Smithsonian
National Museum of American History

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Smithsonian, USPTO Present "Inventing in America"

Gateway to National Museum of American History's New Innovation Wing Opening July 1

The Smithsonian's National Museum of American History in collaboration with the United States Patent and Trademark Office will open "Inventing in America" July 1 in the Johnson-Louis Gateway to Innovation. Patent models, prototypes, trademark examples and inventions by National Invention Hall of Fame members will illustrate the ways that the United States has always depended on invention. The exhibit will be on view for five years, through 2020.

Through three large-scale cases, the gateway will showcase more than 70 objects that represent how inventions influenced the past as well as play a key role in the current world we live in. Alexander Graham Bell's experimental liquid transmitter telephone from 1876, a patent model for an 1841 pin making machine, an Apple I computer and the first digital camera sensor are among the artifacts on display that will introduce the museum's 5 million visitors to its new Innovation Wing.

"The U.S. itself was a new idea and it was ingenuity that helped form the nation we live in today. 'Inventing in America' will showcase the global impact of that innovation on human history," said John Gray, director of the National Museum of American History.

"More than two centuries of cumulative innovation have transformed our nation and our way of life in ways the Founding Fathers could never have imagined," said Under Secretary of Commerce for Intellectual Property and Director of the USPTO Michelle K. Lee. "This exhibit will provide an exciting opportunity for the public to interact with and appreciate the role innovation has played in our country's history."

From inventions as globally impacting as the telegraph to simpler innovations such as the button stitch for sewing machines, "Inventing in America" will look at both the challenges of conceiving new ideas and crafting physical devices to prove those ideas work. For most of the 19th century, the U.S. Patent Office required inventors to submit a model with their patent application. The museum's patent model collection began with the acquisition of 284 models from the Patent Office in June 1908. Today, the museum's collection exceeds 10,000 patent models dating from 1836-1910. The partnership with USPTO provides the museum with a way to explore the role of the federal government in the innovative process, including management of both patents and trademarks.

Patent models and other inventions from the museum's collection are being 3-D digitized as part of a new education initiative, "American Innovations in an Age of Discovery." The project will create digital invention kits to enable students to reconstruct early inventions from the collection such as a telegraph, electric motor, and telephone using 3D printers. A description of the project can be found here: http://3d.si.edu/article/educators.

Innovation Festival

A signature event of the Smithsonian/USPTO partnership is an annual innovation festival. This year's festival will be Sept 26-27 in the museum's Innovation Wing and will explore how today's inventors are creating the world of the future. The museum's Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention and Innovation is taking a lead role in presenting hands-on activities, expert talks, and demonstrations as well as a providing opportunities for the public to meet, learn and exchange ideas with inventors and innovators while exploring their own creative abilities.

The National Museum of American History helps people understand the past in order to make sense of the present and to shape a more humane future. For more information, visit http://americanhisotry.si.edu. The museum is located on Constitution Avenue N.W. between 12th and 14th streets and is operating on summer hours from 10 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. (unless closing early for a special event). Admission is free.

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