

Charles Cotta

My Man and His Dream

No. 652,949.

RUNNING GEAR

(No Model.)

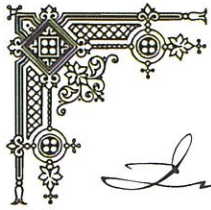
(Appl.)

2 Sheets—Sheet 1



Charles Cotta

Inventor



Introduction

A small-town guy who “made good” doesn’t usually need an introduction. You’d think that a kid born and raised just outside Lanark would be better known—especially when large factories later emblazoned his name—for ideas that were ahead of the times.

It’s been a little over a hundred years since Charles Cotta patented a couple devices hardly anyone knew about, much less cared about. But then four-wheel drive and four-wheel steering, whose patents were applied for in 1900, were only one step in the developments brought about by Cotta. Anticipation was just one word to describe that Cotta kid who revolutionized the automotive industry before it began.

Here he was, only age thirty and involved in the latest fad—automobiles. He’d even hired a mechanic to help him, quite an extravagance especially for the retiring sort Charles Cotta seemed to be. Hammers and drill noises coming from Weed’s Machine Shop, 500 South Broad Street, indicated something was happening. But did anyone but an auto enthusiast know the why and what for of independent traction of separate wheels? Wasn’t there always such a thing? Gears, cogs, transmissions inspired other ideas, but who talked about them in 1900? There were other topics to discuss even though only the hand-made by trial and error was worthy of note. Neighbors, friends, family might have seen the skinned knee or the knot on his head from the latest fall from a bicycle contraption. But autos? Not an everyday conversation piece.

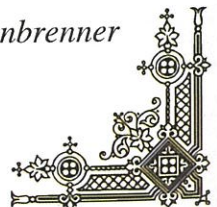
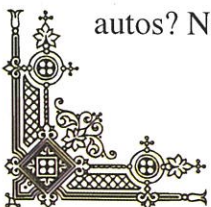


Charles Cotta

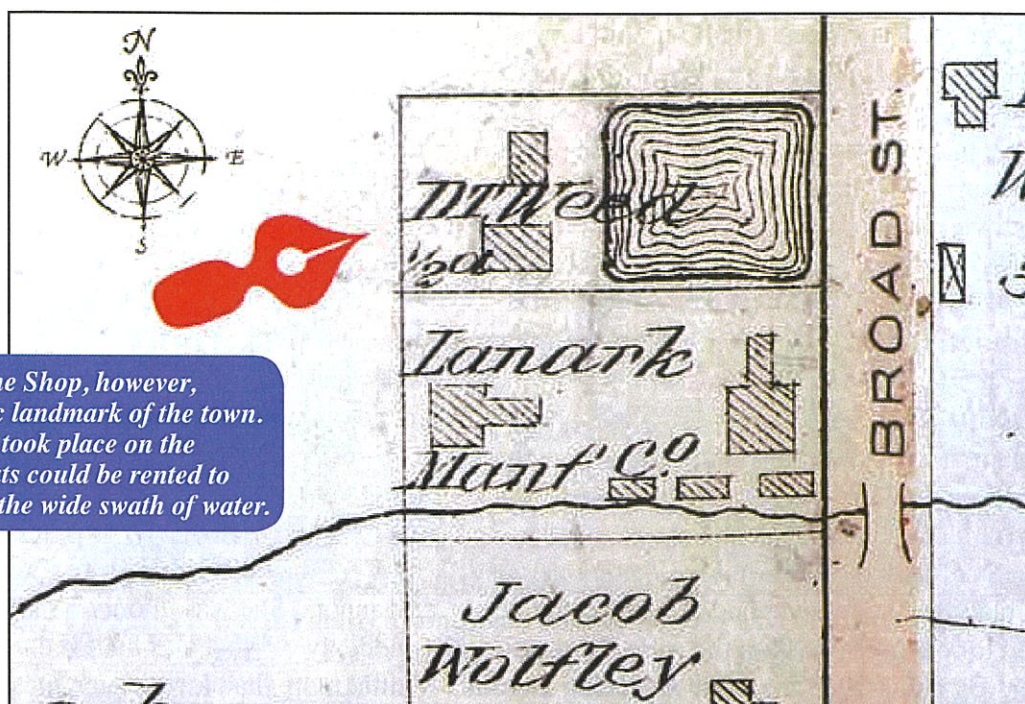
Cotta: His name in print was rare. Usually it was about “Charlie,” passing through town to fish or camp at Sand Slough or Lainesville on the Mississippi. His companions, in fact, had the local or long-time familiar Carroll County names.

