EIP

How EIP celebrated Black History Month

I was not taught anything of note about black history at school (except slavery) so my knowledge of black achievement came from what I was told by my parents.Black History Month (BHM) originated in the US, but has been marked in the UK every October since the 1980s and given world events this year I wanted to celebrate it and make it relevant and interesting to all so thought I would highlight black inventors and their patents.

Working at EIP, an IP firm which embraces diversity and inclusion I wanted to use our internal communication channel, Yammer, to celebrate BHM so I posted a new inventor's story every day in October on Yammer.EIP'ers are great quizzers so to try and peak interest I added questions within the daily posts so that they would learn more about black history and its impact of our industry.I've even organised a prize (some authentic hot sauces from the Caribbean!) for the winner of our EIP BHM Quiz!The idea of celebrating black inventors and their patents was a great idea but I soon realised with sadness that many inventions were not granted patents or ignored (particularly within the US) because it was by a black inventor who was born or forced into slavery which excluded these inventors from being recognised by the patent office. Despite this challenge I persevered with my research and really enjoyed learning about the wealth of black inventors with interesting stories and inventions which are still in use today. Below I have highlighted a few of my favourite inventors.

Henry Boyd was born into slavery in Kentucky in 1802 and after buying his freedom, he invented the "Boyd Bedstead, a corded bed created with wooden rails connected to the headboard and footboard. He knew he would have problems obtaining a patent so he partnered with a white craftsman and had him apply for the patent.

Benjamin Montgomery, born into slavery in 1819, invented a steamboat propeller designed for shallow water. Montgomery tried to apply for a patent but the application

was rejected due to his status as a slave. His owners tried to take credit for the propeller invention and patent it themselves but I was pleased to find out the patent office rejected their application because they were not the true inventors.

Dr Arlyne Simon who invented a blood test that detects when cancer patients reject a bone marrow transplant and her book, "Abby Invents Unbreakable Crayons" that encourages children that look like her, to gain an interest in STEM subjects.

The stories that have been made into films such as "Hidden Figures" about Katherine Johnson, the NASA mathematician or "Self Made" about the life of Madame C J Walker and her hair pomade.The "I didn't know that" inventions have also interested me such as the origin of the saying "the real McCoy" which comes from the quality and function of an invention by Elijah McCoy, the son of former slaves, who in 1872 invented and patented an automatic oiling device for the moving parts of steam trains.

As an attendee at a recent virtual round table which was led by CIPA's IP Inclusive's IP & ME community for BAME professionals and their allies where EIP pledged to make lasting progress on the issue of BAME representation within the UK's IP sector it was really important to me that the firm celebrate BHM.

I am hopeful that the EIP BHM quiz has thrown a light on historic black inventors and their patents during the month of October but will also act as a reminder to recognise their contribution throughout the year.

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Sharon's article was recently published in World IP Review.