

Louis V. Aronson, from matches to lighters...

Eric Roe (Vintage-Ronson.com)
Urban Cummings

Louis Vincent Aronson was an American inventor, industrialist and philanthropist who is best remembered as the inventor of Ronson lighters. Aronson was an exceptionally gifted young man who graduated from public school at the age of 12 before entering a New York Technical School specializing in metallurgy, practical metal working and mechanical drawing. At the same time, he set up a laboratory in the basement of his parent's home where he experimented with plating processes and turned out money-making items while he devised ways of metalizing common items, in a durable finish of matte gold, including flowers, butterflies, animal claws and baby shoes.

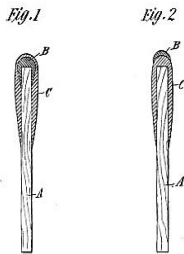


LOUIS V. ARONSON

Aronson demonstrated a natural ability for designing which was honed at the technical school and served him well throughout his life. He excelled, and completed the School's four year academic program in three years. When he graduated in 1885, at the tender age of 15, he was "qualified as an expert metallurgist, draftsman and designer" according to Arthur Oliver's book **the story of a life: a tribute to Louis V. Aronson** (Colyer, 1929). Aronson returned to the school five years later as an instructor in metallurgy for several years before devoting all his time to his own company. The year after Aronson graduated, when he was 16 years old, he sold the rights to a commercially valuable metal plating process, "which he named Ormolu" according to Urban Cummings' book **Ronson, The World's Greatest Lighter** (Bird Dog Books, 1993) While retaining full use of his invention, young Aronson sold the patent rights for \$5000 and used the proceeds to establish his own company named **The Art Metal Works**, in New York City.

Not long after opening The Art Metal Works, Aronson gained public recognition when he won an award in 1893 from the Belgian government for the creation of the first non-toxic match, and young businessman Aronson received 50,000 Francs, equaling \$10,000 U.S. Dollars. In 1897 he received a U.S. patent (592,227) for a match design (called the Wind-match) that would light in windy conditions or when wet. He continued working on his match designs including inventing the "Birds Eye" or "Kitchen" match that had a dual-tip design in 1903; this was an important safety improvement because friction matches of the day would sometimes light accidentally especially when stepped on or while in one's pocket. He realized that placing a small friction ignition chemical on the tip instead of the entire match-head greatly limited accidental ignition. This style of match is still in use today!

(See Model.)
L. ARONSON.
MATCH AND COMPOSITION FOR SAME.
No. 592,227. Patented Oct. 26, 1897.



Witnesses:
Schmitt B. Johnson,
G. B. Linn.
Louis Aronson, Inventor
by New. Curtis & Page Attys

Aronson continued his research on all-weather matches finally receiving a U.S. patent (1,287,819) in 1918, for a match that was praised by soldiers who were fighting in mud-filled trenches during World War I. His proficiency with matches led to a U.S. patent (1,295,952) for Bomb fuses also used in WWI, which he donated to the U.S. Government for the duration of the war, later earning his company the prestigious Distinguished Service Certificate from President Woodrow Wilson and the War Department. Through his research on matches, he sought to create and refine igniting devices that were efficient, safe and commercially practical. He was driven, you could say, to find a better

way to produce and sustain a flame by a portable mechanical device. Soon after, his hard work paid off in a very profitable way.

By the year 1910 he received his first patent for a Pocket Lighter (U.S. Pat. 965,149). According to the patent, it used a flint material which contained a mixture of cerium and iron. His design was a simple device that created a shower of sparks with the press of a finger - but there was no sustainable flame. It is not known if this lighter was ever manufactured. Based on the patent dates, this device preceded the Pist-O-Liter (U.S. Pat. 966,153) which he successfully produced that year, but likewise, it only produced sparks. Within three years he received a patent titled Pyrophorous Lighter, (U.S. Pat. 1,084,386) which we now appreciate as the Paragon striker lighter, a simple device capable of producing and sustaining a flame by using a steel-tipped wand fitted with a cloth-wick saturated in petroleum ether (also known as Benzine or Naphtha). The following year, 1914, he was granted a design patent for the well known Bulldog striker lighter (Des. Pat. D 45,407) which used the same methodology as the Paragon, and soon became a very popular table lighter as evidenced by the relatively common appearance of Bulldog strikers seen today.

Aronson's earlier efforts to produce igniting devices led him to invent many other useful and profitable items too. His ongoing experiments sparked ideas for other successful inventions like safe children's toys including sparking guns, spinning tops, pinwheels and a series of hand held toys with sparking eyes called Archie(s). His inventions were ingenious in that they were appealing to children and safe for them to enjoy. He was a compassionate man who dedicated much of his time to causes that benefited children and the underprivileged in society.

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