

American Inventions

from the production *Riding the Bounds: 1850-1950*

Rebecca Locklear

“Tuxedo, 1886” by Skyler Laughlin

Scene 1 Toilet Paper, 1857

CAST: (*sits at back of stage, moves to center stage to play main roles and then returns to the back*)

NARRATOR: In the 1800's, before the discovery of electricity, oil lamps, tallow candles or pitchy pine-knots were common sources of lighting. Amusements as we know them were nonexistent – including movies, computers, electronic devices, and radio. Reading was difficult, travel was hazardous, and communication unreliable.

Some American inventions in the second half of the 1800's included astounding things. (*gestures to actors*)

BOY 1: Electricity.

GIRL 3: The telegraph.

BOY 3: Cars.

NARRATOR: However, there were other interesting developments....

GIRL 1/SELLER: (*to audience, embarrassed*) Ladies and Gentlemen: I ...uh...I...uh...am here to sell to you...well...uh...this unmentionable. (*holds up one roll of toilet paper*)

BOY 1: Hey, I don't need that. (*others agree, to BOY 2*) I ain't spending money when I can use a catalogue...

BOY 2: Or a newspaper, or advertisements....

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Scene 3: Tuxedo, 1886

NARRATOR: On the night the tuxedo made its debut in New York in 1886, it should have been pronounced “scandalous attire,” inappropriate for formal occasions. A tailless coat would have been an affront to the customary black tie and tails of the day.

GIRL 2: (*sits filing nails*) Yeah, I remember those English “dandies” with black tie and tails.

NARRATOR: The 1880s still had a highly restrictive code of proper attire. But the tailless coat was designed by the prominent Lorillard family and that made the difference.

BOY 1/LORILLARD: I, Pierre Lorillard IV, created the informal yet extremely attractive tailless

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Scene 6: Can Opener, (1858) 1870
MIDDLE OF SCENE below-----

BOY 3/SOLDIER: (*sits, leans back*) I shall ride to Wellington. But tell me, how do we go on?

BOY 2/SOLDIER: (*standing*) We can put 70,000 men into the field right now – which is something.

BOY 3/SOLDIER: Too many 2nd Battalions. Under strength, aren't they?

BOY 2/SOLDIER: Some of them. You know how it is. We're hoping to get some of our troops back from America. (*looks over at servant PERRY*)

BOY 3/SOLDIER: What a mixed bag with all the foreigners!

BOY 2/SOLDIER: (*cuts in as PERRY tries to open can with bayonet*) For heaven's sake, Perry. I'm going to die of STARVATION – not a bullet!

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If you enjoy adding DRAMA to your classroom or like to incorporate drama into history-arts performances, delve into the history of household items such as toilet paper, the dishwasher, and brown paper bag. Great fun! Grades 6-10

REBECCA LOCKLEAR, Educational Writer
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