

# PATENTS OF INVENTION

AS GENEALOGICAL RESOURCES

by Dawn Rohan

For years there has been a footnote in my information about my maternal great-grandfather: he invented a chemical in the head of the Diamond Match. As the Patent and Trademark Depository Librarian at the Wyoming State Library, I turned to the wealth of information in the U.S. patent collection to learn more.

## Patents as Genealogical Resources

Patents of invention have a long history in this country and are often overlooked as a genealogical resource. The right to protect an invention is guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution, and the first U.S. patent was issued in 1790 to Samuel Hopkins of Philadelphia. Prior to this, colonists were issued patents by their colonies or by the British government.

Patents can be intimidating because they are both legal and scientific documents. There is an assumption that your relative had to

be a Thomas Edison or Alexander Graham Bell to receive a patent. My great-grandfather was a laborer at Diamond Match and later a farmer. Many patents were issued for agricultural implements, ranch tools, and other devices that assisted in the running of the American homestead.

Do not overlook your female ancestors. The first woman in America to have her invention patented was Pennsylvania colonist, Sybilla Masters, in 1715. Unfortunately, due to property laws at that time, the British government issued the patent to her husband, Thomas, at the same time acknowledging his wife as the inventor. The U.S. Patent Office placed no gender requirements on receiving a patent. In 1809, Mary Dixon Kies of Connecticut was the first woman to receive a U.S. patent in her own name.

Each patent has a unique patent number. However, the early numbering system is a little awkward. Patent number 1 is not the first U.S. patent. Patents did not start receiving numbers until 1836. Early unnumbered patents were retroactively given numbers preceded by an X. They are now called "X patents." A devastating fire at the Patent Office in 1836 destroyed all 9,957 patents issued to that date. Only 2,845 copies were recovered from patent owners, so many X patents cannot be obtained. Unfortunately, Mary Kies's patent was among those lost.

All surviving U.S. patents issued from 1790 to Present are available as scanned images on the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) Web site [www.uspto.gov](http://www.uspto.gov) or at a Patent and Trademark Depository Library (PTDL). PTDLs are located in 48 states, plus Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia, with specially trained librarians to help you with your patent search. All U.S. patents issued from 1976 to

present can be searched bibliographically or full-text on the USPTO Web site or at a PTDL.

Since it is difficult to search the pre-1976 patents, some PTDLs have begun creating databases that index patents issued to their residents. Web-searchable databases that have been completed or are under construction include Iowa,

Some patents give  
maiden names or legal  
name changes.

Wyoming, Alabama, early Louisiana, Pittsburgh, and Cincinnati. Links to these databases can be found in the resources section below.

### What Information can be Found in a Patent?

The patent's "Front Page" includes the bibliographic information, such as inventor name and address, patent number, application date, and issue date. Most personally identifiable information is found on this page. For current patents, the Front Page is truly page one. However, older patents start with drawings so the Front Page may be located several pages into the document.

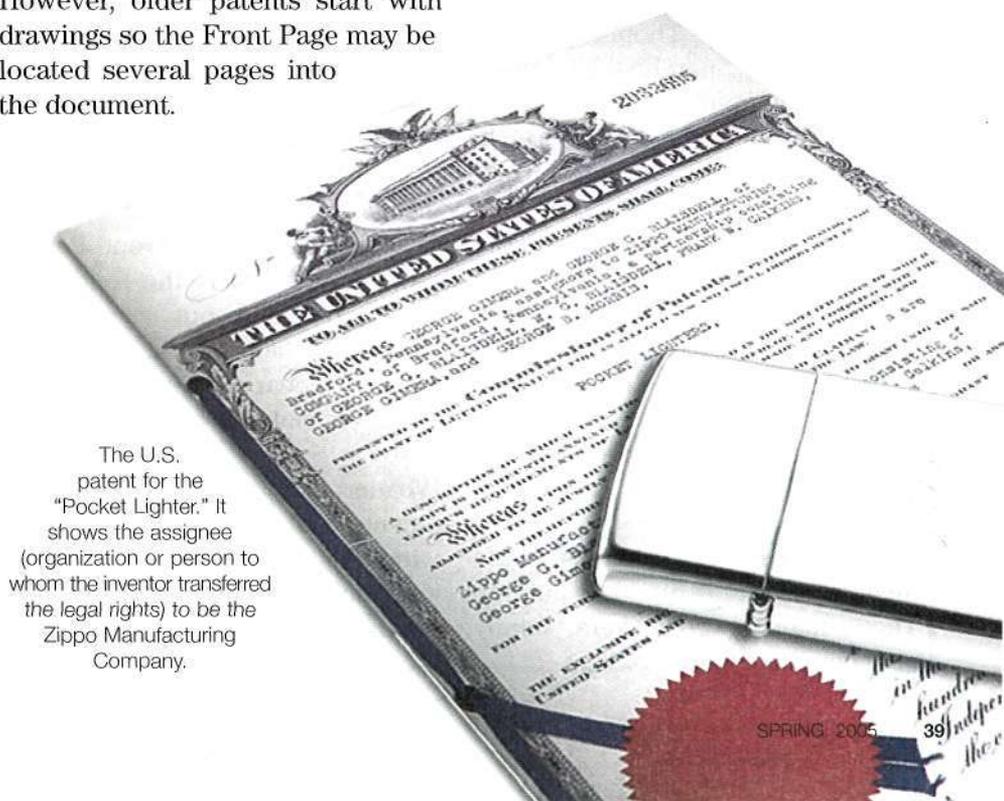
### Basic Biographical Information.

