



The Clerk's Black History Series

Debra DeBerry

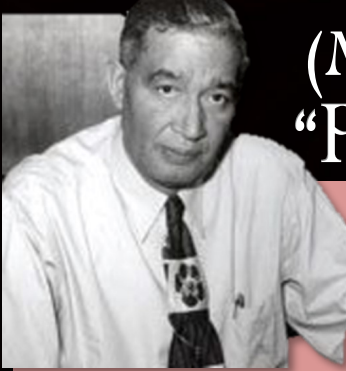
Clerk of Superior Court DeKalb County

Frederick McKinley Jones



(May 17, 1893 – February 21, 1961)

“Prolific Inventor & The King of Cool”



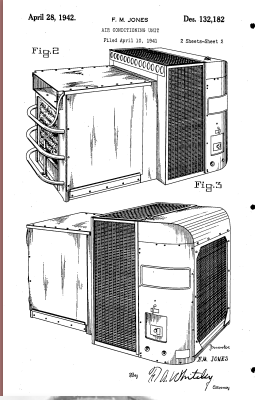
Frederick McKinley Jones was born on May 17, 1893, to mixed race parents in Cincinnati, Ohio. His mother died when Fred was nine years old and he was forced to quit school and move across the Ohio river to Covington, Kentucky, where he was raised by a priest in a boy's home. Fred worked odd jobs - one of which was a janitor in an auto shop. Fred was a natural at auto repair and quickly transitioned into race car driving. He became known as one of the best race car drivers in the Great Lakes area. He later moved to Minnesota, where he worked as a mechanic on a farm.



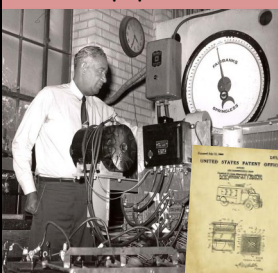
Fred joined the Army during WWI, where he was stationed in France with an all-black unit. During his service, he used his mechanical skills and rewired his camp for electricity, telephone, and telegraph service. While there, he conceived the self-starting gas motor that he later patented in 1943. After his military service ended in 1919, Fred moved to Hallock, Minnesota, where he continued studying electronics. As a result, Fred built a transmitter for the local radio station. To earn money, Fred drove local doctors around to house calls through snowstorms. Working with the doctors gave Fred an insight to their struggles with making house calls - lack of portable equipment. Fred worked for years coming up with the invention of an x-ray machine that was portable. Unfortunately, he failed to get a patent for the machine, and it was quickly patented by others. Fred continued creating new inventions including a radio transmitter and personal radio sets.

In 1927, Fred took an electrical engineering position at the Ultraphone Sound Systems company. The company was owned by Joseph Numero, who made sound equipment used in movie theaters across the Midwest. Fred later partnered with Joseph Numero, forming the U.S. Thermo Control Company, where Fred served as the company's vice-president. Fred was charged with solving the problem of transporting perishable goods over long distances without the use of heavy ice blocks that weighed down the trucks. Truckers were frustrated that meat and dairy would spoil in the summer heat.

Around 1938, Fred began designing the Thermo Control Model A automatic truck refrigeration unit, which attached to the undercarriages of trucks and moved chilled air to the inside of the trailer through refrigerator tubes. His portable air-cooling device featured a gasoline motor built to handle the jolts of over-the-road travel. Early revisions focused on making the units lighter and smaller, and changing from an undercarriage mounting to the over-the-cab mounting still in use on trucks today. Fred became known as the “The King of Cool” for his trucking refrigeration invention. He received the official patent “132,182” on April 28, 1942. Fred's invention redefined the global market, allowing perishable goods to be transported throughout the world, from large cities to remote villages. Consumers now had year-round access to meats, dairy, frozen foods, and fresh produce. During WWII, Fred invented and patented an air-conditioning unit for military field hospitals in need of storing blood for the battlefield. A slightly modified version of his invention is still used today.



In 1944, Jones became the first black man to be elected to the American Society of Refrigeration Engineers. During the 1950s, he was a consultant to the U.S. Department of Defense and the U.S. Bureau of Standards. He invented a self-starting engine, a series of movie projectors and box office equipment that dispensed movie tickets and gave change. By 1949, The Thermo Control Company became The Thermo King Corporation with a value of \$3 million dollars. Today, Thermo King generates around five billion dollars annually.



In his lifetime, Fred had more than sixty patents. Frederick McKinley Jones dies on February 21, 1961. After his death, he was awarded the National Medal of Technology; the first Black inventor to ever receive such an honor.

