

# African American Inventors: Elijah McCoy

by R.V. Staff Writer A.A.

Elijah J. McCoy was born in Canada in 1844. His parents had been slaves in Kentucky, but they escaped. The anti-slavery volunteers of the Underground Railroad helped them get to Canada. After the Civil War was over in 1865, the family returned to the U.S. and lived in Michigan.

As a teenager Elijah went to Scotland to study. He became a mechanical engineer. When the family moved to Michigan, he could not find work as a mechanical engineer, so he worked for the railroad. During this time, he designed a device for oiling engines on trains and ships. In 1872, he received a patent for his device. It was very important for the transportation industry, as engines had to be oiled to stay running.

Elijah McCoy continued to develop new inventions. Most of his inventions involved the oiling of machines. However some were quite different. He also invented a lawn sprinkler and a folding ironing board. By the time he died in 1929 in Michigan, he had received 57 patents on his inventions.

Many people consider Elijah McCoy an important inventor. He has been honored for his contributions. There are historical markers at his home and workshop. He was also named to the National Inventors Hall of Fame in 2001.

**Questions**

1. Where was Elijah McCoy born?
2. Who helped Elijah McCoy's parents escape to freedom?
3. When did Elijah McCoy receive his first patent?
4. How many patents did Elijah McCoy receive?
5. Name something Elijah McCoy invented.