U.S. patents are unique in the world in that the applicant must be the inventor. Therefore, every patent includes an individual's full name and address even if the rights are assigned to a company (see Assignee). More recent patents may give the street address of the inventor.

Some patents give maiden names or legal name changes. For example, patent 1,510,536 was issued to "Grace Ballard, now by marriage Grace Ballard Howell, of Casper, Wyoming." Patent 1,077,687 was issued to "Dorothy Dyrenforth, now by marriage Dorothy D. Auracher, of Oak Park, Illinois."

As legal documents, name changes included are not limited to married names. Patent 1,027,828 was issued to "Emil Elektorowicz (by judicial change of name now Emil De Ryss) of New York, N.Y." Patent 1,209,884 was issued to "Morris Rakowsky, (now by change of name Morris Rockford) of Utica, New York."

**Citizenship.** Many patents issued between the 1880s and the 1920s include citizenship information in



The U.S. patent for the "Pocket Lighter." It shows the assignee (organization or person to whom the inventor transferred the legal rights) to be the Zippo Manufacturing Company.



## U.S. PATENTS BY REGION

the first paragraph of the Front Page. For example, patent 1,267,871 states, "Be it known that I, Mieli R. Jartti, a subject of the Czar of Russia, residing at Glencoe, in the county of Lincoln and State of Wyoming, have invented . . ."

You may also be able to determine when an inventor became a U.S. citizen if they have multiple patents. Joseph Wolny received five patents while living in Wyoming. In patent 1,204,630, filed June 5, 1916, he states that he is a "subject of the Emperor of Austria-Hungary." By the time he files the application that would ultimately become patent 1,339,874 on January 19, 1918, he states that he is "a citizen of the United States."

There are also the occasional clues concerning citizenship. In patent 1,222,595 Charley L. Beeman of Riverton, Wyoming states that he is "a native-born citizen of the United States." In patent, 1,232,713 Karl Gustav Oelsner of Riverton states that he is "a naturalized citizen of the United States."

**Movement.** If an inventor has received multiple patents, you may be able to track his or her movement to other places. Thomas Widdop received six patents in three different Wyoming towns - first Mountain View, then Burntfork, Mountain View again, and Lonetree.

**Assignee.** The assignee is the organization or person to whom the inventor transferred the legal rights to the patent. The assignee is generally - but not always - the inventor's employer. In my great-grandfather's case, it would be the Diamond Match Company.

**Co-inventors.** Are there multiple inventors listed on the patent? These may be coworkers, family members, or friends.

### Alabama Inventors Database

[www.bplonline.org/resources/subjects/gov/inventors.asp](http://www.bplonline.org/resources/subjects/gov/inventors.asp)  
Database of patents created by the Birmingham Public Library

### Iowa Inventions Database

[www.silo.lib.ia.us/app/cgi-bin/patents/](http://www.silo.lib.ia.us/app/cgi-bin/patents/)  
Database of patents created by the Iowa State Library, Coverage: 1843 - 1974

### Wyoming Inventors Database

<http://cowgirl.state.wy.us/inventors/>  
Database of patents created by the Wyoming State Library, Coverage: 1867 - present

### Index to Early Louisiana Patents, 1810 - 1890

<http://adler.lib.muohio.edu/~shocker/LAPAT/index.html>  
Database of patents created by Miami University Libraries

### From Air Brakes to Zinc Furnaces: Pittsburgh and Allegheny City Patentees 1790 - 1879

[www.carnegielib.org/locations/scitech/ptdl/pgh/](http://www.carnegielib.org/locations/scitech/ptdl/pgh/)  
Database of patents created by the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh

**Signatures.** Older patents include the signatures of inventor and the attorney (if there was one). The inventor signature may or may not be their own. Depending on the time period, the attorney could sign for the applicant. Does the handwriting for both signatures look the same?

