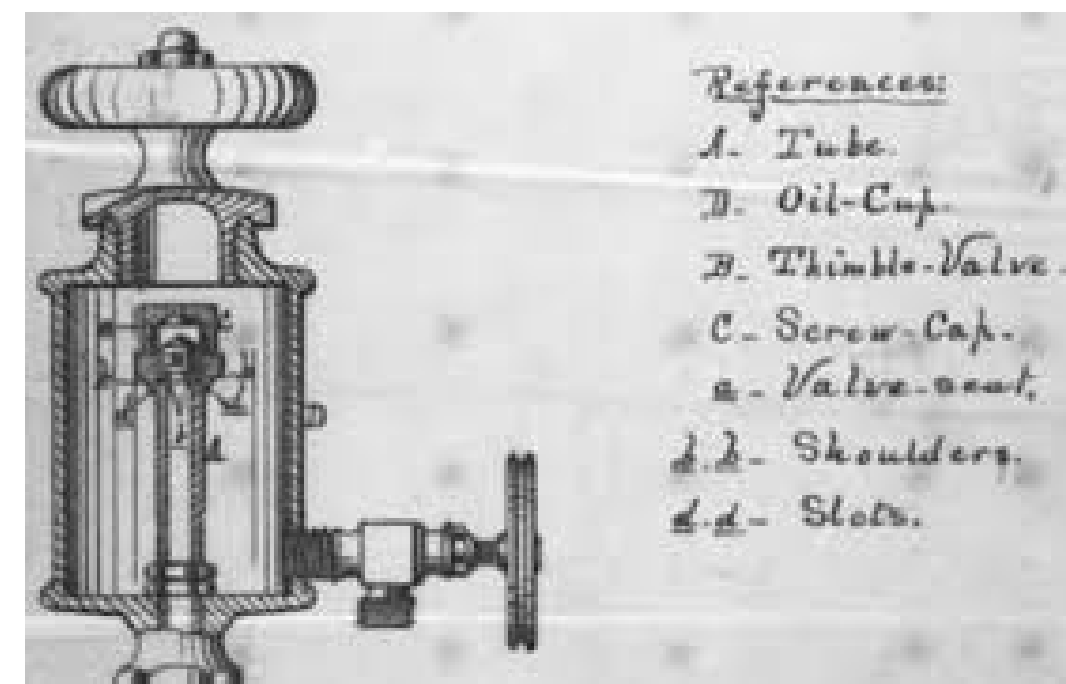




# The Real McCoy

His most famous and influential innovation was patent 129843. It was a cup that fed lubricating oil to machine bearings through a small tube, especially useful for trains.

The invention was popular and widely imitated. According to some later stories, the existence of inferior imitations helped popularize the phrase “the real McCoy” as an expression meaning “genuine and authentic.” While the phrase almost certainly existed much earlier, it became a central part of how McCoy was remembered by later generations.







# New inventions

What kinds of things need to be invented right now?

What kind of education would an inventor need?





After the oil cup success, McCoy established himself in Detroit, Michigan and continued to patent other inventions, including a portable ironing board, a lawn sprinkler, new tread for shoes and tires.

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(71) <b>Inventor:</b> <b>Cory Fugman, San Jose, CA (US); Jason Riedlin, Santa Clara, CA (US); David Ben Burr, Morgan Hill, CA (US); Joel Levin, Cupertino, CA (US)</b>		
(72) <b>Assignee:</b> <b>Apple Inc., Cupertino, CA (US)</b>		
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(57)	<b>ABSTRACT</b>	
Dynamic signage systems are provided for a sales environment. A dynamic signage device (e.g., a tablet computer) is associated with a product, e.g., based on a location of the device and/or the product, and can present information about the product to a customer in an interactive manner. The device can automatically check for updated product information and modify its display based on the updated product information. Management of multiple dynamic signage devices can be coordinated within and across stores, and an interactive floor-map creation system incorporating dynamic signage devices can facilitate changing the associations between products and dynamic signage devices.		





# Booms and new opportunities

When Elijah McCoy was alive, the railroad industry was booming.

