

Just For Openers January-December 2025 1

William P. White, Godfather

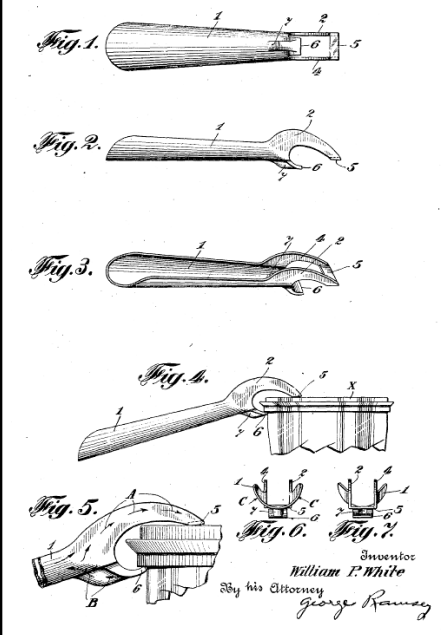
Of White Cap's Lid Flipper By Don Thornton

The White Cap Company was in a pickle. The Chicago firm had perfected a vapor vacuum lid sealer system and it was an unqualified success, with vast numbers of manufacturers racing to incorporate the new sealing technology into their glass bottling plants.

Think green olives, ketchup, pickles, and baby food preserved fresh and flavorful in bottles and jars – sealed tight with White Cap's revolutionary steam-based, vapor-tight system.

But there was a problem. The vacuum jars and bottles were sealed so tight they were frustratingly hard to open. A kitchen knife could do the job, but there was always the chance of a slip and injuries.

April 27, 1926. W. P. White 1,582,442
JAR CAP OPENER
Filed Jan. 6, 1926



William P. White, founder and president of White Cap, along with his partner brothers, Phil and George, recognized the problem. In fact, White had first hand knowledge -- having been granted a patent in 1926 for a "jar cap opener," Patent No. 1,582,442.

The problem was White had applied for the patent in 1921 while employed by the Anchor Cap & Closure Corporation. He had assigned all rights to Anchor and the New York firm had over the years produced immense numbers of the 4-inch tool marked: ANCHOR OPENER FOR REMOVING CAPS FROM GLASS CONTAINERS ANCHOR CAP & CLOSURE CORP. N.Y.C. (Although it was designed specifically "to uncap tightly sealed hermetic packages," it could also be used to remove crown caps on beverage bottles. (See *RANDOM FACTS* below.)

White had advanced to vice president of Anchor when he left the company to launch White Cap in 1926. By 1929, White Cap had developed, based on patents by William, a "Vapor Vacuum" high-speed process capable of sealing 100 food jars per minute. By the early 1940s, small and big businesses, ranging from independent dairies to pickle growers to giant food conglomerates, had purchased and employed the new machinery.



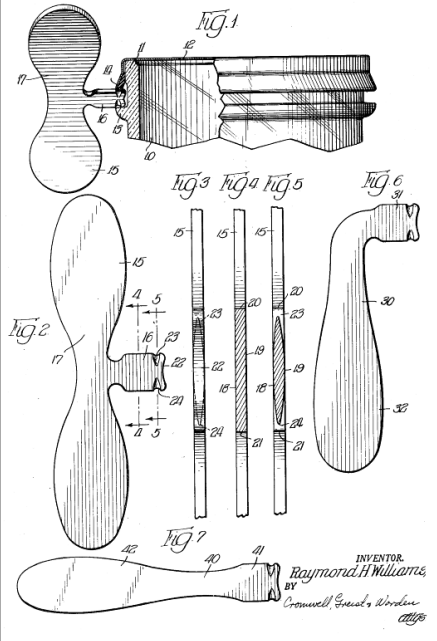
Just For Openers January-December 2025 2

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And thus the pickle. White Cap could not infringe on Anchor's patent but it still had to come up with its own opener – a requisite for effective promotion for White Cap and its customers.

According to one report, White Cap and the H. J. Heinz Company came up with a prototype vacuum cap remover in the early 1940s, but metal rationing during World War II felled the project. At war's end, White cap employee Raymond H. Williams of Chicago came to the rescue. Williams applied for a patent for his "pry type jar cap remover" on October 18, 1946. The patent was granted five years later, on October 16, 1951, Patent No. 2,571,401. Williams assigned all rights to White Cap.

