

## **Sterling Elliott (1852-1922)**

Sterling Elliott is a classic example of the great American success story. He was born in 1852 on a farm in Ortonville Michigan. At the age of 17, he left home and walked 92 miles to Grand Rapids arriving with only eight dollars to his name. He worked various odd jobs to save money so he could afford to get to Chicago. Once there, he showed an aptitude for all things mechanical and was soon applying for patents for his inventions.

In 1875, at the age of 23 he moved to the east coast, specifically Boston, because his inventions could be better manufactured at a lower cost. He opened up his first machine shop where he worked night and day for seven years, and in 1882 with enough savings, moved his machine shop to Watertown. With that in place, he then opened a bicycle factory next door. At this same time, down the street was a photographic business owned by the Stanley Brothers. Both Elliott and the Stanley brothers were mechanical geniuses and soon became good friends.

In 1886, Mr. Elliott invented the Quadricycle. It had a non-turning front axle, self-equalizing brakes, and a two-wheel steering mechanism. However, without a doubt, the most important was its ability to keep all four wheels in contact with the road surfaces.

He also invented a pamphlet-stitching machine, which took nearly 9 years to perfect. The result was a new and much simpler way to tie a double square knot. Sterling said, "It was during a sermon at the First Unitarian Church of Watertown that in experimenting with a piece of string", he devised a method in which a machine could make and tie the knot in succession. These stitching machines are manufactured and still extensively used in Great Britain to this day. Other inventions include the electric door opener and various kinds of machining tools. He is probably best known for his development of the automobile steering mechanism.

Another of his inventions was a direct result of his bicycle manufacturing. It was a system of addressing labels for use in the postal service. He published a magazine called "Bicycle World", and in order for him to mail tens of thousands of subscriptions with little labor and cost he invented this device for labeling mail. They say this invention predated what the computers could do by nearly one hundred years.

In 1886, Sterling Elliott sold his bicycle factory to the Stanley Brothers. Francis and Freeland Stanley, identical twins, used the quadricycle as inspiration for the design of the first steam-powered automobile.

In 1900, Sterling formed the Elliott Addressing Machine Company. In 1907, Mr. Elliott, at a sum of 15.00 dollars a week, hired Harmon P. Elliott, Sterling's only son. Two years later, he became the company's Treasurer and Business Manager. Over the years, father and son worked together and between them received over 200 patents.

In 1922, Mr. Sterling Elliott passed away at the age of 70. His son, who was born in 1887, built a museum in memory of his father in 1960. Harmon gave all the family's collections and inventions including the building and land to the Historical Society of Martin County, Florida. Harmon also included an endowment to maintain the museum for the people of Martin County. To honor the memory of his mother, Adell Parker Elliott, he gave a very large donation to the Martin Memorial Hospital.

Harmon P. Elliott passed away in 1969