But now, with the dedication of his historical sign, a much-awaited tribute to a fellow whose address first was Nursery, Illinois, but whose world became international.

~ Caralee Aschenbrenner



Plat Book of Carroll County 1893



The Weeds Machine Shop, however, was long the iconic landmark of the town. Ice skating parties took place on the frozen pond or boats could be rented to romantically skim the wide swath of water.

Charles Cotta

is a name you might not recognize unless you know the "4 X 4," a term used for four-wheel drive and four-wheel steering, a revolutionary idea that changed the automotive industry globally, inspired new methods of technological, mechanical ways of doing things.

Cotta, as far as is known, had no extended education, no engineering degree but made all parts of the Cotta-mobile by hand, tooling and retooling, cutting and re-cutting. No "warehouse of parts" existed. Welding as we know it had yet to be developed. Charles Cotta was a self-taught genius in his field of expertise—right here in Lanark, Illinois.

Born and raised on the Cotta farm/orchard four miles east of Lanark, August 26, 1871, he grew up with several brothers and a sister. Rural post offices were common in the later part of the nineteenth century. The Cotta post office-residence was appropriately named, "Nursery."

Charles Cotta, called "Charlie" in the family, and his brothers invested in a threshing machine with which they traveled a neighborhood "circuit" in the 1890s doing the seasonal work.

Cotta was also interested in two "fads" of the time – photography and bicycling. All areas had clubs of all kinds and styles of bicycling for sport and contest. "According to the 'Chadwick Tribune', Charles Cotta of Nursery is the champion bicycle rider in Carroll County. The 'Shannon Express' says some of their riders don't agree with this."

Several examples of Cotta's photography exists – a congregation portrait, carte de vista, and other fashionable scenes. This item appeared in the 'Lanark Gazette' in 1891 when the editor commented, "The weather doesn't agree with our photographer. He'd have plenty of work if the weather was nice. He is taking views of the country schools."

Other more complicated, sophisticated ideas were, meanwhile, roiling around in Charles Cotta's head.

700,175.

Patented May 20, 1900.

C. COTTA.

AUTOMOBILE

(Application filed Oct. 5, 1900.)

4 Sheets—Sheet 1.

Every issue some note would appear in the local weekly, the 'Gazette' stating the latest development of the Cotta-mobile being built at "Weed's Machine Shop" or Weed's Mill on South Broad Street. In Lanark's "industrial park," so to speak where a large "factory" was sited, its one purpose was the manufacture of fanning mills, an agricultural implement whose main market may have been Iowa and/or its riverside towns.

Springs rising in the present-day football field and north from the railroad embankment fed a small stream and a larger pond on South Broad where a bridge can be seen on an 1893 plat. That neighborhood hosted a brickyard, two-story ice house, several residential weaving looms, a commercial orchard and other home industry. The Weeds Machine Shop, however, was long the iconic landmark of the town. Ice skating parties took place on the frozen pond or boats could be rented to romantically skim the wide swath of water. By about 1915 the pond was being filled in and no one could guess it was there even though used for probably forty years.

Weed's Mill by the twentieth century had become a factory of the future — weeks, months had been expended in making gears, cogs, retooling, re-cutting, engineering, "from scratch" the hundreds of parts of the Cotta-mobile. Although the machine shop was large in size, globally the four-wheel drive, four-wheel steering could not be contained in a measurable machine shop in small town Lanark.

As early as January, 1900, U.S. Patents were applied for, their specifications are printed here-- #625949 and #700175.

August 28 and September 4, 1901 the 'Lanark Gazette' reported that the auto's body was nearly finished, the boiler to make the steam will be mounted in front of the driver next week, not at the back as is usual. The running gear will be painted a deep, rich red, the body, solid black with a red panel painted on the side panels...exceptionally well proportioned, rather long and reasonably low to the ground..." Added to the quote that day was

the invention would bring "fame and fortune" to its creator.

