

A Step Back in Time By Bobbie Sue Shelton

Sterling Owen "S. O." Edmonds

The Edmonds family arrived in Williamson County (the Eagleville area) between 1842 and 1847. Sterling H. Edmonds, a schoolteacher arrived in Eagleville from Brunswick County, Virginia with his mother Lucy, wife Martha and 5 children. Another child was born soon after their arrival. The Edmonds family had traveled to Tennessee with several other families. In 1850 they were living near Chesley Williams and attended the Harpeth Baptist Church, located about 1½ miles north of Eagleville.

On March 25th 1850 Sterling H. Edmonds died. His mother, wife and children: Minerva, Rebecca, Jane, Joseph Sterling, Martha and Lucy continued living in Eagleville. Joseph Sterling, the only son was 10 years old when his father died. He grew up quickly, working and helping with the responsibility the family's survival.

Joseph Sterling married in 1866 to Drucilla Price Owen, daughter of Peter and Matilda Brooks Owen. They had 4 children: Samuel Houston, Sterling Owen, Edgar and Ethel Edmonds. Joseph Sterling was a very successful businessman. He was known to be one of the best mechanics in the area. He had the reputation of fixing anything that was broken. As his sons, Samuel "Sam" and Sterling Owen "S. O." became adults, they joined him in some of his business adventures; the J. S. Edmonds & Son Funeral Undertakers, a grist mill, blacksmith shop and grain hauling business to name a few. The other Edmonds children; Edgar married Mary Cantrell and Ethel married Ervin Moon, left the Eagleville area after their marriage. Joseph Sterling died in 1911 and his wife, Drucilla died in 1925.

Joseph and Drucilla's oldest son, Samuel Houston Edmonds, born in 1867, married 1st Margaret C. Elam in 1893. She and her baby died during childbirth and are buried in the Russell Cemetery, north of Eagleville. Sam married 2nd to Luda May Wilson, daughter of Thomas Jefferson and Sarah Alice Swaim Wilson. Luda was born in 1874 and died in 1968. They had four children; Sammie May who married Sam A. McPherson and 2nd Sam Jones Bellenfant; Joseph Thomas who died in 1911 at the age of 14; Ann Ella who married Melvin Tomlin and Sarah Price who married Earl Barnes. Sam ran the blacksmith shop after the death of his father, along with helping his brother,

Sterling O., with other business ventures and with some of the inventions that Sterling perfected. He was also recognized in the community for his music ability. He and a group of friends organized a band, often playing at church and other functions. Sam Edmonds died in 1937.

Sterling Owen Edmonds, born in 1871, often called S. O. or Dump, married in 1904 to Marge Neelly daughter of John and Cynthia Neelly. She and their son died July 1913 during childbirth. They are buried in the Neelly Cemetery, north of Eagleville.

Later in 1913 S. O. married 2nd to Ethel Motlow, daughter of Felix and Finetta Daniel Motlow of Lynchburg, Tennessee. Ethel, born in 1885, was a schoolteacher in Eagleville at the time of her marriage. S. O. died in March

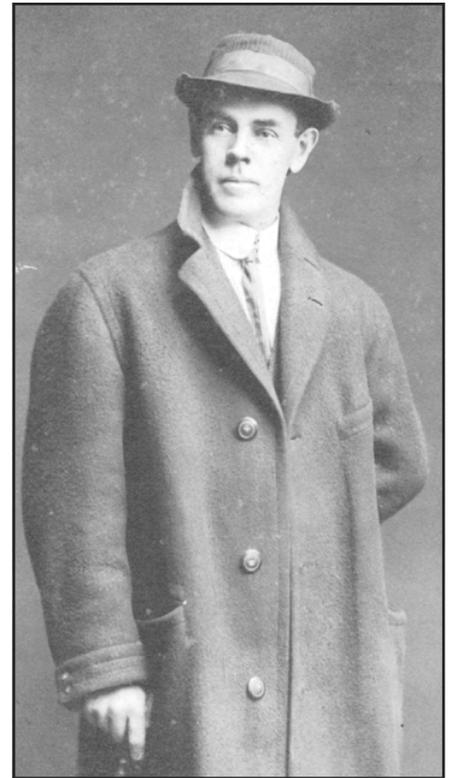
1954 and Ethel died about 4 months later. They had no children. S. O. is buried in the Neelly Cemetery and Ethel is buried in Lynchburg, Tennessee. Ethel's family were very prominent and respected residents of Moore County. Her uncle, Jasper Newton "Jack" Daniel was the founder of Jack Daniel Distillery in Lynchburg Tennessee. (See separate article, "Jack Daniel Distillery"). In 1967, Ethel's family, the Motlow's of Lynchburg donated 187 acres of land for a college to be built in Moore County. The college was opened in September 1969 and was named Motlow College.