Some signatures are not reproduced but typed in a font. This can be beneficial if the Front Page is difficult to read or the font is too small to make out a particular spelling. The typed signatures usually appear in much larger and easier to read font on the last page.

**Witnesses.** As legal documents, patents will include the names of witnesses. They may be unrelated individuals or possibly friends and family. In 1916 William F. Cody received patent D49,949. One of the

witnesses on Cody's patent was W. C. Bradford. William Cody Bradford was Buffalo Bill's close nephew.

**Executors.** If the inventor was deceased, the patent will list the executor/-trix or administrator/-trix. Patent 1,480,515 from 1924 was issued to Attilio De Marchis, and states, "Be it known that I, Ersilia Caselli, widow of De Marchis, a subject of the King of Italy, and residing at Rome, Italy (whose post-office address it [sic] 212 Via Cola di Rienzo, Roma, Italy)." Not only does this patent give an address and citizenship information, it identifies the widow (and administratrix) who has a different surname.

Patent 2,320 gives not only the executor's name but a wonderful description of their occupations: "Be it known that I, Philo B. Tyler, chief coiner of the branch mint of the

**Cincinnati Inventors Database**

www.cincinnati.ohio.gov/resources/invent/  
 Database of patents issued to Cincinnati and Hamilton County, Ohio  
 Inventors from 1813 - 1873

**SPECIALIZED DATABASES**

**African-American Inventors Database**

www.detroit.lib.mi.us/glptc/aaid/  
 Database created by the Great Lakes Patent and Trademark Center at  
 the Detroit Public Library

**Confederate Patent Office**

www.myoutbox.net/popchapx.htm  
 List of Patents issued by the Confederate Patent Office, 1861 - 1864

**Women Inventors Index, 1790 - 1895**

http://staff.lib.muohio.edu/~shocker/FemInv/  
 Database created by the Miami University Libraries

United States at New Orleans, in the state of Louisiana, am the executor of Rufus Tyler, deceased, who was my predecessor in the office of chief coiner of the mint aforesaid."

**Misspellings**

As with many genealogical documents, misspellings are an issue. Search for variations of personal and place names. Certificates of Correction are often attached as the last page to correct minor errors like misspellings. However, since there is a fee for the certificate, they are not always corrected.

Left: U.S. patent diagrams for the paint brush attachments and improvements, and the patent documentation.

Oct. 7, 1924. 1,510,

G. BALLARD  
 PAINTBRUSH ATTACHMENT  
 Filed July 26, 1923

*Grace Ballard*  
*Lawyer*

1,510,536

Patented Oct. 7, 1924.

**UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE.**

GRACE BALLARD, NOW BY MARRIAGE GRACE BALLARD HOWELL, OF CASPER, WYOMING.

PAINTBRUSH ATTACHMENT.

Application filed July 26, 1923. Serial No. 653,842.

*To all whom it may concern:*

Be it known that I, GRACE BALLARD, a citizen of the United States, and a resident of Casper, in the county of Natrona and the State of Wyoming, have invented certain new and useful Improvements in Paintbrush Attachments, of which the following is a specification.

This invention relates to a rubber cup attached to a paint brush stock and designed to act as a drip cup, receiving any paint that may flow down on the stock from the bristles during overhead work, and includes also a swabbing device by means of which the paint collecting in said cup may be returned to the brush portion.

The invention consists in the novel features of construction hereinafter described, pointed out in the claims and shown in the accompanying drawing, in which—

Figure 1 is a side elevation of a brush, provided with my attachment.

Figure 2 is an edge elevation of a brush, the cup portion of the attachment being in section.

Figure 3 is a perspective view of the swabbing device detached.

Figure 4 is a side elevation of a brush, showing a modified form of attachment in position to be slipped in place on the brush.

In the drawing A designates the usual paint brush which may be of any desired size. A cup 1 of elastic rubber, or other suitable material surrounds the brush at the point of juncture of the bristles and stock, and is held open at the forward end by a hard rubber rim 2. At the rear or bottom end the cup is secured to the stock by tacks or in any other suitable manner.

