

Richard Bowie Spikes



Richard Bowie Spikes: October 22, 1876 – January 22, 1963

He was an inventor with over 10 patents for inventions such as automatic gear shifts for automatic transmissions in vehicles, traffic light signals, a safety braking system for trucks and buses, and a beer tap.

Richard Bowie Spikes was born in Dallas, Texas to Monroe, a barber, and Medora Spikes, Richard, he was the fifth child born in a family that later grew to a family of nine children. His younger brothers, John Curry and Reb Spikes would become accomplished songwriters and musicians in their own right working with the pioneering inventor of jazz music Jelly Roll Morton. Richard, like most people during his day, first followed in his father's footsteps as a barber and later became a school teacher in Beaumont, Texas. Richard was a man of many talents and traveled a lot throughout his lifetime. In 1900, Richard married Lula Charlton and two years later had a son Richard Jr. The Spikes family would move west to Albuquerque, New Mexico and later to Bisbee, Arizona.

In 1906, Spikes patented a modern version of a railroad semaphore, an early form of railway signals. He then opened a barber shop and a saloon. Spikes, decided to create several inventions that revolved around better ways to dispense beer due to the inconvenience of beer being dispensed by just the keg. He invented a beer tap using pressure in 1908. By 1910, the pressure beer tap would be used by the Milwaukee Brewing Company additionally, in 1910, he invented a directional turn signal for the Pierce-Arrow Automotive Company. He created and invented more patents up until his last days. Such inventions included an automatic gear shift for cars in 1932 and in 1962 a "fail-safe" braking system for buses. Not only was he a talented inventor but also an accomplished violinist, teacher, barber, pianist.

Resources:

Blackpast. (2017, 11th November), Richard Bowie Spikes (1878-1963), Image 1 of 1. Spikes <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/spikes-richard-1878-1965/>

Eli Dokosi, M., 2019. Richard B. Spikes, Inventor born - African American Registry. (online) African American Registry. Available at: <https://aaregistry.org/story/richard-b-spikes-inventor-born/> (Accessed 19 February 2021).

Brodie, J., 1995. Created equal. 2nd ed. New York: Quill, p.151.

Eli Dokosi, M., 2019. Richard B. Spikes, Inventor born - African American Registry. (online) African American Registry. Available at: <https://aaregistry.org/story/richard-b-spikes-inventor-born/> (Accessed 19 February 2021).