Sterling Owen, the son of a mechanic, found inventing came easy for him. As a boy he rigged up various gadgets in his dad's shop that were found to be a great help around the shop and the Edmonds home. One of his inventions came out of a need to make a job easier. As a partner with his Dad and brother, Sam, in the funeral home business, he invented a device that could be used to lower caskets in the grave without manual labor. Those who knew of his ability for inventions considered Edmonds a genius. As time passed and more of his inventions were put to use, he became a familiar name to households throughout Tennessee.

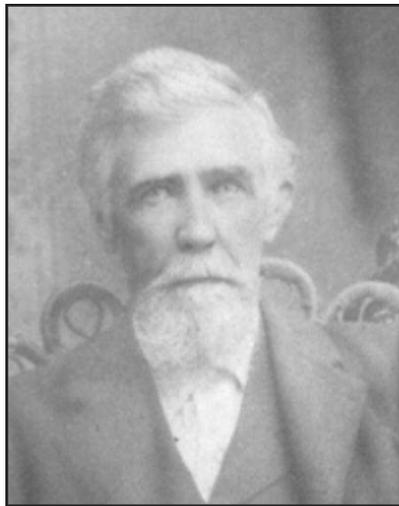
The following information is from an interview with Edmonds in the late 1930's for a newspaper article. Few people today know that it was an Eagleville inventor who conceived the idea of the first trailer truck and gave his invention to the U. S. Government in 1917.

"I was in the grain business and operated 40 teams and wagons on the road. The automobile had been in use around here for several years, but as yet, no one had thought of making a truck. So I decided to attach a flat bed wagon to the front part of a Model T Ford, making it the first truck, I think, in the country. From the hybrid automobile-wagon contraption, the truck grew in a more stable status". This is how inventing the truck evolved in the inventor's own words. "I took the back wheels off a Model T, and replaced them with a sprocket having the desired teeth to give a reduction of speed. Then I mounted the front end of a steel-bodied trailer instead of the wagon on the front end of the prime mover." In 1916 a patent was obtained on the six-wheel truck, which was the first of its kind in the world. The patents were obtained not only in the United States, but also in Great Britain, Germany, France and Canada.

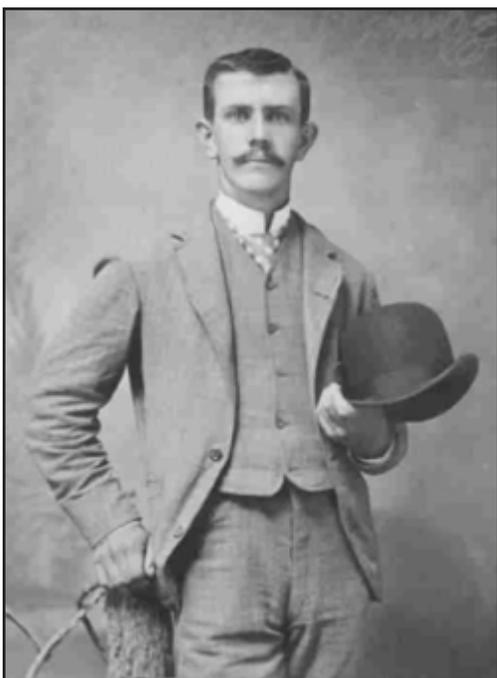
Edmonds and a group of investors established the Trans-Mo Truck Company of Nashville, which did a flourishing business as circulars, was distributed by the company. The circulars carried designs, which were produced at the factory under the brain and brawn of the inventor. He added the hydraulic lift to some of his designs, making a dump truck. (This is how he got the nickname "Dump"). Then the war came and needed metals went into munitions. The Trans-Mo Truck Company faced a shutdown, but its organizer decided



Sterling Owen Edmonds-circa 1900



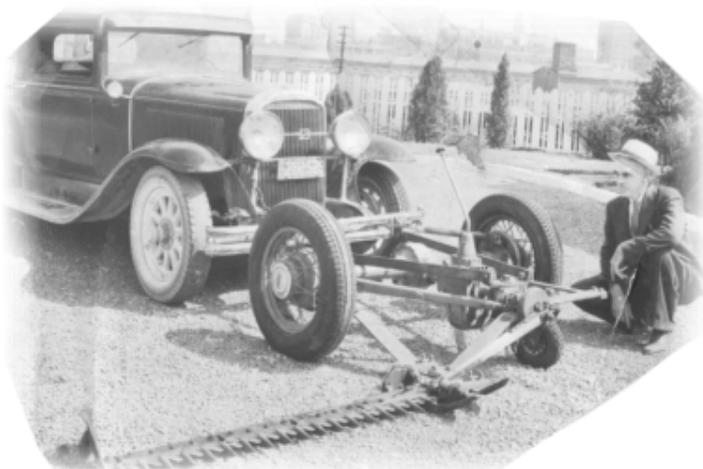
Joseph Sterling Edmonds



Sam Edmonds



Luda Wilson Edmonds



S. O. Edmonds With Mower At The World's Fair in Chicago

to buy out its partners. The shutdown came and Edmonds went to Washington and presented to the Quartermaster-General of the United States Army the invention. "I suppose the truck was more needed to beat Germans than to beat Tennessee roads," he commented.

