

Prolific Innovator Hails From Hadley Township

Some of the most well-known 20th century inventors include the likes of Nikola Tesla, George Westinghouse and Henry Ford, but one name that is rarely brought up is Lloyd Copeman, despite the fact that he held more patents than any of these historical figures.

Born in the small town of Farmers Creek, located in Hadley Township, Michigan, Lloyd Groff Copeman entered the world on December 29, just a few months after the Great Thumb Fire of 1881. As a boy, he was educated in a one-room schoolhouse in Farmers Creek before attending Lapeer Senior High School. Being intellectually gifted at a young age, traditional school disinterested Lloyd, which often resulted in him getting into mischief. Before he was even a teenager, he began creating products, some to make life easier, while others were used for entertainment. Although it is not known exactly which item could be specified as his first invention, he created an instrument that automatically turned his father's grindstone when he was just 10 years old, eliminating his responsibility of turning it by hand – another early invention was a paddle that would automatically smack an unsuspecting person while using the bathroom. After he finished his secondary schooling, Copeman furthered his education at Michigan Agricultural College, which eventually became Michigan State University, studying mechanical engineering, although it doesn't appear he ever earned a degree. Interestingly, later in life, MSU offered him an honorary degree that he refused and said, "When the degree would have done me some good, you wouldn't give it to me. Now I have little desire to accept it."

Following his stint at MSU, Copeman went on to work for numerous companies over the next few years starting at Baldwin Locomotive Works apprenticing as a machinist. It was around this time in 1901, when Lloyd received his first patent, which was a medical device used to disinfect wounds. From there he went on to work for Philadelphia Edison Electrical Company, before leaving for Washington Power Company of Spokane – while working for the Washington company, Copeman married his high school sweetheart, Hazel Berger, in September of 1904. He continued to jump around from job to job in multiple states, before settling again in his home state of Michigan. Once back, he was employed by Detroit Edison Company and then Consumer's Power Company. In 1909, Copeman received one of his most influential patents to date, which was a thermostat he made for a power company he was working for at the time that sent out a warning when a transformer was about to burn out.

Due to the automotive boom in Michigan during the early 1900s, Copeman began focusing on improving the already existing items on vehicles. Soon he came up with a greasing application known as the Copeman Lubricating System, which greased the car parts in a much cleaner and easier fashion – some time later this was purchased by Alemite Company for \$178,000 in 1920. Many of Copeman's ideas seemed to stem from conversations with friends, of whom many were trailblazers in their respected fields – since Lloyd befriended men such as Henry Ford, the Dodge brothers, J.D. Dort and the Fishers, it is widely believed the idea for his lubricating system came from their conversations. Shortly after the turn of the century, Copeman began producing a cooking appliance that is still in use today. By 1912, Lloyd created the Copeman Electric Stove Company based in Flint's first brick building, which was marketed as a fireless cooker. As a testament to how much faith people had in the innovative genius, 22 stockholders, led by J.D. Dort, invested a total of \$500,000 into the enterprise. Unfortunately, the invention was a little ahead of its time because a majority of the houses were not completely electrified and the threat of a fire made many people apprehensive.

Under the same company name, Lloyd soon began working on another kitchen appliance, but instead of coming up with the idea himself, it is said that it was actually his wife who thought of it. After seeing a toaster in a window of a store that required the bread to be turned over manually to toast both sides of the bread, she told her husband he could certainly make one that turned the bread automatically. He created a prototype and in 1914 a patent was issued in Hazel Copeman's name, which forced anyone making a similar appliance to pay royalties to the couple. In the handful of years he ran the stove company, the sales just never became what he had hoped. He was approached by the president of Westinghouse during a marketing event at a Philadelphia convention. Since electric stoves were such a foreign item at a time



It Turns the Toast

when people only used gas stoves, it would take a household name like Westinghouse to sell people on the idea – a short time later Westinghouse purchased the Copeman Electric Stove Company and continued producing the stove and toaster.