Oct. 16, 1951. R. H. Williams 2,571,401
PRY TYPE JAR CAP REMOVER
Filed Oct. 18, 1946



Production began as soon as the patent was applied for and was an immediate household favorite. The thin, just under 2 ½-inch long, T-shaped device was marked: VAPOR-VACUUM JAR CAP OPENER WHITE CAP CO. CHICAGO INSERT UNDER CAP TURN LIKE KEY. White Cap also offered the tool for branding and in addition to Heinz dozens of other concerns, including Peter Pan Peanut Butter, Cheez Whiz and several pickle bottlers, jumped on the bandwagon. In newspaper ads of the day, Heinz offered the branded opener free to baby food customers.



It was a very important patent that turned out to be extremely profitable for White Cap. Inventor Williams obviously

was aware of its importance and being nobody's fool took the opportunity to do some management back scratching in his patent application.



Just For Openers January-December 2025 3

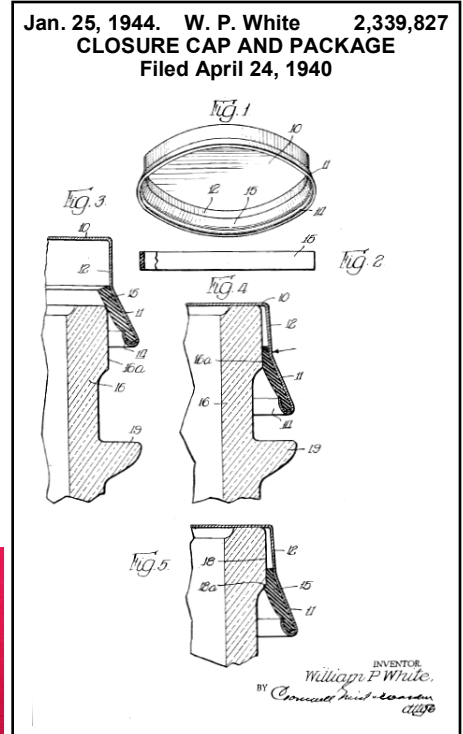
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"Closure caps or lids of the pry-off type ... have long been used on receptacles such as glass bottles and jars for putting up various kinds of products, particularly foods," Williams said in the second paragraph of his application. "The most popular pry-off cap now in use is the type such as shown in Patent No. 2,339,827, issued January 25, 1944 to William P. White." That's right, William P. White, his boss.

The story doesn't end here. There are two more chapters, both related to EKCO Products Company, at the time of the biggest housewares manufacturer in the country.

In 1954 White Cap made a deal with Chicago-based EKCO to manufacture the opener. Details are not known, but production of the opener, now twice as big and with a crown cap bottle opener, switched to EKCO and the "Lid Flipper" was born. With the help of clever advertising devised by White Cap, the Lid Flipper was an overnight kitchen sensation.

The new 4-inch device is marked on the main body: EKCO A&J U.S.A. PRY OFF LID FLIPPER PAT. 2,571,401 and at the top of the "T": INSERT UNDER CAP TURN LIKE KEY. The end with a punch out hook is marked: TUMBLER CAP LIFTER.



White Cap's advertising blitz included print ads and catchy news releases picked up by copy hungry newspaper food section editors. For example, The Springfield Journal in Springfield, New York, reported June 16, 1955 under the dateline Chicago: "A new ten-cent gadget called a lid flipper is causing a change in the phrase that has been familiar to homemakers for more than 25 years. The opening instructions -- 'To Open, Pry Up' -- on the lids of vacuum sealed glass food containers, will be amplified with the phrase, 'To Open, Use Lid Flipper.'"

FREE! "Lid Flipper"
JUST BY VISITING
Claster's During Festival

Here's the new Ekco "Lid Flipper" you've heard so much about. It's the finest all-around pry-off cap opener ever developed!

And this "Lid Flipper" is yours ABSOLUTELY FREE just by visiting Claster's during our Summer Savings Festival. Nothing to buy! Just ask for your "Lid Flipper" at Claster's Supply is Limited.

