

## Community

### Museum Piece

By Robb Wilson, Curator  
Columbia County Historical Society Museum

Have you ever used a mouse trap? Surely, with over two thousand different patents and many homemade versions out there, you have. Maybe you even designed one and are one of those many patent holders. If you go to any store, though, I don't think you'll find more than three types of this trap on the shelf for sale.

Wherever you are at this moment, stop reading this article, glance around and take note of the manufactured goods around you. No matter where you are, something designed or invented by someone to make your life easier or more comfortable will be near.

Whatever you look at probably has a patent on it, or one pending. Someone might have even made a lot of money for their idea, and some might even have spent a lot of money on an idea that hasn't come to market yet.

Today we are close to the six-million mark in numbers given to patents. But are there six million different products out there to use? Take the mouse trap, for instance. Probably two dozen of the 2,000 types are actually being manufactured. Why? Most are probably only slightly different from another and, I would bet, most are either not efficient or "plain don't work"! A product doesn't have to work efficiently to gain a patent.

In 1790 the first patent was issued (I believe to Ben Franklin) and a hundred years later the chief patent superintendent, Charles Duell, wanted to close the U.S. Patent Office because, "everything that can be invented has been." His tenure came late in a century of discovery. There must have been a slowing-down of technology to warrant such a statement from him. In the 1930s many minds became inspired and people came up with thousands of ideas and inventions that would better their fellow man.

Backbreaking agriculture

was the main occupation in the world at that time and many patents were issued that dealt with the growing and harvesting of food. Manufacturing was very important and development in manufacturing techniques brought about great inventions for raising and supplying food products. The steam engine was a major development. Factories, locomotives and equipment powered by this great steam energy greatly changed the landscape of our nation and the world.

When crude oil was discovered, petroleum products and their varied uses—along with the many inventions that used them—became increasingly important.

Electricity was harnessed and put to use, creating many more inventions to make life more comfortable.

With developments in the 20th century, life became easier and more minds went to work doing more developing. Many fortunes were made and profits could be great with earnings from an idea that "made it". But, of the nearly six million patents, how many actually went to work for us, and how many are obsolete now?

How many of you have invented something—only to discover that it already had a patent issued 80 or 90 years ago? It is truly amazing, the number of things that are "newly" invented that were patented many years ago. It is like re-inventing the wheel. Many ideas that were tried years ago might make it in today's market but are deemed old-fashioned, so the consumer goes without that little gadget that would really be useful. And how many so-called "useful" gadgets are sitting on shelves in our homes? And how many good ideas and inventions are sitting on shelves in someone's shop, studio or mind, waiting to come forth?

In Oregon, many inventions and patents have been issued over the years. It has been said that with all of our rain and wet weather, great minds stay indoors and think things up! Ore-

gon today is ranked eighth of our 50 states on the list of patents issued. Most of these patents are credited to the electronics industries and a certain shoe company.

Many individuals though, right here in our town, have credit for patents issued to their inventions. One fellow designed some logging equipment 30 years ago and had a manufacturer build prototypes of a backsaving device—only to have a more modern technology make his invention obsolete. Just like in the electronics business, when something is developed and, by the time it is manufactured and marketed, it is basically obsolete. So there is always room for more ideas!

Quite a handful of inventors, engineers and tinkerers out there have had patents issued to them. Many of these inventions are used daily, some by men in the woods, others by housewives in their homes. Most of us don't know where they came from or how they are used or have changed our lives. Some are simple devices and some are very technical. No matter what it is, though, from something as simple as the zipper on your clothing or the parts in your computer, someone, somewhere, thought it up!

### Advocates needed for the elderly

Volunteers interested in investigation, advocacy and the elderly are needed to serve as ombudsmen for residents of nursing homes, residential care facilities, assisted living facilities and adult foster care homes.

The Office of the Long Term Care Ombudsman provides training on the aging process, communication, problem-solving, investigation and other ombudsman skills. The next training will begin on January 22 in Portland.

Certified Ombudsmen identify and investigate complaints of the residents and then work with the facilities to make changes. "More than half of long term care residents do not receive regular visitors," said **Members needed for Agency on Aging**

The Columbia County Area Agency on Aging Advisory Council is seeking volunteers to fill Council vacancies. Responsibilities include advising the Columbia County Board of Commissioners on needed services for Seniors, advocating on behalf of Senior Citizens.

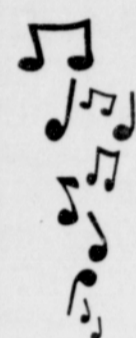
The Advisory Council meets at the courthouse on the first Monday of each month, 10:30 a.m.-12:00 noon. All interested persons, regardless of age, are urged to apply.

For an application, call Darlene Smith at 397-3511.

Kathy Walter, Volunteer Recruitment Supervisor. "By serving as the residents' voice, ombudsmen ensure that the residents receive good care, that their rights are protected and that they enjoy a good quality life." There is a strong need for committed, caring volunteers willing to speak out on behalf of the residents.

For information about the program or to learn how to get involved contact Kathy Walter at 1-800-522-2602.

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