With plenty of time on his hands now that he wasn't running his stove company, he established Copeman Laboratory in Flint with the help of E.W. Atwood, where he continued to work on inventions. While working at the lab, Lloyd made a great deal of breakthroughs, many of which involved the electric refrigerator. It was during this time that Copeman came up with his most profitable product while collecting maple syrup during the winter. After noticing how the ice easily fell off his rubber boots, it gave him the idea to use the material



Lloyd and his father John (contributed by lloydcopeman.com)

an attempt to inject chickens with a fluid to make them taste like beef. He also invested a great deal of money in 1935, in an attempt to drill for natural gas. He purchased large tracts of land around Lapeer County along with other associates, spending \$60,000 to make the wells a reality, believing the Lapeer area was filled with natural gas. Unfortunately, they only found enough gas



Drilling for natural gas in Lapeer County

to flow for a few seconds before turning into water, but half a century later it is now proven that Copeman's belief of the gas-rich area was true – the group of men wasn't able to find the natural gas because of their equipment restrictions at the time, but recently it has been discovered all over the state. Lloyd continued to work at Copeman Laboratory until 1936, when he began using the basement of his Farmers Creek home for his lab to work on inventions due to financial restrictions. Despite the fact that for some time during the first half of the 1900s, Lloyd was part of the elite group of millionaires, his financial situation didn't remain that way. Before long, he was forced to sell his massive house near Flint and live off Social Security – his home included a 100,000-gallon, in-ground pool built in 1929, making it one of the first pools built in the state.

To make matters worse for Copeman, his wife became ill, suffering from seasonal asthma. Since air conditioning wasn't available at the time, Lloyd set his sights on finding a way to make her more comfortable, since the heat made her condition worse. The first design consisted of pipes he ran in the walls throughout the entire room that constantly had cold water pumped through them from the basement, helping to cool the room. His next idea seemed strange to people in the neighborhood, but it actually worked very well – he installed four lawn sprinklers on his roof, and when the water flowed over the shingles, it cooled the house and removed the pollen on the roof that caused his wife's sickness. These ideas helped further a great deal of innovations used for electric refrigerators.

Later in life, Copeman's time was consumed by more leisure items, such as the Flexo-Line, which was a portable clothesline for camping that is still being sold today. In addition to the Flexo-Line, he also sold other items under the company name Cope-Craft Products – these items could be ordered through the mail and included things like coolers, bird feeders and birdhouses. Lloyd Groff Copeman passed away on July 5, 1956, at 74 years old from complications caused by cancer and diabetes. Just a short time before he died, he applied for a patent on a moisture-free container. The patent was actually allocated seven months after he passed. Lloyd's grandson, Kent Copeman, remembers spending time with his grandpa as a kid, who often said he could walk into any store and find one of his inventions.

With patents still being awarded after his death, Copeman was able to amass more than 650 patents and was named to *DesignWanted's* top 10 most influential product designers list. Despite these amazing achievements, Lloyd Copeman has yet to be inducted into the National Inventors Hall of Fame, even though

THE MOST COMPLETE LINE OF BIRD HOUSES
EVER PLACED ON THE MARKET FOR ALL KINDS OF HOLE-NESTING BIRDS

NO. 3
SIZE—3" DIAMETER, 14" HIGH
"Logcote" for Flickers, Crested Flycatchers, Downy Woodpeckers and Marsh Wrens. Sturdy, built-in waterproof material used throughout. Complete with screwing and nailing directions.
Price, 75c

NO. 2
SIZE—3" DIAMETER, 10" HIGH
"Logcote" for Bluebirds and Tree Swallows. Has a natural bark-like appearance sure to attract these birds. Sturdy assembled and nailed. Comes complete with directions.
Price, 40c

NO. 1
SIZE—4" DIAMETER, 8" HIGH
This "Logcote" is sure to attract the Blue Birds and Chickadees. Best in most specifications of bird habitats. Sturdy material and weather resistant. Complete with many instructions for assembling.
Price, 30c

NO. 4
SIZE—7" DIAMETER, 14" HIGH
"Logcote" recommended for nest-building birds. Has a natural bark-like appearance. This will supply all the necessary material for the birds to nest in. Complete with many instructions for assembling and nailing included.
Price, \$1.00

A whirl of wings... a flash of color through the air... a faint rattling of leaves... and then—the full-throated, love-inspired melody of a bird floats on the summer breeze... There are few birds in life that are greater than that... Bird lover or not, you, too, will find life fuller, richer and more enjoyable with the companionship of birds around your home.

