

April Marks Important Milestone for Patent Law

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The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office celebrated an important milestone earlier this month. April 10 marked the anniversary of the first [U.S. patent law](#), which was enacted on April 10, 1790.

By signing the bill into law, President George Washington established the foundation of the modern American patent system. It also marked the first time in American history that the law gave inventors legal rights to their creations.

The 1790 law authorized Patent Board members to grant a patent. Their authority was absolute and could not be appealed. Thomas Jefferson, Secretary of State, was considered the first administrator of the American patent system and the first patent examiner.

The law also defined patentable subject matter as “any useful art, manufacture, engine, machine, or device, or any improvement thereon not before known or used.” Applicants were required to provide a patent specification and drawing and, if possible, a model. After examining the application, the board members would issue a patent if they deemed “the invention or discovery sufficiently useful and important.” Fees for a patent were between \$4 and \$5.

On July 31, 1790, Samuel Hopkins of Philadelphia, PA, was awarded the first U.S. patent for an improvement in “the making of Pot ash and Pearl ash by a new Apparatus and Process.” Potash is an ingredient used in fertilizer. The first patent can be seen on the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office website. In addition, the original document still exists in the collections of the Chicago Historical Society.

Source: [USPTO](#)

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