Charles F. Kettering-"dean of Inventors" Encyclopedia Article

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Charles F. Kettering—"dean of Inventors"

Charles F. Kettering (1876–1958), often referred to as the "Dean of Inventors," graduated from Ohio State University in 1904. He first worked for the National Cash Register Company, where he developed the electric cash register.

Forming Dayton Engineering Laboratories Company (Delco) in 1909, he developed the electric automobile starter that was first used by Cadillac in 1912. While running Delco he also invented the "Delco," a fuel-driven generator that electrified farms decades before power lines reached rural America. In 1916 Kettering sold his thriving business to General Motors (GM) and joined the staff. Overseeing its research facilities, Kettering remained at GM for thirty-one years. In 1927 he founded the Charles F. Kettering Foundation for research to benefit mankind.

During World War II (1939–45), "Boss Ket" headed the National Inventors Council that examined new inventions sent to the government. He also had a regular Sunday afternoon radio program that was listened to by millions of Americans. "Horsepower is war power" is the slogan he used on the program, as related in the December 1944 issue of *The National Geographic Magazine* in the article "Michigan Fights." A few other Kettering inventions included spark plugs, Freon for electric refrigerators, quick-drying automobile paint, automatic transmission, the first lightweight diesel locomotive engine, and the first synthetic aviation fuel. At the close of the war in 1945, Kettering, along with Alfred Sloan (1875–1966), founded the Sloan-Kettering Institute for Cancer Research. Located in New York City, it remained at the beginning of the twenty-first century a premier cancer research and treatment center.

At his death in 1958, Kettering held roughly 140 patents and had been presented honorary doctorate degrees by about thirty universities.