The Four Wheel Drive Wagon Co. is said to have begun making automobiles by 1904 but continued only until 1906. It is believed that by 1906 the Cotta Transmission Co. and Cotta Gear Works organized, supplying transmissions and gearboxes for the Four Wheel Drive Wagon Co. The latest model had three speeds forward with one in reverse.

The Lanark Public Library has a growing file on the early days of the Cotta-mobile with the constant progress of technological and mechanical developments. No problem seemed too large or too small and that somehow, questions would find answers.

There was no answer to Charles Cotta's question for the death of his wife, Edith Burt of near Shannon. She was ill only a short time but died suddenly of what was believed to be meningitis. Little more than a year later, October 11, 1913, Charles Cotta married Lucinda Presley Smith of Aurora, Illinois. The informative obituaries printed elsewhere give many details otherwise too numerous to be included here.

Charles Cotta was an outdoors man interested in hunting, fishing, camping and the like. Cross-country fox hunts of several hundred "drivers" was just one sport he promoted. The Mississippi River enticed him in its many facets. He and his family were frequently noted as having passed through Lanark, stopping to say hello. There was always something to do in the country. Work could be entertainment!

"Lock, stock and barrel" is how the Cotta "steamer" was packed up and sent to Rockford in January, 1902. Cotta had been searching for investors to building automobiles. He courted Dixon, for instance, and Milwaukee where, surprisingly perhaps, he sold the U.S. Patents of the four-wheel drive and four-wheel steering to the Four Wheel Drive Wagon Co. (FWDW) headquartered in Clintonville, Wisconsin.

In May 22, 1902, a notice in the Rockford Morning Star reported that though they had “nasty weather and struck all kinds of bad roads,” the machine answered the test. Weight was no factor, the auto weighed one thousand pounds, water, four hundred, seventy-five of gasoline, and two passengers, one at two hundred twenty-five pounds with Cotta at one fifty, it more than withstood poor roads, baggage and so forth.

By October of 1904, the Daily Register (Rockford), noted that Mr. Cotta had taken a long trip of two hundred miles; this in a gasoline fueled automobile. The versatility of the motor driven four-wheel drive and four-wheel steering was the objective of testing the common fuels of the day—none, so far, was dominant, steam power, however, ran silently.

After 1903, the Cotta Automobile Co. became Cotta Gear and Cotta Transmission specializing in heavy duty trucks such as fire trucks, street sweepers, buses, mine sweepers, oil field drills, switch locomotives and much more; even to miniscule gears used in the space program. During WW II Cotta worked exclusively for the war department. Many were the annexes, new and old factory sites, five shifts a day tours of duty—all recorded in a Cotta file at the Lanark Public Library (1-815-493-2166). Many details not recorded here are open to the patrons’ search.

The Lanark Sesquicentennial Book Committee has undertaken to prepare a career and personal folder, until now not forwarded! The old saying that a genius is unappreciated in his hometown



The Cotta Family Homestead located 4 miles east of Lanark in Nursery, IL. The homestead had its own U.S. post office location established by John V. Cotta on March 6, 1885.

has held true until recognition of the inventor/creator of four-wheel drive and four-wheel steering, Charles Cotta acknowledged as driving the “4 X 4” as early as 1901 on the streets of Lanark.

Unfortunately, Charles Cotta spent nearly five years bedridden at “Sunny Rest Sanitarium” and died July 26, 1945 and was buried at Greenwood Cemetery, Rockford, Illinois.

The Cotta farm house remains about a mile southeast of the Maple Grove School (now a residence). A note written on the reverse of a photo taken in 1950 states it was built in 1857 but other reference refutes that.

The nursery and livestock of the Cottas’ was sold in April of 1901. Eighty acres at \$84.25 per was sold to Charles Gouker. A clause in the sale bill stipulated that any nursery stock could be removed by the seller. Said to be a nature lover, John V. Cotta up until the end gave thought to those who came to live on the treeless prairie. Charles Cotta, his son, had a different genius.

