



## Zippo History

*The story of Zippo Manufacturing Company is the story of its people, from the founder, George G. Blaisdell, to the many Zippo employees, customers, and collectors who have played a part in its rich 80-year history. Their loyalty to Zippo has made this one of America's great companies.*

The Zippo timeline begins in the early 1930s, at the Bradford Country Club in Bradford, Pennsylvania. Mr. Blaisdell watched a friend awkwardly using a cumbersome Austrian-made lighter. The lighter worked well even in the wind, due to the design of the chimney, but its appearance was utilitarian. Its use required two hands, and its thin metal surface dented easily.

He decided to refashion the Austrian lighter in the fall of 1932. Mr. Blaisdell fabricated a rectangular case and attached the top of the lighter to the case with a hinge. He retained the chimney design which protected the flame under adverse conditions. The result was a lighter that looked good and was easy to operate. The first lighter, currently displayed at the Zippo/Case Museum in Bradford, was produced in early 1933.

The name "Zippo" was created by Mr. Blaisdell in 1932. He liked the sound of the word "zipper" so he formed different variations on the word and settled on "Zippo," deciding that it had a modern sound.

The first Zippo lighters sold for \$ 1.95 each. From the very beginning, every one was backed by Mr. Blaisdell's unconditional lifetime guarantee that "It works or we fix it free.™" In 80 years, no one has ever spent a cent on the mechanical repair of a Zippo lighter, regardless of the lighter's age or condition.

Application for the original Zippo patent was filed on May 17, 1934, and patent number 2032695 was granted on March 3, 1936. A second patent, number 2517191, was issued on August 1, 1950. The design of the Zippo lighter remains basically the same to this day, with minor improvements.

In the mid-30s, Bradford's Kendall Refining Company placed an order for 500 Zippo lighters. These are believed to be the first promotional lighters produced by Zippo with a company logo. Today, companies continue to use Zippo lighters as an advertising medium and Zippo "advertiser" lighters continue to be among collectors' favorites.

World War II had a profound effect on Zippo. Upon America's entry into the war, Zippo ceased production of lighters for consumer markets and dedicated all manufacturing to the U.S. military.

The military initiative led to the production of the steel-case Zippo lighter with black crackle finish. The fact that millions of American military personnel carried the lighter into battle was a significant catalyst in establishing Zippo as an icon of America throughout the world. Supplying the military market resulted in full production for the plant. This enabled Zippo to be strong financially and made it a viable company.

At the end of the war, Zippo hit the road selling lighters to peacetime America. A promoter at heart, Mr. Blaisdell wanted to create a car that looked like a Zippo lighter. In 1947, the Zippo Car was born.

Zippo Manufacturing Company, Canada, Ltd. was established in Niagara Falls, Ontario, in 1949 to negate import duties. Outside of the main plant in Bradford, this is the only place in the world where Zippo lighters have been made. The bottom stamps of lighters produced in Canada reflect the Niagara Falls location and are highly collectible. Due to the implementation of free trade policies in the 90s, a Canadian manufacturing facility was no longer needed, and the plant was closed in 2002.

Starting in the mid-50s, the bottom of every Zippo lighter was stamped with a [date code](#) signifying month and year of manufacture. The original purpose was for quality control, but the codes have since become an invaluable tool for collectors.

The launch of the Slim windproof lighter in 1956 was a major milestone. This version was designed to appeal primarily to women. The first non-lighter product was a retractable steel pocket tape measure introduced in 1962. Other items have been added and deleted from the Zippo line since the 1960s. Many were primarily geared to the promotional products division. The roster includes key chains, pocket knives, golf greenskeepers, pen-and-pencil sets and the ZipLight pocket flashlight.

Mr. Blaisdell passed away on October 3, 1978. He is remembered not only for inventing the Zippo lighter, but also for his generous and kind spirit. After his passing, his daughters, Harriett B. Wick and Sarah B. Dorn, inherited the business. In the 1980s and 90s, the company was owned by six members of the Blaisdell family, including his daughters and their children. Today, George B. Duke, Mr. Blaisdell's grandson and Sarah Dorn's son, is owner and Chairman of the Board.

In the 70s and 80s, Zippo greatly expanded its overseas sales and marketing efforts. As a result, Zippo lighters are now sold in more than 160 countries.

In 1993, Zippo acquired Bradford-based [W.R Case and Sons Cutlery Company](#), manufacturer of premium collectible and sport knives. Established in 1889, Case has a rich heritage and many aficionados collect both Case knives and Zippo lighters.

The number of Zippo collectors and fans is extensive. It's estimated that there are some four million Zippo collectors in the United States and 11 Zippo collectors clubs worldwide. People like

to identify with Zippo – there are more than 34,000 Zippo-related videos on YouTube, and over 225,000 fans on Facebook. At the same time, over 18 million Zippo enthusiasts have downloaded the Zippo iPhone app.

The [Zippo/Case Museum](#) opened in Bradford, PA, near the Zippo manufacturing facility, in 1997. The 15,000-square-foot facility includes a store, museum, and the famous Zippo Repair Clinic, where the Zippo lighter repair process is on display. It is Northern Pennsylvania's most-visited museum with thousands of visitors from around the world every year.

Perhaps one of the biggest influences on collecting is Zippo's starring roles in movies, Broadway shows, and television shows. The Zippo lighter has been featured in more than 1,500 movies, stage plays and television shows over the years, including such diverse productions as "I Love Lucy," "The X-Men," and "Hairspray – the Musical." Often the lighter is a key prop, used as a device to move the plot forward or to reflect the personality of a character or time period being depicted.

On the music scene, Zippo lighters have been raised high since the 1960s as a salute to favorite performers, a gesture later dubbed the "Zippo Moment." The famous Zippo "click" sound has been sampled on songs, and the lighters themselves have been featured on album covers, tattooed on rockers' skin, and wielded in Rolling Stone photo shoots. With a rock resume like this, [ZippoEncore.com](#) was created in 2007 to showcase the talents of bands across the country.

In the fall of 2002, Zippo obtained trademark registration for the shape of the [Zippo lighter](#). This was a major milestone in helping Zippo protect the brand from counterfeiters. The lighter is ingrained in the fabric of both American and global culture. In marketing parlance, the brand enjoys an unaided awareness rate of more than 98 percent. That means 98 out of every 100 people surveyed have knowledge of the Zippo name and lighter without being coached in any manner – an astonishing recognition factor.

In February, 2010, Zippo acquired the [Ronson](#) brand of lighters and fuel in North America. Ronson also has a rich history dating from its founding in 1886 by Louis V. Aronson.

In addition to Zippo and Ronson lighters and accessories, Zippo markets these diverse product lines: butane candle and utility lighters, watches, fragrance, lifestyle accessories for men, and a robust assortment of heat and flame products for outdoor enthusiasts.

This year, 2012, marks Zippo's 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and production of the 500 millionth lighter.

Buy your Zippo lighter from [www.nyttigbras.dk](http://www.nyttigbras.dk)