John Wesley Hyatt Encyclopedia Article

John Wesley Hyatt

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John Wesley Hyatt

1837-1920

American inventor best known for his discovery of the process for making celluloid, the first artificial plastic. In 1870, while searching for an ivory substitute for the manufacture of billiard balls, Hyatt combined nitrocellulose, camphor, and alcohol, and heated the mixture under pressure. When it cooled and hardened, the resulting substance was celluloid, a discovery that facilitated the development of plastics. Hyatt is also credited with inventions in sugarcane refining and water purification.