~ Caralee Aschenbrenner



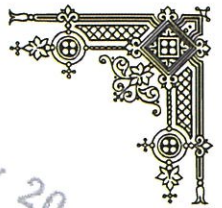
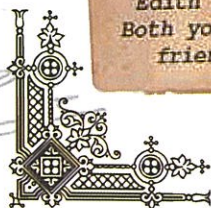
September 15, 1897

On Monday morning Sept. 6th, a young girl named Stenie Tessman applied at the J.V. Cotta's for a position doing housework. Mrs. Cotta wanted a girl and she was employed. She arrived there about ten o'clock in the morning, and at four the same afternoon complained of feeling sick and asked for a horse and buggy to drive over to Casper Plock's for some medicine, promising to be back in time for supper. She didn't come, however, nor did she put in an appearance the next day. On Wednesday afternoon Chas. Cotta mounted his bicycle and rode over to Plock's to make inquiry. No one there had seen her lately or knew anything of her whereabouts, but by making skillful inquiry Mr. Cotta learned that the girl had recently lived near Coleta and that her "bestfellow" resided at Round Grove, also that she had gotten quite serious to attend the Morrison Fair. He returned home and acquainted his brother John with the facts and together they went to Morrison, where they took turns watching the gates at the fairgrounds. Thursday afternoon John recognized the old mare, the buggy and the girl. He watched the girl tie up to the post, and then struck out for a policeman, but when he returned with him, the outfit was gone again. Later on, however, the rig was captured on Main Street, the girl arrested, and after a preliminary hearing, was lodged in jail to await her trial which was set for October 6. John brought the rig home by easy stages. The old mare was completely fagged out, and looked as if she hadn't had a square meal for a month. It developed at the preliminary that the girl had first driven to Coleta, thence to Round Grove, then she took a little pleasure drive over about half of Whiteside County, winding up at the Morrison Fair where she was captured and her fun spoiled.

~ Taken from Rowland Scrapbook

January 4, 1898 (DRG)

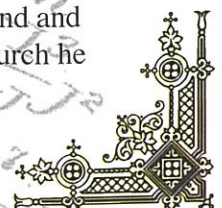
Popular Young People Wedded Charles Cotta and Edith Burt were married Thursday evening. Both young people are popular and a host of friends will wish them much happiness.



J. V. Cotta,

JOHN VALENTINE COTTA, aged 64 years, who was one of the most prominent nursery men in Northern Illinois, died at his home, last Thursday morning, after a continued illness of more than a year. Mr. Cotta was born in Germany. The funeral was held Friday.

2nd Obit: John Valentine Cotta was born at Eisenach, Germany, June 6, 1835. He was a lineal descendant of the famous Cotta family of that place which took Martin Luther into their home when a student there. He came to America in 1854 and for several years made his home in Chicago, from which place he went to Dixon and where he was united in marriage with Miss Rosalie Moller, April 4, 1861. In 1863 they came to the vicinity in which he died, Rock Creek Township, Carroll County, Illinois. To Mr. and Mrs. Cotta were born four sons and one daughter, all of whom with his wife, including a son-in-law, three daughters-in-law and eight grandchildren, are the immediate family survivors. Our departed friend and brother was a diligent student and lover of nature and had a special fondness from early life, for the cultivation of certain products of earth. And thus the employment in which he was engaged in his boyhood home he pursued in the land of his adoption - the culture of fruit and flowers. His educated mind and taste led him to an appreciation of the beautiful and refined, and from these handiworks of God as seen above and around him he could well explain with the Psalmist "O Lord-Manifold are thy works! In wisdom has thou made them all; the earth is full of thy riches.: But now he has gone to the land of unfading flowers and where is "the tree of life: which bears twelve manner of fruit and yields her fruit every month." But the deceased as a man and as a Christian has indelibly stamped himself upon his family and upon all who have been associated with him. He was received into connection with the Lutheran church when a young man in the fatherland and in communion with this branch of the church he



