

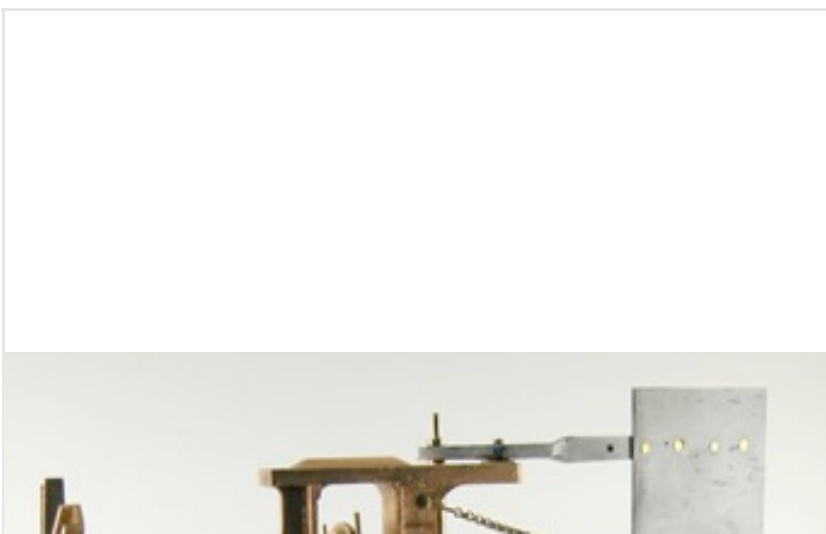
Spotlight on the Rothschild Patent Model Collection

Alan Rothschild began his career of collecting with his first car. In 1960, at the age of 18, he purchased and restored a 1930 Model A Ford. "I still have that car today," Rothschild says proudly.

For the past few decades, he has gotten into the habit of collecting items that are much smaller—miniature, in fact. Alan Rothschild is the owner of the world's largest private viewable collection of patent models, the 12" square working pieces that were once required by the U.S. Patent Office for any inventor seeking protection for their invention. A patent allowed inventors to exclusively profit from their idea for up to 20 years by producing and selling it on their own or licensing others to do so.

Due to the U.S. Patent Act, patent models were required from 1790 to 1880 with all patent applications. "The reason models were required was to help the patent examiner understand exactly what the inventor was claiming to patent. Also, it helped the examiner compare new patents to existing patents," says Rothschild. "The U.S. was the only country to ever require a model with a patent application." During this 90-year period, more than 200,000 models were submitted.

In 1836, President Andrew Jackson ordered the construction of the patent office building in





Windmill, Patent #235333, 1880, Sylvester Ament, Aurora, IL.

construction of the patent office building in Washington, D.C. as a tribute to American ingenuity. By the turn of the 20th century, the patent office simply ran out of room to store the volume of models they were receiving and dropped the model requirement. The government moved some of the models into storage, returned some to their owners and gave several important patent models to the Smithsonian. The remaining 150,000 models have been passed from private collector to private collector, and while many have been lost to fire and auctioned off individually, scattered collections remain across the country. Rothschild estimates he has acquired about 4,000 patent models.

Now, in a temperature-controlled facility at his home in Cazenovia, NY, Rothschild displays about 800 models in the **Rothschild Petersen Patent Model Museum**, viewable to the public by appointment. The thousands of remaining models are stored in his heated basement and garage on shelves and packed in boxes. “We try very hard to properly preserve these models, and we are continually restoring them,” Rothschild says. “However, they’ve

survived for over 100 years without this kind of care, stashed in warehouses and barns—sometimes when I unwrap a model it has pieces of hay in it.”

Rothschild’s collection includes models submitted by inventors who are household names today, such as the famous piano maker **C. F. Steinway** and rubber industrialist **B.F. Goodrich**, who submitted a patent for an enhanced rubber billiard table cushion. “The inventors that submitted these models fueled such an important time in the history of our country, the Industrial Revolution,” says Rothschild.

In addition to being functional displays of inventions, Rothschild believes that the models, which are often ornately made from polished wood and brass, are truly works of art. “Model making was a popular profession during this time period,” he says. “The model makers encouraged inventors to create a model that looked like it deserved a patent, so they used high-quality materials to create beautiful pieces.”

The Rothschild Petersen Patent Model Museum has museum status in New York State and official designation as a non-profit organization, but several attempts to secure funding to create a national museum in Syracuse have been unsuccessful. In 2001, a \$20 million deal with New York State fell through after budget cutbacks as a result of September 11. Later, partnerships with State University of New York (SUNY) and Syracuse University had similar fates. However, as Rothschild has seen museums struggling over the years with lack of funding, he has come to believe that everything happens for a reason.

