Encouraging Invention by Municipal Employees

By REBECCA B. RANKIN
Municipal Reference Librarian, New York City

FEW PEOPLE are aware that the city of New York encourages invention among municipal employees. This is not altogether an altruistic act on the part of the city, because the city itself gains a very considerable advantage in making use of these technical advances. However, it is believed to be unique for a municipality to assist men who have ideas for improvements in the use of machinery in city departments and to secure their patents for them.

In 1937 a policy in regard to inventions was adopted whereby the city employees who develop new devices to help in their daily work are privileged to ask the city to apply for patents for them. The city files for the patent in the name of the employee who is the inventor, and the patent is issued to the individual; but under a so-called "shop right" rule the city has a free license as the employer to use the invention for all municipal purposes without payment of any royalty.

The City Is Protected

The city is always protected in the event of patent litigation involving similar constructions, and the city employee has no expense and full assurance of best legal advice in securing his patent, and the privilege to sell it to other cities or corporations.

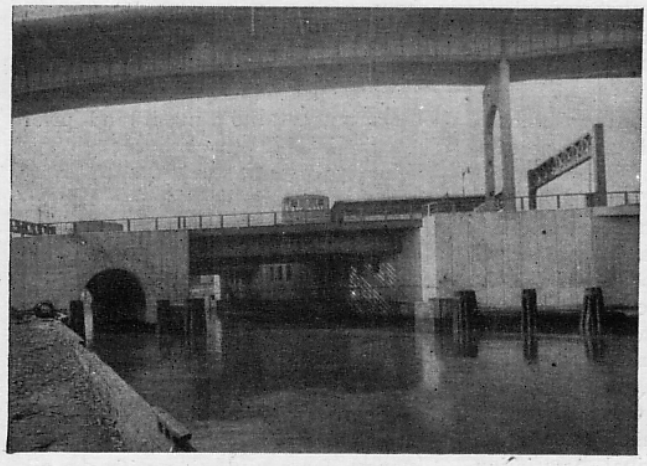
The recognition of city employees for inventions has resulted in the introduction of a large number of labor-saving tools, devices, and chemical processes for use in municipal departments. A few of the most interesting ones on which patents have been applied for by George H. Mitchell, patent counsel, are the new "draw" bridge on Hamilton Avenue over the Gowanus Canal, the only one of its kind in the world. It is called the Skew Bascule Bridge and was invented by Clinton D. Hanover, Jr., Chief of the Bureau of Bridge Design in the Department of Public Works. The street crosses the canal at an acute angle—it is not a square crossing.

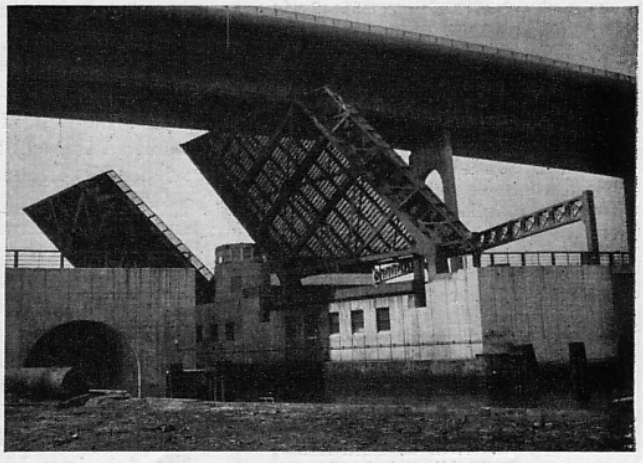
A labor-saving device on which a patent has been allowed is a tire stripping machine for removing motor vehicle tires from their supporting rims, the invention of Joseph S. Plumeau and Carl C. Ottoson of the Department of Sanitation. The saving of man hours over the old hammer and chisel method is incalcuable.

