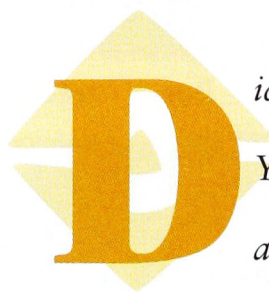


HE'S THE

# REAL McCOY

by KAREN KULINSKI



*Did you ever hear the expression "It's the real McCoy!"*

*You might be interested to learn that the "real" McCoy was an African American inventor named Elijah McCoy.*



**Elijah McCoy**

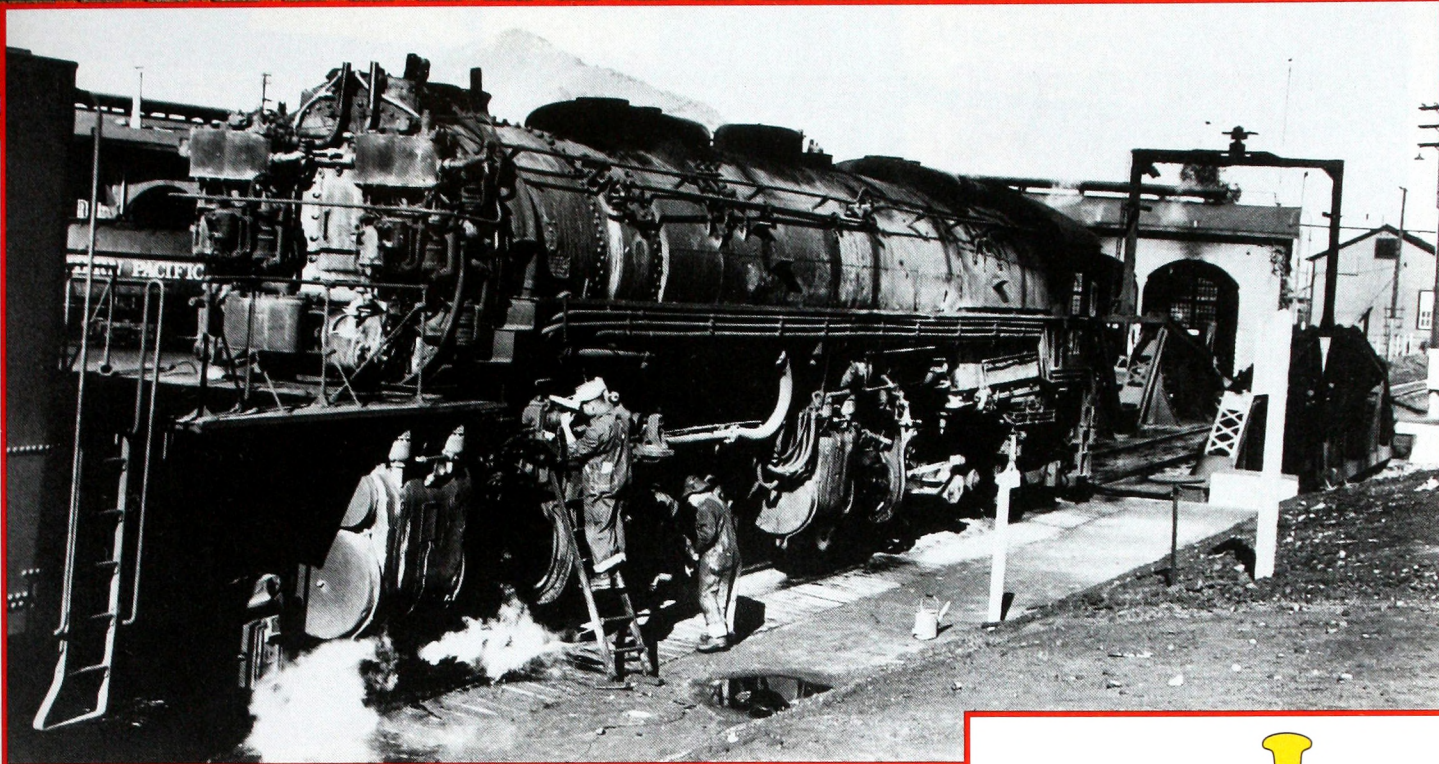
**A station stop provided no break in the work schedule. Rather, it was a good time to oil, clean, and check all moving parts (opposite, top).**

McCoy was born in 1843 in Colchester, Ontario, Canada. His parents, George and Emilia, were former slaves who had escaped via the Underground Railroad. Even as a child, McCoy was fascinated by the mechanical devices used on his family's farm. To figure out how they worked, he often took them apart and reassembled them. At age 15, McCoy was sent to Scotland to study mechanical engineering. Seven years later, he returned home "a master mechanic and engineer."

Since no one would hire him as an engineer because of his race, he finally accepted a position in

1866 with the Michigan Central Railroad. The exact details of his position are uncertain. What is certain is that he recognized the problems involved in keeping a train's engine well oiled.

When a train stopped, all the engine's moving parts had to be oiled, and trains had to stop frequently for oiling or the engine would overheat and catch fire. These stops were time-consuming and dangerous, since moving trains often ran into trains that had stopped for oiling. McCoy designed a lubricating cup that automatically oiled the engine while the train was moving. In 1872, he was granted a patent for this invention, the



McCoy graphite lubricator.

At first, McCoy's invention was belittled because an African American had created it. The Michigan Central did, however, adopt his lubricator and soon its trains were running faster and more safely. Before long, other railroads began using McCoy's invention. In fact, it worked so well that steamship lines, mills, factories, and mining companies adapted it for use in their steam equipment as well.

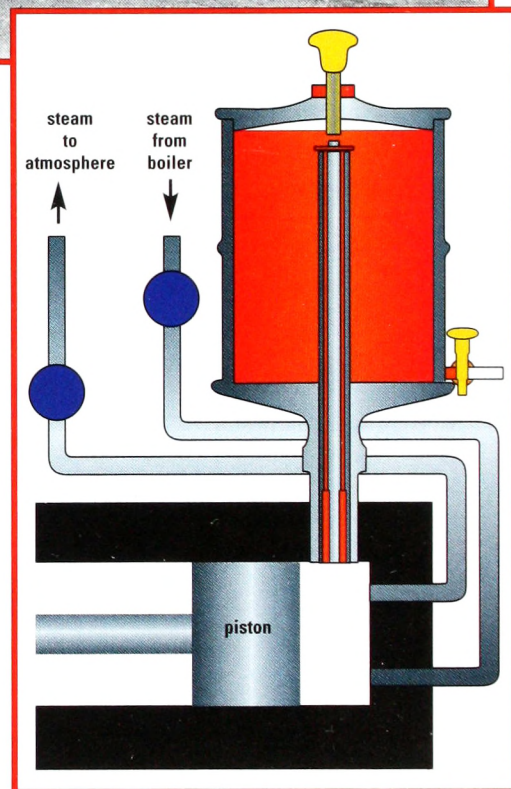
McCoy continually improved his lubricator and started a company to create other inventions. In his lifetime, McCoy was granted more than 50 patents, including one for a lawn sprinkling system and another for a folding ironing board. He received

his last patent at age 80 for a vehicular wheel tire.

Other inventors tried to sell their lubricators, but none worked as well as McCoy's. Soon, companies buying steam equipment demanded that it be equipped with "the real McCoy." To this day, when the best is needed, people still ask for "the real McCoy." 🚂

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**Karen Kulinski** is curator of the Griffith Historical Park, a railroad museum in northwest Indiana that includes a World War II Pullman troop sleeper.



**McCoy's oil cup (oil shown here in red) lubricated the train's parts while the train was moving.**