Patent Act of 1897, Ch. 391, 29 Stat. 692-694 (March 3, 1897)

CHAP. 391. --An Act Revising and amending the statutes relating to patents.

Scope

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That section forty-eight hundred and eighty-six of the Revised Statutes be, and the same hereby is, amended by inserting on line four, after the word "country," the words "before his invention or discovery thereof," and on line five, after the word "thereof," the words "or more than two years prior to his application," so that the clause so amended will read as follows:

"SEC. 4886. Any person who has invented or discovered any new and useful art, machine, manufacture, or composition of matter, or any new and useful improvements thereof, not known or used by others in this country, before his invention or discovery thereof, and not patented or described in any printed publication in this or any foreign country, before his invention or discovery thereof, or more than two years prior to his application, and not in public use or on sale in this country for more than two years prior to his application, unless the same is proved to have been abandoned, may, upon payment of the fees required by law, and other due proceeding had, obtain a patent therefor."

SEC. 2.

That section forty-nine hundred and twenty of the Revised Statutes be, and the same hereby is, amended by adding to the third clause of said section after "thereof" and before "or" the following words: "or more than two years prior to his application for a patent therefor," so that the section so amended will read as follows:

"SEC. 4920. In any action for infringement the defendant may plead the general issue, and, having given notice in writing to the plaintiff or his attorney thirty days before, may prove on trial any one or more of the following special matters:

"First. That for the purpose of deceiving the public the description and specification filed by the patentee in the Patent Office was made to contain less than the whole truth relative to his invention or discovery, or more than is necessary to produce the desired effect; or,

"Second. That he had surreptitiously or unjustly obtained the patent for that which was in fact invented by another, who was using reasonable diligence in adapting and perfecting the same; or,

"Third. That it has been patented or described in some printed publication prior to his supposed invention or discovery thereof, or more than two years prior to his application for a patent therefor; or,

"Fourth. That he was not the original and first inventor or discoveror of any material and substantial part of the thing patented; or,

"Fifth. That it had been in public use or on sale in this country for more than two years before his application for a patent, or had been abandoned to the public.

"And in notices as to proof of previous invention, knowledge, or use of the thing patented, the defendant shall state the names of the patentees and the dates of their patents, and when granted, and the names and residences of the persons alleged to have invented or to have had the prior knowledge of the thing patented, and where and by whom it had been used; and if any one or more of the special matters alleged shall be found for the defendant, judgment shall be rendered for him with costs. And the like defenses may be pleaded in any suit in equity for relief against an alleged infringement; and proofs of the same may be given upon like notice in the answer of the defendant, and with the like effect."

SEC. 3.

That section forty-eight hundred and eighty-seven of the Revised Statutes be, and the same hereby is, amended by inserting on line one, after the words "no person," the words "otherwise entitled thereto," and on line three, after the words "caused to be patented," the words "by the inventor or his legal representatives or assigns," and by erasing therein all that portion of the section which follows the words "in a foreign country," on lines three and four, and substituting in lieu thereof the following: "unless the ap- plication for said foreign patent was filed more than seven months prior to the filing of the application in this country, in which case no patent shall be granted in this country" so that the section so amended will read as follows:

"SEC. 4887. No person otherwise entitled thereto shall be debarred from receiving a patent for his invention or discovery, nor shall any patent be declared invalid, by reason of its having been first patented or caused to be patented by the inventor or his legal representatives or assigns in a foreign country, unless the application for said foreign patent was filed more than seven months prior to the filing of the application in this country, in which case no patent shall be granted in this country."

SEC. 4.

That section forty-eight hundred and ninety-four of the Revised Statutes be, and the same hereby is, amended by striking out the words "two years" in every place where they occur and substituting in lieu thereof the words "one year," so that the section so amended will read as follows:

"SEC. 4894. All applications for patents shall be completed and prepared for examination within one year after the filing of the application, and in default thereof, or upon failure of the applicant to prosecute the same within one year after any action therein, of which notice shall have been given to the applicant, they shall be regarded as abandoned by the parties thereto, unless it be shown to the satisfaction of the Commissioner of Patents that such delay was unavoidable."

SEC. 5.

That section forty-eight hundred and ninety-eight of the Revised Statutes be, and the same hereby is, amended by adding thereto the following sentence:

"If any such assignment, grant, or conveyance of any patent shall be acknowledged before any notary public of the several States or Territories or the District of Columbia, or any commissioner of the United States circuit court, or before any secretary of legation or consular officer authorized to administer oaths or perform notarial acts under section seventeen hundred and fifty of the Revised Statutes, the certificate of such acknowledgment, under the hand and official seal of such notary or other officer, shall be prima facie evidence of the execution of such assignment, grant, or conveyance," so that the section so amended will read as follows:

"SEC. 4898. Every patent or any interest therein shall be assignable in law by an instrument in writing, and the patentee or his assigns or legal representatives may in like manner grant and convey an exclusive right under his patent to the whole or any specified part of the United States. An assignment, grant, or conveyance shall be void as against any subsequent purchaser or mortgagee for a valuable consideration, without notice, unless it is recorded in the Patent Office within three months from the date thereof.

"If any such assignment, grant, or conveyance of any patent shall be acknowledged before any notary public of the several States or Territories or the District of Columbia, or any commissioner of the United States circuit court, or before any secretary of legation or consular officer authorized to administer oaths or perform notarial acts under section seventeen hundred and fifty of the Revised Statutes, the certificate of such acknowledgment, under the hand and official seal of such notary or other officer, shall be prima facie evidence of the execution of such assignment, grant or conveyance."

SEC. 6.

That section forty-nine hundred and twenty-one of the Revised Statutes be, and the same hereby is, amended by adding thereto the following sentence:

"But in any suit or action brought for the infringement of any patent there shall be no recovery of profits or damages for any infringement committed more than six years before the filing of the bill of complaint or the issuing of the writ in such suit or action, and this provision shall apply to existing causes of action," so that the section so amended will read as follows:

"SEC. 4921. The several courts vested with jurisdiction of cases arising under the patent laws shall have power to grant injunctions according to the course and principles of courts of equity, to prevent the violation of any right secured by patent, on such terms as the court may deem reasonable; and upon a decree being rendered in any such case for an infringement the complainant shall be entitled to recover, in addition to the profits to be accounted for by the defendant, the damages the complainant has sustained thereby; and the court shall assess the same or cause the same to be assessed under its direction. And the court shall the same power to increase such damages, in its discretion, as is given to increase the damages found by verdicts in actions in the nature of actions of trespass upon the case.

"But in any suit or action brought for the infringement of any patent there shall be no recovery of profits or damages for any infringement committed more than six years before the filing of the bill of complaint or the issuing of the writ in such suit or action, and this provision shall apply to existing causes of action."

SEC. 7.

That in every case where the head of any Department of the Government shall request the Commissioner of Patents to expedite the consideration of an application for a patent it shall be the duty of such head of a Department to be represented before the Commissioner in order to prevent the improper issue of a patent.

SEC. 8.

That this Act shall take effect January first, eighteen hundred and ninety-eight, and sections one, two, three, and four, amending sections forty-eight hundred and eighty-six, forty-nine hundred and twenty, forty-eight hundred and eighty-seven, and forty-eight hundred and ninety-four of the Revised Statutes, shall not apply to any patent granted prior to said date, nor to any application filed prior to said date, nor to any patent granted on such an application.

Legislative History

APPROVED, March 3, 1897.