

For immediate release
News from the University of Southern Indiana

Internet search leads to the real McCoy

An Internet search by the documentary unit of the Canadian Broadcasting Company offered a connection to **Keith Benedict**, instructor in engineering. The Canadians were working on a show about the top 50 inventions by their countrymen.

Elijah McCoy, one of the 50 inventors to be recognized, was a person Benedict took an interest in when he was asked in the early 1990s to replicate for a local nonprofit organization the first invention patented by McCoy in 1872. The device was the first to use the steam pressure within a steam engine to regulate the amount of lubricant dispensed into the cylinders, thus eliminating the need for frequent filling.

The cutaway reproduction of McCoy's first patent was explained on a Web page (www.usi.edu/science/engineering/emccoy/mccoyrep.htm) that Benedict had added to the USI Web site. It was this Web page that the CBC staffer found.

McCoy was born in Colchester, Ontario, the son of former slaves who had fled along the Underground Railroad. Because McCoy wasn't selected for a mechanical engineering job after he graduated from a school in Scotland, he worked for the Michigan Central Railroad. His duties included lubricating engine parts, and he experienced the delays involved in making trains stop to get the engines lubricated. He had a talent for mechanical innovations, and he developed a mechanism to feed lubricating oil to machine bearings through a small bore tube. His lubricator was so popular that companies began asking for it by name, and his invention inspired the term "the real McCoy."

A CBC staff person called Benedict to see if they could use the reproduction for the television documentary. Benedict complied, sent the model to Canada, and the artifact became part of the show that aired in January and February.

Benedict said, "The call reminded me I had made the replica 12 years ago for a public display. It also was on display in the USI Multicultural Center. The request showed the power of the Internet to find information. I was happy to share it with the CBC."

Benedict joined the USI faculty in 1990 and teaches in the Engineering Department of the Pott College of Science and Engineering.