remained a faithful, liberal and godly member until he was transferred to the church triumphant. He was one of the first members of the congregation organized at what was then and is still known as Maple Grove, and when the organization was removed to Lanark he continued his membership therewith. For a number of years he was an office bearer in the congregation, and it was only last spring when on account of his physical infirmities, his official robes were laid aside to the great regret of his brother officers and congregation which he had so long and faithfully served. For more than a year prior to his death he was truly a child of affliction, but amid all the suffering incident thereto the Christian grace of patience was evident. On a number of occasions to his pastor in the presence of his family and others did he freely express his submission to the divine purpose and his willingness and readiness to depart; and yet after all these months of sickness and patient waiting, somewhat unexpectedly to the members of the family about him, on Wednesday morning, September 27, 1899, at the age of 64 years, 3 months and 21 days, died the gentle and saintly spirit of John V. Cotta - the affectionate husband and father, a worthy and esteemed friend and neighbor, and a true brother in Christ, take its flight to scenes that know no sin, pain or death, to "God's right hand where there is fullness of joy and pleasure forevermore." The funeral services were held at the family residence at Nursery on Friday afternoon at 1 o'clock, and were conducted by the undersigned who spoke from Psalm 90:12. Rev. Rowland of the Dunkard church, a near neighbor, offered prayer. The church choir furnished the music singing four selections, three of which were by request of the family, being favorites of the deceased. The remains were laid away in the Lanark cemetery to await the resurrection of the just. "So he giveth his beloved sleep." M. Colver, Pastor.

~ Contributed by Karen Fyock

Rosalie Cotta,

ROSALIE (MOLLER/MUELLER) COTTA, was born on August 10, 1836, in Erford, Germany. In the year 1850 accompanied by her parents she left the home of her birth and came to Dixon, Illinois, where she resided until April 4, 1861, when she was united in marriage to John V. Cotta. They lived near Prairieville, Lee County, until 1863, when they moved to a farm in Rock Creek Township in Carroll County. Here she lived with her husband surrounded by her children for many years, but as the family grew up they left home and on September 27, 1899, she lost her husband by death. The year following she left her old home and went to live with her only daughter, Mrs. George R. Knapp, of Forreston. For over six years the deceased had been sorely afflicted with rheumatism and dropsy. Though at times she suffered greatly and was unable to get about without the use of a wheeled chair, she was patient and cheerful through it all and was often heard to remark that she was thankful that her condition as no worse than it was. She loved to read and kept herself well posted on what was going on about her. For years she had been a member of the Lutheran church. In her everyday life she lived her Christianity and she is now at rest, free from the pain and sufferings which racked her body. During the past winter her great affliction seemed to take on a more serious nature and about four weeks ago it was deemed best to remove her to the Glove Hospital at Freeport, where she passed away Sunday morning, April 17, 1904, aged 67 years, 8 months, and 7 days. To mourn her death she leaves one daughter, Mrs. Knapp, of Forreston, and four sons, Theodore, of Freeport; Herman and Charles, of Rockford, and John, of Woodland. She also leaves one sister, Miss Dollie Moller, of Dixon, and three brothers. The remains were conveyed from Freeport to Lanark, where the funeral services were held from the Lanark church at 9:30 o'clock Wednesday forenoon. The interment was made in the Lanark cemetery beside her husband.

~ Contributed by Karen Fyock

UNITED STATES AMERICA.



No.

Vol. 949

To all to whom these presents shall come:

Whereas

Charles Cotta,

of Shannon, Illinois,

has presented to the Commissioner of Patents a petition praying for the grant of Letters Patent for an alleged new and useful improvement in

Running-Gear for Automobiles,

a description of which invention is contained in the Specification of which a copy is herewith annexed and made a part hereof and has complied with the various requirements of Law in such cases made and provided and

Whereas upon due examination made the said Claimant is adjudged to be justly entitled to a Patent under the Law,

Now therefore these Letters Patent are to grant unto the said

Charles Cotta, his

heirs or assigns

for the term of Seventeen years from the third day of

July, one thousand nine hundred

The exclusive right to make, use and vend the said invention throughout the United States and the Territories thereof

In testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the Patent Office to be affixed at the City of Washington this third day of July, in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and of the Independence of the United States of America the one hundred and twenty-fourth.