The cleaning or swabbing device comprises a handle 4 which lies parallel to the brush handle, and forks 5 which lie on opposite sides of the brush handle and are connected to the handle 4 by angled portions 5', all these parts of the swabber being formed of wire. The forks project into the rubber cup, on opposite sides of the stock and carry rubber swabbers 6 arranged at right angles to the forks and shaped to fit within the cup and between the sides of the cup and the brush. They also retain the greater portion of the paint dripping into the brush.

To clean the cup the handle 4 is pushed forwardly along the brush handle forcing the swabbers to the open forward end of the cup and ejecting the paint collected by the cup.

If it is desired to form the cup removable from the brush so that it can be used with different brushes, of the same size I employ a cup 7 of elastic rubber which is open at the rear end, as shown at 8, in Figure 4. This cup is slipped over the brush handle and onto the stock and is held in place by friction. It is provided with the same swabbing device as in the preferred form.

The advantages of the device will be obvious from the above description and drawing.

What I claim is:—

1. The combination with a brush, a rubber cup adapted to fit the brush stock, a rim sufficiently rigid to hold the cup open, swabbers arranged to work in the cup on opposite sides of the stock, and means extending along and substantially parallel to the brush handle for actuating the swabbers.
2. An attachment for paint brushes comprising an elastic, normally open cup adapted to engage the stock of the brush at the base of the cup, swabbers arranged to work in the cup on opposite sides of the brush stock, a swabber handle lying parallel to the brush handle, and fork members connecting the swabbers to said swabber handle.

In testimony whereof I affix my signature.

GRACE BALLARD.

On July 4, 1836 Congress passed a bill that significantly changed the patent system in the United States, establishing a systematic examination of patent applications that became the model for other nations.

Earlier patents were known only by their Name and Date, but now a numbering system was introduced. Patents issued between 1790 and July 4, 1836 were eventually assigned unique numbers preceded by an "X".

Six months later on December 15, 1836, a fire destroyed every patent, model, and record in the Patent Office. Congress immediately requested that inventors return their copies of the original patents to reconstruct the lost information. Fewer than 3,000 of the 10,000 patents were recovered.

As time goes on, these patents may be lost forever. Or they just may be waiting to be discovered. In early 2004, two patent attorneys found 14 X patents in the Dartmouth College special collections library (*New York Times*, August 9, 2004). These patents were previously believed lost and the library was unaware that the Patent Office was looking for them.

Should you find a patent at an antique store or flea market, do not assume that the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office is aware of its existence. Check the USPTO Web site or with a Patent and Trademark Depository Library. You may have found a unique item lost to history.

## File Wrappers

If you would like more information than what is provided in the patent itself, you can purchase a copy of the file wrapper. A file wrapper is

the folder the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office maintains that includes all the application papers, such as, correspondence between the applicant (or their attorney)

Address: <http://www.uspto.gov/>

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## UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE.

DOROTHY DYRENFORTH, (NOW BY MARRIAGE DOROTHY D. AURACHER,) OF OAK PARK, ILLINOIS.

SWIMMING-S

1,077,687.

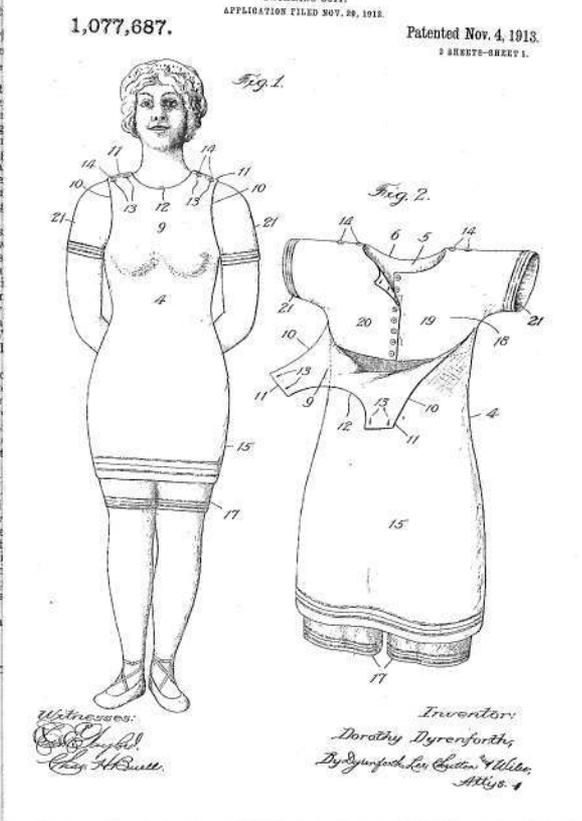
Specification of Letter Application filed November 29, 1913

D. DYRENFORTH (NOW BY MARRIAGE D. D. AURACHER), SWIMMING SUIT, APPLICATION FILED NOV. 29, 1913.

1,077,687.

