

GADGETS & GIZMOS

Fun Facts

Susan Hibbard invented the feather duster in 1876, but there was a patent fight between her husband and herself. She won the battle, opening the doors for future women inventors to apply for patents in their own names.

The first “calculating machine,” invented in 1885 by William S. Burroughs, gave wildly different answers depending upon how hard you pulled the handle to make the calculation. Burroughs patented an improved calculator in 1893.

Luther Burbank sold the rights to the “Russet Burbank Potato,” which he invented in 1871, for \$150. He used the money to travel to California where he established his experimental farms. The Burbank Potato is the ancestor of Idaho Russet, the most widely cultivated potato in the world today.

Arnold Beckman of CalTech invented a device to measure the sourness of lemons in 1934. This invention, the pH meter, led to a career of developing accurate and easy-to-use scientific instruments.

Tin cans for food preservation were invented in 1810, but the can opener wasn’t patented until 1858.

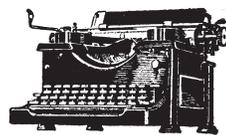
Lillian Gilbreth, the real-life mother in “Cheaper by the Dozen,” was an expert in time management and ergonomics. She invented the step-on trash can, the electric mixer, an electric can opener, the waste water hose for washing machines, and refrigerator shelving.

Actress Hedy Lamarr invented a modern torpedo guidance system.

Typewriters were invented in 1868. The QWERTY keyboard was invented in 1878 to slow down typists and thus keep typewriter keys from jamming together.

Abraham Lincoln patented a “device for buoying vessels over shoals” in 1849. The invention was never marketed, probably because it was so heavy that it made it more likely that boats would run into sand-bars.

Walter Hunt, inventor of the safety pin in 1849, built America’s first sewing machine in 1834. He didn’t patent the machine because he thought it would put hand-sewers out of work.



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San Bernardino County Museum

2024 Orange Tree Lane, Redlands CA 92374
909-307-2669 • www.sbcountymuseum.org

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contact: Jennifer Reynolds, media specialist, 909-307-2669 ext. 278
Michele Nielsen, curator of history, 909-307-2669 ext. 240

GADGETS & GIZMOS, continued

The first useful dishwashing machine was invented in 1886 by Josephine Garic Cochran. Because she entertained often, she needed a machine that could wash dishes faster than her servants could without breakage.

Herman Hollerith invented an apparatus for compiling statistics—a punch card, tabulator, and sorter—in 1884. His system allowed the 1890 population census to be tallied in six months saving more than \$5 million dollars and two year's of time. He founded the Tabulating Machine Company which became IBM in 1924.

Buckminster Fuller invented the geodesic dome in 1954. It is the lightest, strongest, and most cost-effective structure ever devised, and it becomes proportionally lighter and stronger the larger it is. Fuller documented the feasibility of a dome two miles in diameter that would enclose mid-town Manhattan, paying for itself within ten years with the savings from snow-removal costs.

The first successful general digital computer, ENIAC, was completed in 1945. It contained more than 18,000 vacuum tubes (about 2,000 of them had to be replaced each month) and weighted more than 60,000 pounds.

The original use of duct tape was to keep moisture out of ammunition cases during World War II. Because it was waterproof, and because it was made using cotton duck like cloth medical tapes, it was called “duck tape.” After the war, it began being used to connect heating and air conditioning duct work together, changed from Army green to silver to match duct work, and “duck tape: became “duct tape.”

Whitcomb Judson invented the zipper, a “clasp locker,” in 1893 as a one-handed fastener for shoes.

The wire coathanger was invented in 1903 by Albert Parkhouse when he was annoyed that all the coat hooks at work were in use.

Chester Greenwood invented earmuffs in 1873 at age 15 to protect his ears while ice skating. He made a fortune supplying earmuffs to soldiers during World War I.

Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin in 1793 and patented it in 1794. His machine, which separated cotton fiber from seed, brought prosperity to the southern United States but was easily copied, leading Whitney to state that “an invention can be so valuable as to be worthless to the inventor.” His inventions affected the industrial development of the United States because he pioneered the concepts of interchangeable parts and gave birth to the American mass-production concept.

Hippocrates recognized that juice from willow bark killed pain, and by the 19TH century its active ingredient, salicylic acid, was recognized. But aspirin wasn't patented until 1900, when Felix Hoffman, a chemist at Bayer, refined a buffering process and invented acetylsalicylic acid.

The first dry, flaked breakfast cereal, Corn Flakes®, was patented in 1896. It was invented when John H. Kellogg accidentally left bread dough overnight and ended up with flakes instead of loaves. Kellogg, who with his brother Will ran the Battle Creek Sanitarium and promoted health through a vegetarian diet, also invented other food products including peanut butter, granola, and a grain-based coffee substitute. Will Kellogg left the hospital business and founded the Kellogg Toasted Flake Company, today's Kellogg Company.