Countersigned:

C. H. Dwell

H. Campbell

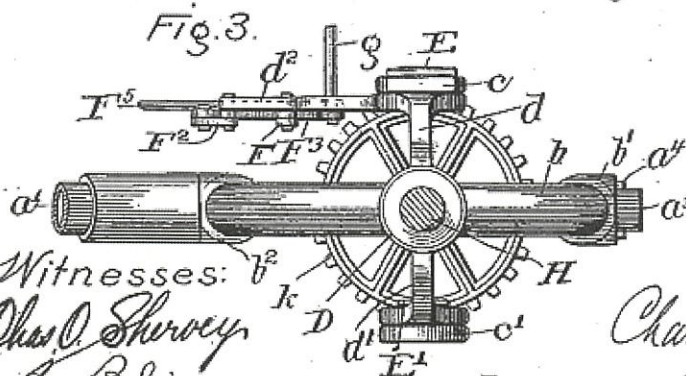
Assistant Secretary of the Interior.

Commissioner of Patents.

RECEIVED JUL 12 1900
PATENT OFFICE

Patented July 3, 1900.

2 Sheets—Sheet 1.



Inventor:
Charles Cotta
McGurne & Pitzer
Attys.

No. 652,949.

C. COTTA.

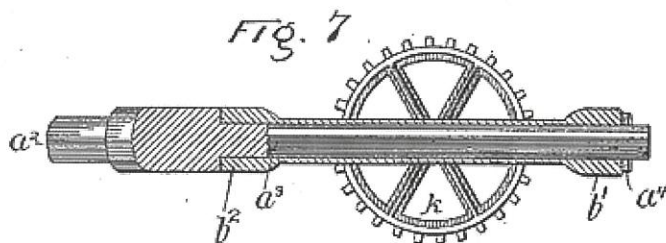
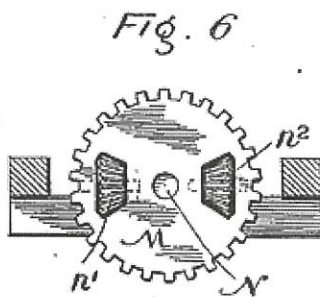
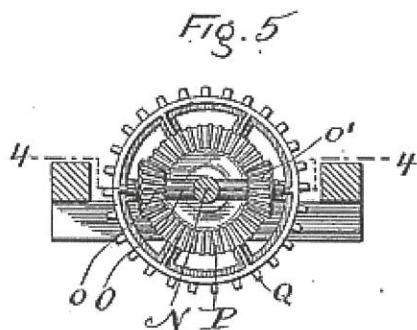
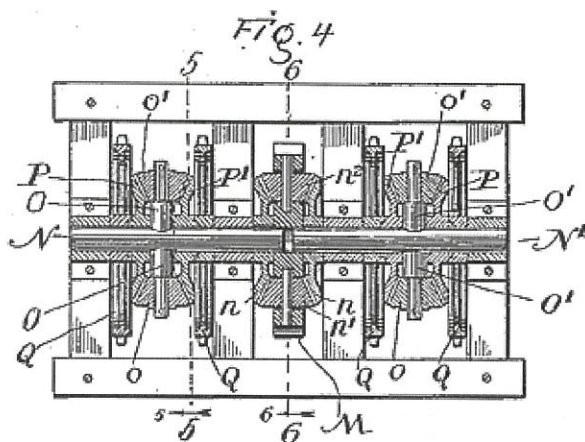
Patented July 3, 1900.

RUNNING GEAR FOR AUTOMOBILES.

(Application filed Jan. 17, 1900.)

(No Model.)

2 Sheets—Sheet 2.



Witnesses:
Chas. O. Shroyer
S. Blissett

Inventor.
Charles Cotta
by Miles & Ritten
Attys.

UNITED STATES AMERICA.



700175

To all to whom these presents shall come:

Whereas *Charles Cotta*,
of Shannon, Illinois.

has presented to the Commissioner of Patents a petition praying
for the grant of Letters Patent for an alleged new and useful improvement in

Automobiles.

a description of which invention is contained in the Specification of which
a copy is herewith annexed and made a part hereof and has complied
with the various requirements of Law in such cases made and provided and

Whereas upon due examination made the said Claimant *is* adjudged
to be justly entitled to a Patent under the Law:

Now therefore these **Letters Patent** are to grant unto the said

Charles Cotta, his heirs or assigns
for the term of *Seventeen* years from the *twentieth* day of
May one thousand nine hundred and *two*
the exclusive right to make, use and vend the said invention throughout the
United States and the Territories thereof.