Accurate Testing of Milk

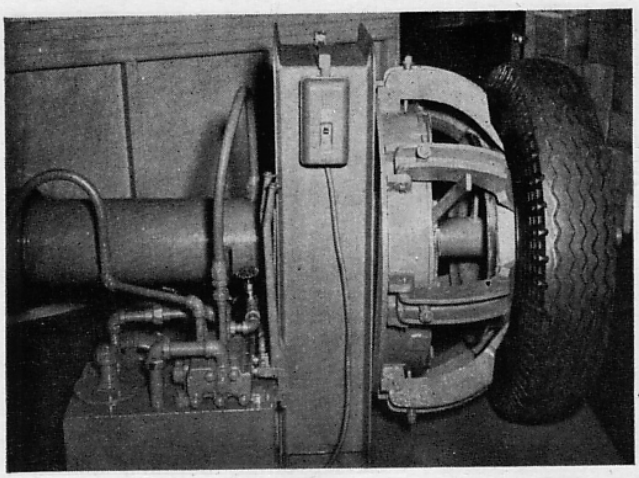
Pasteurization insures the safety of dairy products by requiring that such products be subjected to a temperature of 143 degrees Fahrenheit for 30 minutes, which experience has shown is sufficient to destroy all pathogenic (disease producing) organisms which may be present in the unpasteurized

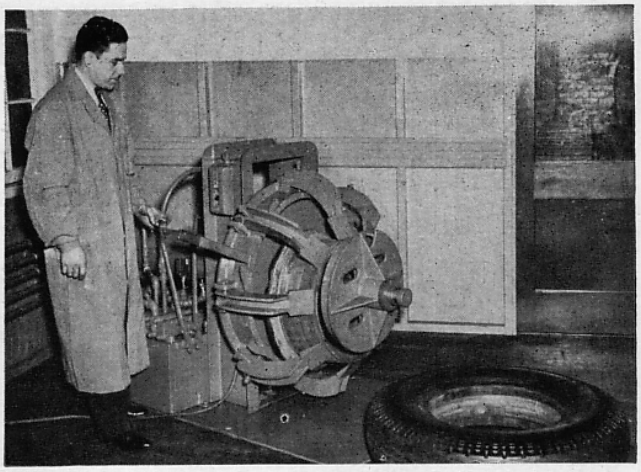
Loading the hopper of a late model New York City refuse truck. From the hopper refuse is conveyed into the truck body by hydraulically operated flights carried by chains somewhat like an escalator





The Skew Bascule draw bridge over the Gowanus Canal in New York City at a place where a street crosses the canal at an acute angle. It was invented by Clinton D. Hanover, Jr., Chief, Bureau of Bridge Design, Department of Public Works





This tire-stripping machine, which is called a "Tire Press," removes motor vehicle tires from their supporting rims much faster than the hammer and chisel method could

product. Harry Scharer, chemist of the Department of Health, has perfected an enzyme test upon which a patent has been granted which indicates when the pasteurization process has been ineffective or inefficient. This test is so sensitive that it will indicate when the temperature is even one degree low, or when only 25 minutes of heating is used instead of the required 30, and will even indicate the presence of as little as one-tenth of one percent raw milk which may have inadvertently leaked into the pasteurized milk during the process.

Another labor-saving device—this one developed by J. S. Plumeau and E. C. C. Miller in the city's Motor Repair Shop, and on which a patent has been granted—is a machine for replacing broom bristles used in the large mechanically-operated brooms used for sweeping the city's streets. Whereas formerly it took two men seven hours to make up a broom, this equipment will turn out one in from 18 to 21 minutes.

The fatal results of the time bomb found in the British pavilion of the World's Fair on July 4, 1940, showed the necessity for having some type of conveyor to transport unexploded bombs to an isolated spot where they might be detonated without danger to life or property. For this purpose three members of the Police Department and Mayor LaGuardia designed a bomb carrier on which all four persons are now the patentees.