

Generations of STEM:

Percy LeBaron Spencer

Microwave Oven Inventor

Percy LeBaron Spencer was born in 1894 in Howland, Maine. He was raised by his aunt and uncle after his father passed and his mother left him when he was only 18 months old. At age 7, his uncle died and Percy was on his own supporting his aunt and working at a spool mill. Upon hearing the local

Maine paper mill was using electricity, he began working there after teaching himself the basics of electricity at the age of 16. He joined the Navy and continued to teach himself about wireless radio technology, physics, chemistry, trigonometry, calculus, and metallurgy. His self-taught skills brought him to Raytheon developing radar. By 1939, he was one of the world's top experts on radar tubes.

While standing next to a magnetron, Percy noticed his candy bar had melted in his pocket. As any scientist would, he experimented with other foods to see what happened. Popcorn popped, eggs exploded. This discovery led to the invention of the microwave cooking oven, originally called the Radarange. About 20 years later Amana, a division of Raytheon, released a commercial version. Despite no formal education, Percy had over 300 patents, a Fellowship in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and many other honors.

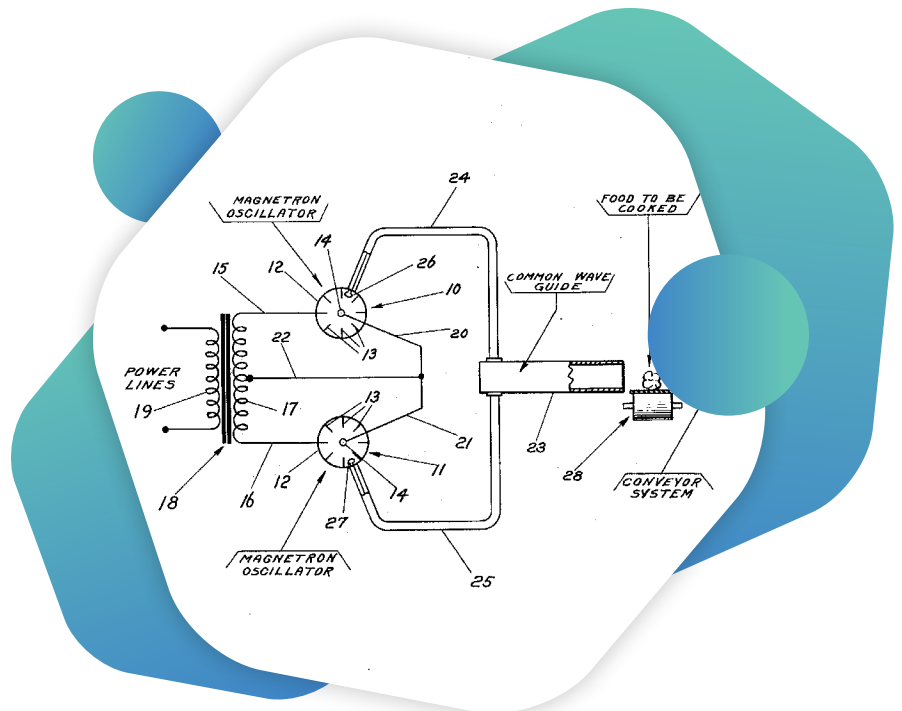


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