A Clino-cladistic Look at Pull & Push Tab Patents ca.1950-1980

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Abstract

Pull tabs revolutionized the way beverage cans and food containers were opened and their contents removed. Ermel Fease is credited with this, yet he was not alone. In the invention nor was he technically the first. Until recently, pull tabs were not considered diagnostic in Historical Archaeology because they had not yet met the 50-year-old threshold. As of 2019, ring pull tabs entered the historic era, yet relatively little is known about these artifacts, in order to place these artifacts in terminus ante and post quem timeframes for historical archaeologists who have located and will more frequently encounter these items of disposable material culture, a database with hyperlinks has been built to provide an archival reference. There are hundreds of patented variations and manufacturing methods in the United States Patent and Trademark Office filed and accepted between ca.1950 and 1980 yet really only two generic—pull and push, and four species—snap top, ring pull, stay-tab, and push button. Taking a cue from biology, the inventors were arranged by family based on the first instance of a morphological characteristic (snap) and by progeniture (inventors) then put in numerical/chronological order based on their patent or design filing and/or acceptance dates (alike) thereby generating a genealogy or family tree thereby charting their evolution. Not all patents or designs saw nationwide production or distribution; some never saw production. Not all patents, designs, or innovations are represented here. And, one should keep in mind the "Finn lag" between a patent's filing, patent pending production, and its official acceptance. Products also had a use life and disposal period that often extended past its manufacturer's date range. Functional ease, compatibility with can manufacturing machinery, reduction of harm, and esthetics also influenced the food and beverage container industry to "build a better mousetrap." Then there's "Blister Shrance"...