The war was over, the Eagleville inventor set about dismissing the trailer truck from his mind. He went to work on plans and specifications for a vacuum street cleaner and made one for the City of Murfreesboro. He also made various gadgets like the So-Easy jack for big trucks, an idea he sold to a Chattanooga manufacturing firm; milk coolers and insulated receptacle for milk bottles when brought by the milkman; an air jack that raised the car for the spare and a revolving rural mailbox. It is thought that the idea for guardrails on roads also came from Edmonds.

"Back in 1919 they had a fair at the Rutherford County Fairgrounds and this fellow did a stunt with an airplane." Says Edmonds. "When it landed the thing turned over and several of us went over to pull the pilot out from under it. Then I got to thinking that it would be a find thing if somebody would invent an airplane that would land straight down. Later I decided that somebody was me". Edmonds drawing of the autogiro was based on the same principle as the one patented four years later by the Spaniard, de Cierva. He filed an application for the patent, spending about \$600 with Washington patent attorneys. When the attorneys told him they could put it over for about \$400 more, Edmonds went about dismissing the autogiro from his mind.

In 1933 Edmonds attended the World's Fair in Chicago with his mower invention. This trip boosted his business since it was a great help to the farmers.

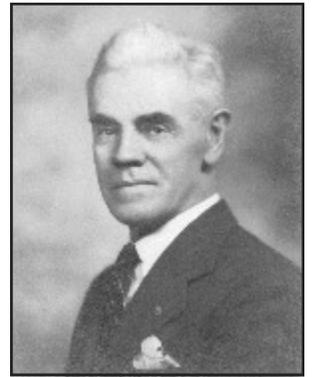
Sometime in the late 1930's Sterling O. Edmonds invented the pressure pump, which he thought was his most important invention because it was the greatest help to the farm family. The pump, suitable for spring wells, creeks, shallow and deep wells could be installed at half the price of any other pump and will give better service than most of them. He applied for a patent on the pump but no records can be found, concerning received or not. "My pumps are going at the rate of two

a day and I have more orders than I can fill." Edmonds stated. The "Dump Edmonds Pumps" as they were referred to in the Eagleville area, were introduced to the public at the Tennessee State Fair.

Edmonds genius mind was not all on the utilitarian side. He was the man who made possible all those revolving signs motorists saw at filling stations, for it was his idea to construct cylinders on them so that the sign would revolve in the wind. Another invention was the automatic lipstick. (Lipstick tube) "I visit so many offices and see the young ladies taking up a lot of their employers' time putting on lipstick." He commented. "So I got the idea of having a gadget that will do the work automatically while the stenographer types. It ought to work", added the inventor. "Fiddlesticks," said his usual understanding wife.

These are only a few of his inventions that we know about. I'm sure there were many more that was put on paper, but never materialized. I personally knew Dump and Ethel Edmonds when I was growing up. In 1930 my Dad, Junior Redmon, started working for him at the age of 16. I remember Dump coming to our home at night to discuss business with Daddy. When I was very young, I thought he was one of my grandfathers. I looked forward to him coming to visit. Dump's old shop was located just behind the present Eagleville post office. Daddy took over the business when Dump died in 1954 and continued, making pressure pumps, farm gates and doing all kinds of plumbing until his death in 1961.

The Edmonds home was the second house directly behind the post office on highway 99. When I was born, my parents and sister, Hazel, was living in a small trailer located between the Edmonds home and the shop. Hazel remembers Ethel Edmonds coming over during the summer and taking her home with her. She would put a washing tub of water out in the sun to warm up and let Hazel play in the water and take her bath in it. We considered Dump and Ethel as part of our family. Jane Shelton of Eagleville also remembers Dump bringing bags of candy and fruit for all the children to the Baptist Church at Christmas and how glad they were to see him. She remembers him laughing with the children. Lynda Sledge, a great granddaughter of Sam Edmonds, brother to Dump, remembers being scared by stories that Dump would tell her about the time they were in the funeral home business. Dump Edmonds enjoyed being around children. He was a rather quite person, but enjoyed his friends and family. His inventions made life a lot easier for many, many people that never knew him.



Sterling Owen Edmonds



S. O. Edmonds with Pressure Pump Invention, Tennessee State Fair-Edmonds 1st from left; Junior Redmon 1st from right; Carlton Floyd 2nd from right

1903 Advertisement



J. S. Edmonds & Son
Funeral
Undertakers

A Full line of Caskets in Wood and Cloth kept in Stock. Also a Nice Line of Ladies Robes, Slippers, Gloves, Etc.

PRICES REASONABLE.

EAGLEVILLE, TENN.