Patented Nov. 4, 1918.  
2 SHEETS-SHEET 1.

To all whom it may concern:  
Be it known that I, DOROTHY DYRENFORTH, a citizen of the United States, residing at Oak Park, in the county of Cook and State of Illinois, have invented a new and useful Improvement in Swimming-Suits, of which the following is a specification.  
My invention relates to an improvement in swimming-suits for women's wear; and my primary object is to provide as a part of such a suit a bust-supporter, or "bras-sière," by a construction of the suit whereby it may be made, preferably by weaving or knitting, with the jacket-portion, the bust-supporter with or without sleeves, the trunks and the skirt, all in one piece.  
Referring to the accompanying drawings, Figure 1 shows my improved swimming-suit on a woman's form; Fig. 2 is a perspective view of the garment with the bib-portion of the jacket let down to display the bust-supporter covered by it, and Fig. 3 shows the garment by a broken view in front elevation.  
The jacket 4 is formed, to fit the figure of the wearer, of a back 5 having a rear collar-portion 6. The bib 9, which forms the upper part of the jacket-front, has its edges concave, as represented at 10 in Fig. 2, to fit about the front parts of the wearer's arms near the shoulders and terminate in flaps 11, at the ends of a concave front collar-section 12, to encircle with the rear collar-section 6 the neck of the wearer when the bib 9 is raised, in which position it may be fastened by button-holes 13 in its flaps to buttons 14 on the tops of the wearer's shoulders.  
The skirt 15 is formed as a continuation of the jacket, from the hip-line, at 16, of which extend the trunks 17.  
The salient feature of my improvement is the bust-supporter 18 as an integral part of the one-piece garment. It consists of two chest-sections 19 and 20, buttoning at their meeting-edges and extending thereto, respectively, from between the ends of the collar-section 6 and below the base or folding corners of the bib 10, thus from the opposite sides of the jacket; and the sleeves 21 of the garment, if provided at all, are formed



The U.S. patent and diagrams for swimming suit improvements.

and the patent examiner. These files generally do not discuss the process of invention or whether the invention was commercially successful. The cost to receive a copy of a file wrapper is quite expensive—around \$200. These documents are also kept in warehouses and archival facilities so receiving a copy can take time.

## My Great-Grandfather and the Diamond Match

A search of U.S. patent records has found no mention of my great-grandfather and since the Diamond Match Company no longer maintains these personnel records, I may have to discard it as a family myth. Despite my lack of success, do not overlook U.S. patents as a rich source of genealogical information.

Thank you to Dave Morrison, Janet Williams, Mande Putnam, and

Chris Kitchens for their comments on this article. ■

## Resources for Researching Historical U.S. Patents

U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. Patent and Trademark Depository Library Program. Name and Date Patents: July 31, 1790 - July 2, 1836. Washington, DC: PTDL, 1999. Index to the X patents in chronological order

Annual Report of the Commissioner of Patents. Washington, DC: GPO, 1837 - 1920. Indexed by patentee, assignee, and invention

U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. Index of Patents issued from the United States Patent and Trademark Office, 3 vols. Washington, DC: GPO, 1920 to present (annual, print + CD). Indexed by patentee, assignee, and invention

U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. Official Gazette of the United States Patent and Trademark Office: Patents. Washington, DC: GPO, 1872 to present (weekly, print + CD). Indexed by patentee, assignee, and invention

Subject-Matter Index of Patents for Inventions Issued by the United States Patent Office from 1790 to 1873, inclusive, 3 vols. 1874. Reprint, North Stratford, NH: Ayers Co. Publishers, 2000. Indexed by subject of invention, not patentee

U.S. Patent and Trademark Office Patent Database. [www.uspto.gov](http://www.uspto.gov)

Scanned patent images 1790 - Present; pre-1976 patents searchable only by patent number or classification

**Dawn Rohan** is the Intellectual Property Librarian at the Wyoming State Library in Cheyenne. She manages the Patent and Trademark Depository Library, which is a library designated by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office to disseminate patent and trademark information and to support the diverse intellectual property needs of the public.



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