

Pass It On®...

Mary Anderson, the Woman who Invented the Windshield Wiper

Sometimes it just takes looking at things a little differently in order to solve a problem. Sometimes we don't even realize there is a problem until we ask questions that begin with why?

We tend to think of inventors as those bespectacled, thick-apron-wearing individuals bending over workbenches all day, tinkering. But inside each of us is a natural curiosity that we can tap into if we just take the time to think. Sometimes we need a change of scenery to arouse our senses. And so it was with Mary Anderson.

Mary was born on an Alabama plantation during Reconstruction, just after the Civil War. Those years of rebuilding a country required strong individuals, and Mary was one of them. She moved to Birmingham, Alabama, and became a real estate developer, then on to Fresno, California, to operate a cattle ranch and vineyard.

In 1903, Mary visited New York City, the bustling metropolis that was fast becoming the center of enterprise. It was winter, and Mary jumped aboard a trolley car. She became slightly annoyed at how often the driver had to stop and clear the windshield on that frosty day. Of course, nobody else had thought to solve the problem. It was just one of those things drivers accepted.

When Mary returned home, she went right to work on a spring-loaded lever with a rubber blade that the driver could operate from inside the trolley car. She patented the device before Henry Ford rolled out his first automobile.

Unfortunately for Mary, she never made any money from her invention. It was deemed too dangerous to operate a hand lever to clean the windshield while driving. But by 1922, after Mary's patent expired, Cadillac included wipers on all their cars. Driving was more popular, cars got faster and Mary's invention was exactly what they needed.

It wasn't until 2011 that Mary Anderson was inducted into the International Inventors Hall of Fame, finally getting the recognition she so rightfully deserved. Meanwhile, although Mary

wasn't financially successful with her invention, she was successful as a real estate developer, rancher and viticulturalist. And she did make the history books for an invention that was years ahead of its time — simply because she wanted to see a little more clearly.

Innovation...PassItOn.com

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