OPENS
jars
tumblers
bottles

FREE "LID FLIPPER"

Here's something new! "Lid Flipper" is an all-purpose opener for pry-off caps. Opens vapor-vacuum sealed-type jars, tumblers, bottles—the type so hard to get into, like baby food, catsup, jelly. One twist of the "Lid Flipper" and any size or type of vacuum lid pops off without bending or denting. The undamaged lid can be pressed back on, to preserve the jar contents. To get your FREE "Lid Flipper," just send 2 trade-mark pictures from any size sack of METROPOLITAN Flour or LIGHT WHITE Flour, along with your name and address, to: ROANOKE CITY MILLS, INC., Dept. LF, P. O. Box 1280, Roanoke, Va.

The Lid Flipper opens them all!

There's a brand new kitchen habit that's spreading over the land very rapidly, of late. It's the pleasant habit of using a Lid Flipper to open pry-off jars like those illustrated here.

This simple little key flips up all types of pry-off caps instantly, without effort. And it leaves them unbent, so they can be used over and over, for re-sealing.

A lid flipper costs only a dime. And you'll love it! Be sure to get one—in your food or variety store!



Just For Openers January-December 2025 4

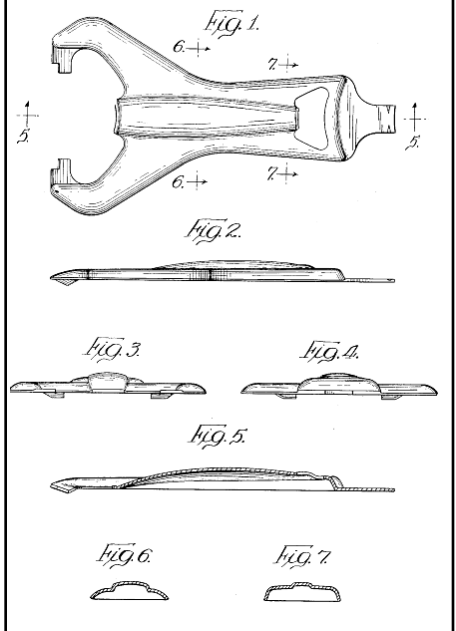
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EKCO apparently had another deal with White Cap when EKCO introduced its two-arm fruit jar and bottle cap opener in its "Miracle" product line. The just under 6-inch device is marked: EKCO A&J U.S.A. MIRACLE VACUUM JAR CAP LIFTER PAT'D 2,571,401 PAT. PEND.



Jan. 3, 1956. James L. Hyale Des. 176,518
COMBINED BOTTLE AND JAR OPENER
Filed Sept. 9, 1954



**INSERT
UNDER CAP
TURN LIKE KEY**

The Miracle's flat butt end flipper, covered by Williams patent, is exactly like the Lid Flipper and marked just the same under a pointing arrow:

And EKCO covered all its patent bases for the Miracle in 1956. Design Patent No. 176,518 was

awarded to James L. Hyale of Chicago on January 3 of that year for the sleek design of the device with cutout bottle opener. Hyale, an award winning industrial designer, assigned the patent to EKCO, his longtime employer.

William P. White retired in 1953 with the title president emeritus. He died in 1973 at the age of 88. His brothers and eventually his son ran the company for decades. In the early 2000s, the then-named Continental White Cap Company faded away following confusing corporate sales, takeovers, buyouts, and mergers. EKCO Products closed its Chicago operations in 1992.

Just For Openers January-December 2025 5

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RANDOM FACTS

- William P. White's 1926 patent did not rule out using the opener to remove crown caps from bottles, stating: "The present invention is designed to be utilized for uncapping various types of packages but primarily for removing such jar caps" that are hermetically sealed. White did not say it in the patent, but the opener works fine in removing crown caps.
- From 1915 to 1936, White was awarded more than a dozen patents, two for his openers, five for various closure caps and six for the machinery to process the caps and jars.
- Anchor Cap & Closure Corporation merged with Hocking Glass Company in 1937, becoming the famous Anchor Hocking Glass Corporation.
- In addition to its branding on the White Cap opener, the H. J. Heinz Company had its own opener, the history of which remains a challenge. The just under 3-inch beauty with hook crown cap opener is marked on one side: 57 HEINZ EST. 1869 SEE OTHER SIDE, and on the other side: JAR CAP OPENER FOR PRY OFF CAPS INSERT BLADE UNDER CAP AND TURN LIKE KEY TUMBLER CAP OPENER.

