



## From the Annals of the World History

### King C. Gillette

(January 5, 1855 - July 9, 1932)



King Camp Gillette was an American businessman popularly known as the inventor of the safety razor, although several models were in existence before Gillette's design. Gillette's innovation was the thin, inexpensive, disposable blade of stamped steel. Gillette is widely credited with inventing the so-called razor and blades business model, where razors are sold cheaply to increase the market for blades, but in fact he only adopted this model after his competitors did.

#### Biography

Born in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin and raised in Chicago, Illinois. King Camp Gillette's family was devastated by the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. His ancestors came from England to Massachusetts in 1630.

#### Razors and blades

While working as a salesman for the Crown Cork and Seal Company in the 1890s, Gillette saw bottle caps, with the cork seal he sold, thrown away after the bottle was opened. This made him recognize the value in basing a business on a product that was used a few times, then discarded. As existing, relatively expensive, razor blades dulled quickly and needed continuous sharpening, a razor whose blade could be thrown away when it dulled would meet a real need and likely be profitable.



Safety razors had been developed in the mid-19th century, but still used a forged blade. In the 1870s, the Kampfe Brothers introduced a type of razor along these lines. Gillette improved these earlier safety-razor designs, and introduced the high-profit-margin stamped razor blade steel blade. Gillette's razor retailed for a substantial \$5 (about \$134 in 2006 dollars) - half the average working men weekly pay - yet sold by the millions. The most difficult part of development was engineering the blades, as thin, cheap steel was difficult to work and sharpen. This accounts for the delay between the initial idea and the product's introduction.

To sell the product, Gillette founded the American Safety Razor Company on September 28, 1901 (changing the company's name to Gillette Safety Razor Company in July 1902). Gillette obtained a trademark registration (0056921) for his portrait and signature on the packaging. Production began in 1903, when he sold a total of 51 razors and 168 blades. The following year, he sold 90,884 razors and 123,648 blades, thanks in part to Gillette's low prices, automated manufacturing techniques and good advertising. By 1908, the corporation had established manufacturing facilities in the United States, Canada, England, France and Germany. Razor sales reached 450,000 units and blade sales exceeded 70 million units in 1915. In 1918, when the U.S. entered World War I, the company provided all American soldiers with a field razor set, paid for by the government. The company continues in the present day as the Gillette brand of Procter & Gamble.

#### Personal life

Gillette was also a Utopian Socialist. He published a book titled *The Human Drift* (1904) which advocated that

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Gillette was also a Utopian Socialist. He published a book titled *The Human Dilemma* (1894) which advocated that all industry should be taken over by a single corporation owned by the public, and that everyone in the US should live in a giant city called Metropolis powered by Niagara Falls. A later book, *World Corporation* (1910) was a prospectus for a company set up to create this vision. He offered Theodore Roosevelt the presidency of the company, with a fee of one million dollars. (Roosevelt declined the offer.) Gillette's last book, *The People's Corporation* (1924), was written with Upton Sinclair and later inspired Glen H. Taylor.

In his later life he traveled extensively, and was universally recognized from his picture on the packets of razor blades. People were surprised that he was a real person rather than just a marketing image. A Gillette company history stated that in non-English speaking countries people would often ask for "the kind with the Man's Face" blades.

Gillette died in Los Angeles, California, and was interred in the lower levels of the Begonia Corridor in the Great Mausoleum located at Forest Lawn Memorial Park Cemetery in Glendale, California. He was almost bankrupt at the time of his death, due both to his having spent large amounts of money on property, and to his having lost much of the value of his corporate shares as a result of the Great Depression.

### Legacy

Some peers in the marketing industry quote him as one of the innovators who revolutionized the Freebie marketing ideas.[13] The Gillette Company continued to thrive and sell products under a variety of brand names including Gillette, Braun, Oral-B, and Duracell. In 2005, the Gillette Company was sold to Procter & Gamble for \$57 billion USD. It is now known as Global Blades & Razors, with the Gillette (brand), a business unit of Procter & Gamble.

