

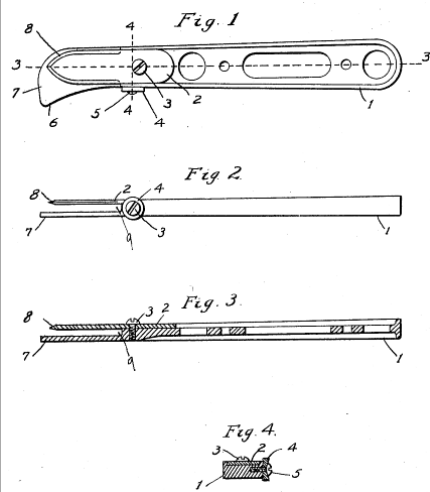
Just For Openers January-December 2025 1

William Blake & John Duket, Holy Toledo Can Openers By Don Thornton

Toledo, Ohio was home to not one but two inventors of can openers that proved very popular in the 1920s. They were similar in design and name but there were differences: The first one on the market was strictly a can opener, but a bottle opener hook was later added. The second one was originally a combo can and bottle opener, but the cap remover was switched to a hook and later eliminated.

First up was William F. Blake who was granted Patent No. 1,327,434 on January 6, 1920 for a can opener “with a safety blade guide so that one’s fingers are not injured.” Blake assigned 51% of the patent to Henry W. Duvenback, also of Toledo. The device was branded with a combination of the two names – the Du-Blake Can Opener made by the Du-Blake Manufacturing Company of Toledo.

Jan. 6, 1920. W. F. Blake
CAN OPENER
Filed June 25, 1917



Witness
L. S. Woodhull
Hayne R. Peppers
Inventor
William F. Blake

Two versions were manufactured, one at just over 6-inches long and the other 5 3/4-inches. In the first models the aluminum handle had three holes. A later model, with the hook bottle opener added to the cutting blade, had a solid cast-aluminum handle. The early three-hole model is marked on the back: **DU-BLAKE PATENTED TOLEDO, O.** The later solid model is marked on one side: **DU-BLAKE** and **TOLEDO, OHIO** on the other.



Just For Openers January-December 2025 2

William Blake & John Duket,

Holy Toledo Can Openers By Don Thornton

A 1921 newspaper advertisement listed the retail price at 50 cents and boasted: "The Perfect Can Opener." A 1922 edition of *Hardware World* said the Du-Blake "has been called one of the most unusual can openers ever put on the market. It cuts a clean, smooth edge, quickly and with less effort – in fact requiring no strangle hold on the can..." One object of Blake's invention was to allow the blade to be removed from the handle to be sharpened. "The blade is securely fastened to the handle by the screw and thus is readily removed to that the edges can be sharpened whenever necessary," Blake said.

Suggestions for the Kitchen

50c



Du Blake Can Opener

The perfect can opener, has aluminum handle and high-grade steel blade.

Fifteen months after the Du-Blake went on the market, Toledo inventor John J.

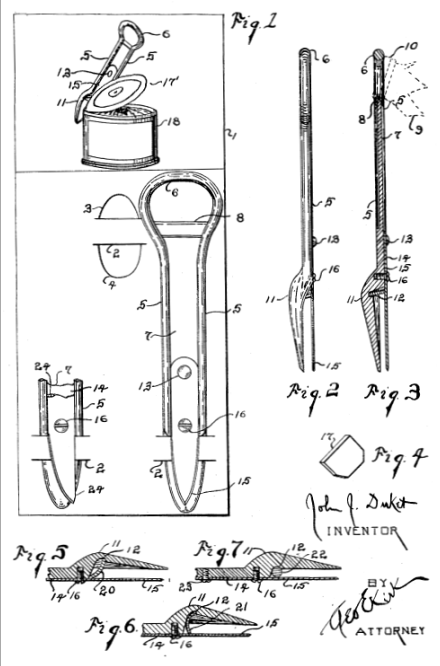
Duket applied for a patent on April 4, 1921 for a "container opening tool" very similar to Blake's opener, especially the blade design. Four years later he was granted Patent No. 1,548,988 on August 11, 1925 for his combo

opener, which also featured a removable blade. Duket said the circular open end of his tool was "effective for removing the (bottle) cap as crimped or otherwise held in position." He also said the opener's "double-edged blade" was designed for "seesawing progress for closely trimming the (can) lid."

Several versions of the Duket were made by the Duket Manufacturing Company of Toledo, all about 6-inches long. The three most popular versions are marked:

- DUKET CAN OPENER** (front) **PAT. APD. FOR** (back) cast-iron handle with round end bottle opener
- DUKET CAN-OPENER THE BEST BY TEST** (front) **DUKET MFG. CO. TOLEDO OHIO PATD. 8-11-25** (back) cast-iron handle with hook added to blade to open bottles
- DUKET CAN-OPENER EXTRA GOOD** (front) **DUKET MFG. CO. TOLEDO OHIO PAT. 8-11-25** (back) aluminum handle with curved hook on end, which probably could be used in a pinch to open bottles but probably was designed to hang on a nail.

Aug. 11, 1925. J. J. Duket 1,548,988
CONTAINER OPENING TOOL
Filed April 4, 1921



Just For Openers January-December 2025 3

William Blake & John Duket, Holy Toledo Can Openers By Don Thornton

Both Blake and Duket held several patents. Blake was granted a washing machine patent in 1920 while a Toledo resident. In later years he turned up in Chicago where he was awarded two more washing machine patents and patents for a fire extinguisher and jar opener, among others. He died in 1957 at the age of 82. Duket began his patent career in 1899 with a "skirt and waist holder" invention and was granted at least nine other patents over the years. Those included a hat fastener, an oil burner, a pan lifter and an unusual "folding Jack-O-Lantern." He died in 1960 at the age of 95.

But back to Toledo, Blake and Duket. There is the lingering question: Holy Toledo -- what's with all the opener similarities? There is the same city, time period, cutting blades, blades with hooks, aluminum handles and names that begin with DU. Unfortunately, extensive research of readily available public records did not turn up any connections between the three. However, it is interesting to note that one story behind the phrase 'Holy Toledo' is a reference to gangsters laying low or holed up in Toledo during Prohibition (1920-1933) under a secret agreement with police for a crime free city.

