

## A Moment in Black History

Sources: <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/spikes-richard-1878-1965/>



Richard Bowie Spikes (1878-1965) was an American inventor with eight patents to his name, awarded between 1907 and 1946. He was born in Dallas, Texas to Monroe Spikes, a barber, and Medora (Kirby) Spikes.

Richard Bowie Spikes learned to cut hair in his father's barber shop, and briefly became a public-school teacher in Beaumont, Texas. On October 8, 1900, he married Lula Belle Charlton, daughter of Charles Napoleon Charlton, an ex-slave who co-founded the first public schools for Blacks in the city of Beaumont. They had a son, Richard Don Quixote Spikes. Soon after, the Spikes family moved west to Albuquerque, New Mexico and later Bisbee, Arizona where he operated a barber shop and later a saloon

On April 9, 1907, in Bisbee, Arizona, Spikes became dissatisfied with how draft beer was dispensed from a keg and he developed variations on the pressure-dispense Beer Tap. The tap used tubing to ease the release of beer from the barrel, while also improving freshness over time and this technology is currently in use. Mr. Spike's next invention was a self-locking rack for billiard cues which was granted patent on October 11, 1910, in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He went on to invent several other devices including break testing machine, pantograph for conveying electrical current to trolleys' wires, combination milk bottle opener and cover, device to obtain average samples and temperatures of tank liquids, an improved gear shift transmission, horizontally swinging barber's chair, and an automatic brake safety system at the age of 84.

The most significant of all his inventions are those related to automotive technology which he received patent on in 1932. Spikes' gear shifting device aimed to keep the gears for various speeds in constant mesh, enhancing the turn-of-the-century invention of the automatic transmission. His automatic brake safety system was also significant; according to the patent application, it provided a reserve braking action in case of damage to the normal braking means and is still used in some buses as a fail-safe means of stopping the vehicle.

Richard Bowie Spikes died on January 22, 1965, in Los Angeles, California at the age of 86.

### References:

1. RICHARD SPIKES (1878-1965): <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/spikes-richard-1878-1965/>

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2. Richard B. Spikes, Inventor born: <https://aaregistry.org/story/richard-b-spikes-inventor-born/>