

Joseph Hunter Dickinson

“Invented the Reed Organ in 1899”

“Joseph Hunter Dickinson contributed several improvements to different musical instruments. He's particularly known for improvements to player pianos that provided better actuation (the loudness or softness of the key strikes) and could play the sheet music from any point in the song. In addition to his accomplishments as an inventor, he was elected to the Michigan legislature, serving from from 1897 to 1900.

The Life of Joseph H. Dickinson

Sources say Joseph H. Dickinson was born in Chatham, Ontario, Canada on June 22, 1855, to Samuel and Jane Dickinson. His parents were from the United States and they returned to settle in Detroit in 1856 with the infant Joseph. He went to school in Detroit. By 1870, he had enlisted in the United States Revenue Service and served on the revenue cutter Fessenden for two years.

He was hired at age 17 by the Clough & Warren Organ Company, where he was employed for 10 years. This company was one of the largest organ makers in the world at that time and made over 5,000 ornate inlaid-wood organs per year from 1873 to 1916. Some of their organs were purchased by [Queen Victoria](#) of England and other royalty. Their Vocalion instrument was a leading church organ for many years. They also began to manufacture pianos under the brand names of Warren, Wayne, and Marville. The company later switched to manufacturing phonographs. During his first stint at the company,

one of the large combination organs Dickinson designed for Clough & Warren won a prize at the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia.

Dickinson married Eva Gould of Lexington. He later formed the Dickinson & Gould Organ Company with this father-in-law. As part of an exhibit on the accomplishments of black Americans, they sent an organ to the New Orleans Exposition of 1884. After four years, he sold his interest to his father-in-law and went back to the Clough & Warren Organ Company. During his second stint with Clough & Warren, Dickinson filed his numerous [patents](#). These included improvements for reed organs and volume-controlling mechanisms.

He was not the first inventor of the player piano, but he did patent an improvement that allowed the piano to start playing at any position on the music roll. His roller mechanism also allowed the piano to play its music in forward or reverse. Additionally, he is regarded as the main contributing inventor of the Duo-Art reproducing piano. He later served as superintendent of the Aeolian Company's experimental department in Garwood, New Jersey. This company was also one of the largest piano manufacturers of its time. He received over a dozen patents during these years, as player pianos were popular. Later, he continued to innovate with [phonographs](#). He was elected to the Michigan House of Representatives as a Republican candidate in 1897, representing the first district of Wayne County (Detroit). He was re-elected in 1899."

Source: Thought Co

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Patent Link:

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