“I don’t want to say that it’s better—but on the one hand, it is,” he says. “If we had



the one hand, it is, no easy job. If we had been able to start a national museum here, the audience would be somewhat limited. The amount of people who are able to see the exhibits we have now far exceeds that. It's the difference between thousands and millions of people."

The exhibits Rothschild is referring to are the national and international exhibitions of the **Rothschild Patent Model Collection**. Since 2001, 53 models from the collection have been on display in Discovery Arcade on Main Street U.S.A. at **Disneyland Paris** in France. In 2010, Rothschild sought out Smith Kramer Fine Arts Services to do a national traveling exhibit of about 60 models called "**The Curious World of Patent Models**." That



Paper-Cutting Machine, Patent #198519, 1877, John Morgan, Appleton, WI.

exhibit will continue to travel across the United States until the end of 2014.

In 2010, Rothschild was approached by the director of the Smithsonian American Art Museum to do a very unique, two-year long exhibit. Titled "**Inventing a Better Mousetrap: Patent Models from the Rothschild Collection**," the exhibit opened November 11 and will run until November 2013 with a special opening night ceremony on December 1. The 32 models in the exhibition will be displayed by categories, including domestic life, leisure and machinery, on the second floor in the museum's Allan J. and Reda R. Riley Gallery. There will also be a display of "mystery models" with clues to allude to the models' intended purpose.

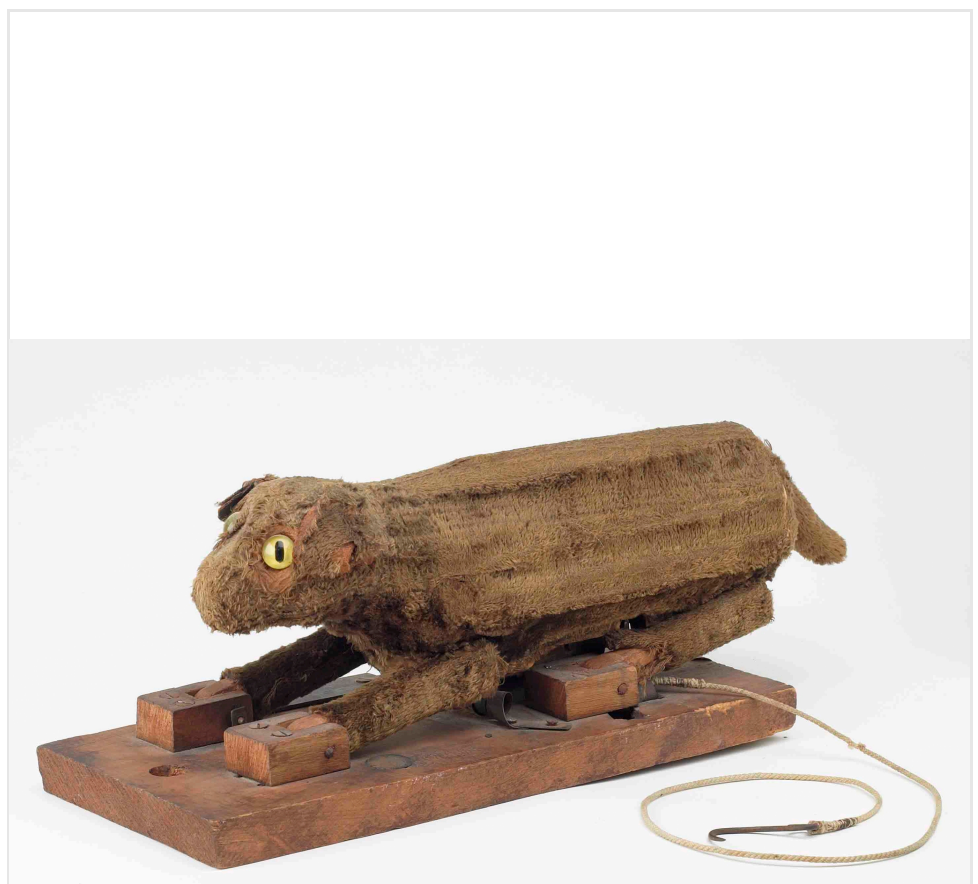


Roller Skate, Patent #90603, 1869, George Stillman, Cincinnati, OH.

Included amongst the selection on display at the Smithsonian are patent models for everything from an improved mousetrap and an artificial leg to a paper bag making machine and an electro-magnetic engine. A particularly unique patent model that will be on display is one of Rothschild's favorites: **the pigeon-starter**.