One of the greatest conservation movements ever undertaken in America has been started in Flint, Michigan, and presents everyone the opportunity to enjoy the friendship of wild birds. This movement will open the door of a new, thrilling experience to homes to others it will mean an opportunity to enjoy the companionship of wild birds to an even fuller extent than before.

COPE-CRAFT "LOGCOTE" WILD-BIRD HOUSES ARE ATTRACTIVE, NEAT, PRACTICAL

SEE BACK PAGE FOR SPECIAL COMBINATION OFFERS

This ThumbPrint News feature article is sponsored by ABC Home & Commercial Services. ABC has been servicing the Thumb of Michigan for over 40 years. They're a multiservice company that you can trust! For more information call (810) 794-5678 or visit www.abcbes.com.

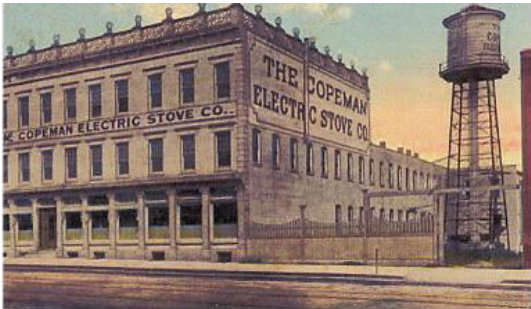
We are an Independently Owned and Operated Michigan Newspaper.

ThumbPrint News

An imprint of places and people at work and play in the Thumb of Michigan.

The "Good News" newspaper is FREE for readers!
It is published monthly, and is filled with historical articles, local events and so much more!
There are nearly 1,000 drop locations throughout the Thumb of Michigan.

To find out more, call (810) 794-2300 or visit ThumbPrintNews.com!



Plant of The Copeman Stove Company in Flint



First Copeman Stove



Lloyd demonstrating the inspiration behind the ice cube tray

INSTRUCTIONS

Remove grid and ice from metal pan and wipe pan dry. Place FLEXOTRAY in metal pan, tab to the rear if pan has a false front, otherwise tab to the front.
Fill FLEXOTRAY with water to within one-quarter inch of the top, and place in freezing compartment.
To remove ice cubes follow pictures below. There is no danger of tearing rubber. Use no water to melt cubes out of FLEXOTRAY.

Pull Straight Up

Break or Twist

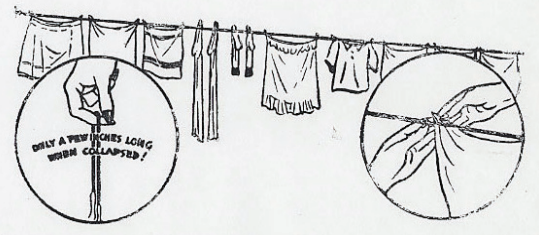
Remove One or All

FLEXOTRAY is made of the purest and highest grade rubber available, first grade pale crepe. The ice cubes are many degrees colder than those from metal trays.
If you want extra FLEXOTRAYS for making additional ice cubes for parties, etc., please call your dealer. Freeze the FLEXOTRAYS full of cubes in advance, remove and place under the freezing compartment. FLEXOTRAY will keep each cube frozen a long time.

235 Curtis Building G. M. DWELLEY, Inc. Detroit, Michigan
COPEMAN LABORATORIES CO., Manufacturers and Patentees

Ice cube directions

to flow for a few seconds before turning into water, but half a century later it is now proven that Copeman's belief of the gas-rich area was true – the group of men wasn't able to find the natural gas because of their equipment restrictions at the time, but recently it has been discovered all over the state. Lloyd continued to



Flexo-Line

he was able to accomplish more than others who had already been conscripted into the exclusive organization – his creativity as an inventor is often compared to that of Thomas Edison, but he rarely receives the recognition he deserves. 🇺🇸

All photos seen in article were contributed by lloydcopeman.com.