

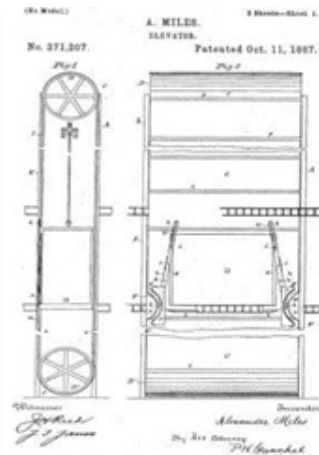
African American Inventors: Protecting Our Intellect

BY ANDRÉA SIMMONS, ESQ.

Intellectual property rights like patents and other forms serve a primary goal to encourage the innovation of products, inventions, new works, improvements and matter compositions to benefit all of society.¹ **Often enslaved African Americans lacked the rights to their own intellect.** Labeled as “non-citizens,” African Americans with the capacity to explicate intellect were faced with the inability to obtain rights for protecting their inventions. Thus, history demonstrates a lack of true ownership of intellectual property rights. However, many free African Americans (citizens) employed the benefits of protecting their intellectual developments through patents. Inventors like Alexander Miles, Elijah McCoy and Sarah Boone are a few named as patent owners with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO).

Alexander Miles

Alexander Miles was born in Duluth, Minnesota, in May 1838.² According to the USPTO, Miles filed an application for a patent of automatic elevator doors. The patent application filed by Miles’ attorney states the following, “I, ALEXANDER MILES, a citizen of the United States, residing at Duluth, in the county of St. Louis and State of Minnesota, have invented certain new and useful Improvements in Elevators, of which the following is a specification. My invention relates to mechanisms for closing the openings to the shafts of passenger and freight elevators and for operation the doors of the elevator-cages.”³

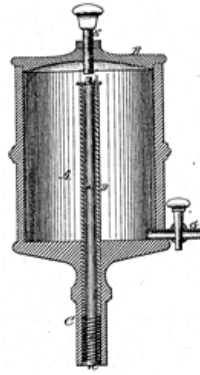


Alexander Miles, Drawing: N. Peters, Photo-Lithographer, Washington D.C.

Miles’ improvement to the elevator provided a lifetime change to the functionality of elevators that are still used today. By taking advantage of protecting his intellect, Miles made history and earned his place in the National Inventors Hall of Fame in 2007.⁴

Elijah McCoy

Elijah McCoy was born May 2, 1844, in Canada free from slavery.⁵ McCoy trained in Scotland as an engineer and later returned to the U.S. where he was unable to find work as an engineer.⁶ McCoy received nearly 60 patents for his inventions.⁷ One of the inventions McCoy is best known for is his lubrication system that allowed lubrication of trains' components while a train was still in motion (instead of having to shut the engine down).



Elijah McCoy Drawing: AM. Photo-Lithographic Co. N.Y. (Osborne's Process)

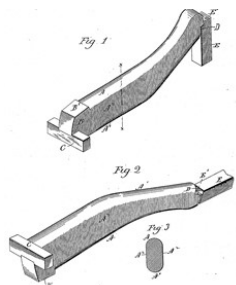
McCoy is responsible for the developed design of the ironing board as well as the lawn sprinkler.⁸ McCoy lacked the financial resources to manufacture his lubricators, therefore he employed licensing of his patent rights to his employers or investors.⁹ McCoy utilized his intellect through continuous development and refining of his inventions. As a result of McCoy's improvements to his inventions, he became widely recognized.¹⁰ Competitors created cheaper alternatives to McCoy's invention, which created the coined phrase "the real McCoy," referencing heavy equipment customers' desire for McCoy's original invention.¹¹ In 2001, McCoy was inducted into the National Inventors Hall of Fame.¹²

African Americans possessed the intellect to develop, invent and advance many of the products and resources available today. As a result of the protections put in place through patents and other intellectual property rights, recognition can be given to celebrate the intellect of African American inventors.

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2. Madam C.J. Walker and 9 Black Inventors Who Changed Your Life, by Brad Witter The Biography.com, A&E Television Networks, www.biography.com/
3. U.S. Patent Office, patent no. 371,207, dated October 11, 1867
4. Alexander Miles: Improved Method for Opening and Closing Elevators, National Inventors Hall of Fame, www.invent.org
5. Elijah McCoy Biography, The Biography.com, A&E Television Networks, www.biography.com/, April 2, 2014
6. Id.
7. Elijah J. McCoy: "The real McCoy", by Office of Public Affairs, U.S. Department of Transportation, transportation.gov, February 5, 2018
8. Id.
9. Id.
10. Elijah McCoy Automatic Engine Lubricator, National Inventors Hall of Fame, www.invent.org
11. Id.
12. Id.
13. Sarah Boone Biography, The Biography.com, A&E Television Networks, www.biography.com/, April 2, 2014
14. Id.
15. Id.
16. U.S. Patent Office, patent no. 473,563, dated April 26, 1892

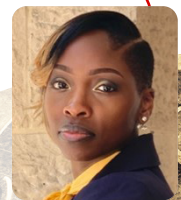
Sarah Boone

Sarah Boone (nee Marshall) was born in 1832 in North Carolina.¹³ Although Boone's parents were enslaved, her freedom likely came when she married a free man by the name of James Boone.¹⁴ Boone was a dressmaker and developed an improvement to the ironing board for ironing sleeves and the body of women's garments.¹⁵ Boone was awarded her patent on April 26, 1892.¹⁶



Sarah Boone Drawing: The Norris Peters Co., Photo-Litho., Washington, D.C.

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February 2021 Online Feature Nevada Lawyer PRES EXTRA FOR COP-PEGA C GORGINO'S OS CASPERIE CANDA-GALLINE DORSMAN-RENET DO PIS GEMINA HEDVA INIUMI SINTA TAVIA OCTAVI TAVIA BELLATRIX PESIC ANTONIO NOLA PESORIONO MENT VMPCETI TEREVS BELDANI VEI MERCETI CANDA-CETI PRES EXTRA FOR