This patent—the only one of its kind submitted for such an invention—was applied for by Brooklyn inventor Henry A. Rosenthal in 1875. The concept was to aid in the popular sport of trap shooting, in which live pigeons were released from traps set in the ground, scared into flight and then shot in the air. "It frequently happens that the pigeons will not leave the trap when it is sprung, and have to be frightened out by shouting and throwing stones," says Rosenthal in his patent application. "[This] tends to make the sportsman nervous, and frequently causes him to lose his shot."

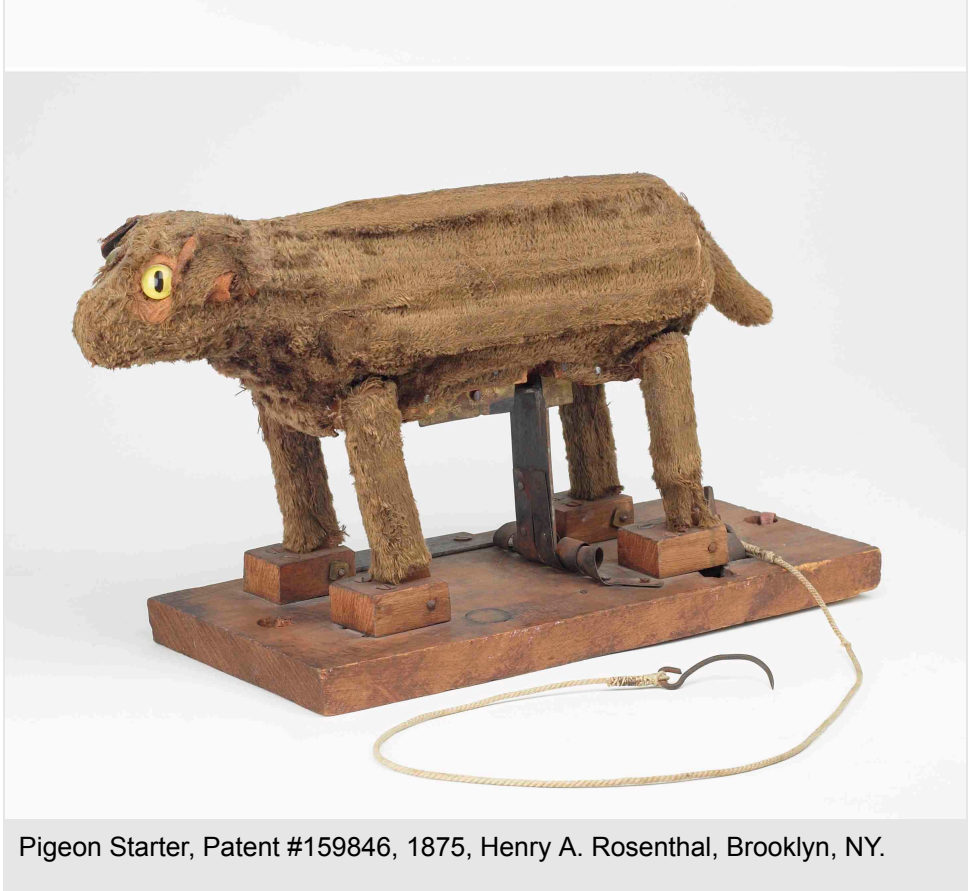
When tripped at the same time as the traps were opened, the pigeon-starter, a spring-loaded wood model of a cat-like body covered with mohair, would immediately scare the pigeons out of the trap and into the air with the combination of the



movement of the wood figure lunging forward and the sound of the spring being released. While the use of live pigeons has since been outlawed, thus eliminating the need for Rosenthal's patent, the sport's origins have not been forgotten. The clay targets used in trap shooting today are often referred to as "clay pigeons."

When it comes to naming a favorite model from his collection, Rothschild is reluctant to choose. "It's a hard question to answer because there are some very simple models that are excellent at showing Yankee ingenuity," he says. "And there are other very elaborate models that are beautiful but not necessarily my favorite." The pigeon-starter, however, sticks out for one important reason. "It's the one model I have that no one has been able to identify the purpose of when they see it. Everyone that sees it is very intrigued by it—they all ask, 'What is it?'"

Rothschild believes the exhibit at the Smithsonian was truly meant to be because the U.S. Patent Office used to exist in what is now the Smithsonian's American Art Museum and National Portrait Gallery, where his collection will be exhibited for the next two years. "For the first time in over 85 years," says Rothschild, smiling, "these models will be returning to their original home."



Pigeon Starter, Patent #159846, 1875, Henry A. Rosenthal, Brooklyn, NY.

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