

## **John L. Love**

### **“Invented the Pencil Sharpener in 1897”**

“John Lee Love was an African American inventor, most known for his invention of the hand-cranked pencil sharpener, the “Love Sharpener,” and an improved plasterer’s hawk. Little is known about the early life of Love. His date and place of birth are unknown, but it is conjectured that he was born sometime between 1865 and 1877, during the Reconstruction Era. Love spent his adult life working as a carpenter in Fall River, Massachusetts.

In 1894, Love invented the hand-cranked pencil sharpener, a portable alternative to contemporary pencil sharpeners. On November 23rd, 1897, he filed a patent application for the “Love Sharpener.” Prior to the Love Sharpener, the only available pencil sharpener was the rotary blade sharpener, a cumbersome device that utilizes the same rotary crank mechanism as wall-mounted pencil sharpeners. Love’s invention vastly simplified the pencil sharpener’s design.

As opposed to the traditional crank mechanism, the Love Sharpener is a blade fastened to a wood casing. The casing is aesthetically customizable to suit the desires of the user, and the sharpener is no larger than the length of the blade. The entire device fits easily into the palm of the hand and is designed in such a way that loose pencil shavings remain within the casing of the sharpener until the user removes them. Love’s pencil sharpener design is still the most practical and convenient design used today.

Prior to inventing the Love Sharpener, Love also designed an enhanced plasterer's hawk, a tool used by masons and plasterers. The plasterer's hawk is a metal or wood board with a handle attached to it. The board was used to spread plaster and mortar smoothly and evenly. In 1895, Love patented his improved design of the plasterer's hawk. Love's plasterer's hawk was designed with a foldable aluminum board and a detachable handle, a more lightweight and portable version of the previous one-piece plasterer's hawks.

Although Love seemed to have struggled in obscurity his inventions are still widely used and well-known. In the case of the pencil sharpener, Love's completely reimagined design is still the most popular and is imitated by most other portable pencil sharpeners.

Love and nine fellow passengers died on December 26th, 1931 near Charlotte, North Carolina when the car they were traveling in crashed into a train."

Source: Black Past

Information link:

<https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/love-john-lee-1931/>

Patent Link:

<https://patents.google.com/patent/US594114A/en?q=US594114>