

WHAT MIGHT HAVE HAPPENED IF THE AMERICA INVENTS ACT HAD BEEN A LAW IN 1886. Dean F. Martin, Department of Chemistry, University of South Florida, 4202 Fowler Ave. CHE 205, Tampa, FL 33620.

The America Invents Act brings a certain rule of the Patent and Trademark Office in compliance with worldwide practices. Had the law been in effect in 1886 it is possible that Charles Martin Hall, American discoverer of the electrochemical reduction of bauxite, a major aluminum mineral, would not have received the critical patents. Paul L. T. Héroult, a Frenchman, would have. Héroult had obtained a patent in France and applied for a U.S. patent. The rule until last summer awarded the patent to whomever first reduced the invention to practice. In the patent trial of 1886, Hall showed he was the first to invent. His supporters formed the Pittsburg Reduction Co.—later converted into Alcoa—which held a monopoly in the US until after WWII. Hall became a multimillionaire, generously enhanced the endowment of Oberlin College, and Alcoa made a significant contribution to the production of airplanes during WW II.