

Norman James Breakey. You saved me many, many hours of drudgery. You're an inventor of the best kind. And born in Pierson no less.



Back before 1940 and before your invention, everyone who painted a house inside or out needed to use a paint brush. The paint brush is fine for small jobs, but, I shudder when I remember doing a whole house with one. One instruction manual described brush painting, saying: "Dip the brush into a can of paint and raise it above your head. Be careful not to let the paint roll down your arm, or add freckles to your face! Dab it on the ceiling. Repeat the process, hundreds of times! Then, take a bath." I've had many bad days scrubbing paint off my arms and face so I could go to church or a WI meeting with self-respect. Now you, Mr. Breakey, have made painting so much easier. Thank-you, for inventing the paint roller, and, the paint roller tray!

You grew up in the 1890s, during Pierson's building boom, when the hardware store was the busiest place in town. By the time you were a young man, prairie settlers were done with being rustic. Folks wanted their homes, and their community, to look smart. You had an idea, as inventors do, that a 2 inch cylinder with a cloth covering, mounted on a rod with a handle would improve the painting experience. After the war you found yourself in Toronto consulting with a Mr. Hamilton. You needed help determining which fabric would absorb

paint and then release it smoothly as it rolled over a wall. Mr. Hamilton suggested a mohair velour, that was used in railway touring coaches. He suggested applying the cloth on a bias, so that there wouldn't be a distinct line left behind by the roller. You got a local tin smith to hammer out a tray, and you were off to the races! Literally.

You got a Canadian patent and set up a home factory, producing over 50,000 of them with the name Koton Kotor. Eaton's even sold them in their catalogs! Just think of all those happy painters!

But fame and fortune didn't roll out as smoothly as your Koton Kotor. A certain Mr. Adams in the States also claimed to be the inventor of your slick contraption. In 1942 Mr. Adams convinced the US Patent Office with his story, and, since he worked for Sherwin Williams Paints, his version was the one that was mass produced, satisfying the largest market in the world. You died a poorer man for all this, but not at all forgotten.

Mr. Breakey, you were finally honoured, vindicated, at least for us 'Piersonites', when in 1967 you were heralded in the McClelland & Stewart's Inventor's guide and in a Maclean's feature called "Who's Who of Canadian What's Their Names". For us, you won the race!

Paint by Roller is adapted from a story in Vantage Points 4.

See you later!