What industries are booming today?

What opportunities exist now?

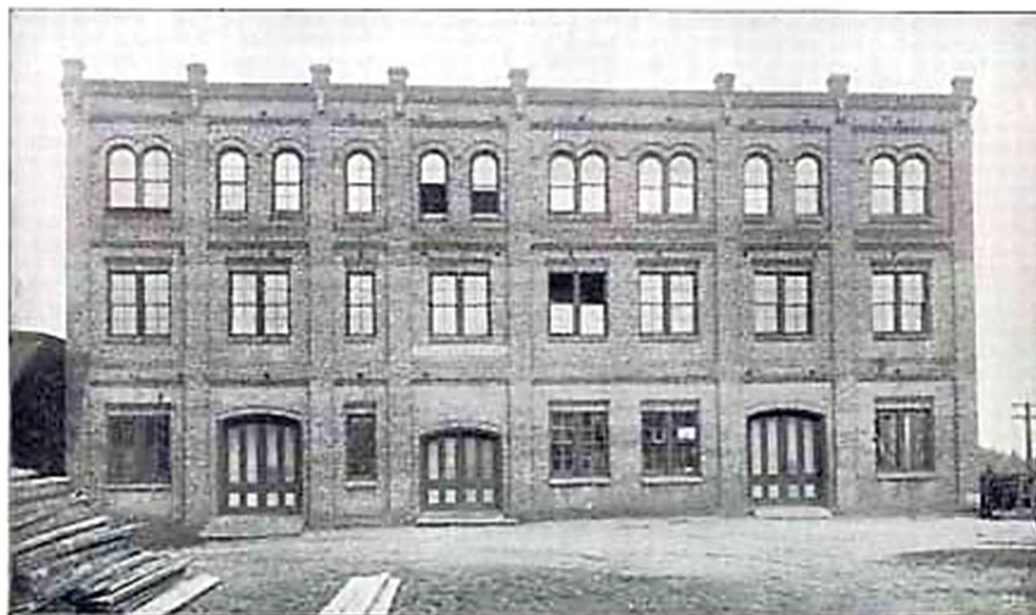




# Celebrated businessman

McCoy founded the Elijah McCoy Manufacturing Company in Detroit in 1920 to produce and market his many inventions, rather than continuing to selling his patents to others. His character and achievements were widely celebrated by his contemporaries, including Tuskegee Institute founder Booker T. Washington.

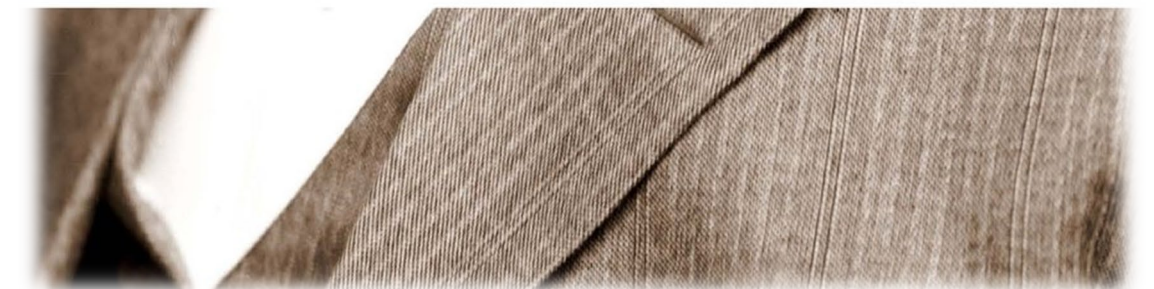
What do you know about the Tuskegee Institute?  
What else is Booker T. Washington known for?



CASSEDY HALL, TUSKEGEE INSTITUTE. ERECTED BY STUDENTS.



**UP FROM  
SLAVERY**  
BOOKER T. WASHINGTON





# Known for Quality

Elijah McCoy's name is known the world over as being synonymous with high quality.

Who are some other famous people who are known for something you admire?

What would you like to be known and remembered for?







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