In testimony whereof I have hereunto set my
hand and caused the seal of the Patent Office
to be hereunto affixed at the City of Washington
this *twentieth* day of *May*
the year of our Lord one thousand nine hun-
dred and *two* and of
the Independence of the United States of America
the one hundred and twenty sixth.

P. S. Allen
Commissioner of Patents.

U. S. PATENT OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D. C.

No. 700,175.

Patented May 20, 1902.

C. COTTA.
AUTOMOBILE.

(Application filed Oct. 5, 1900.)

(No Model.)

4 Sheets—Sheet 1.

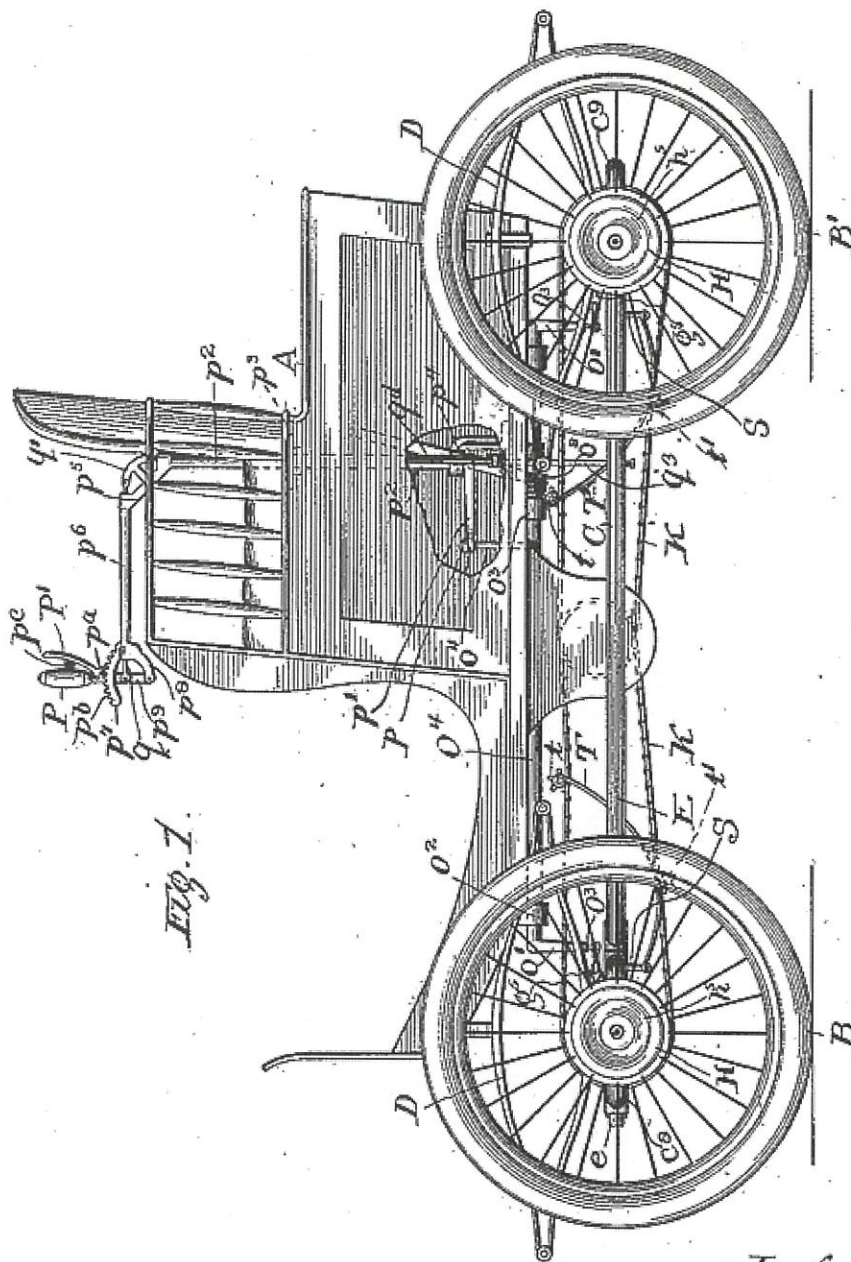


Fig. 1.

Witnesses:
Chas. O. Sherway
S. Bliss.

Inventor:
Charles Cotta
by Nils Gunnar Rind
Attys.

No. 700,175.

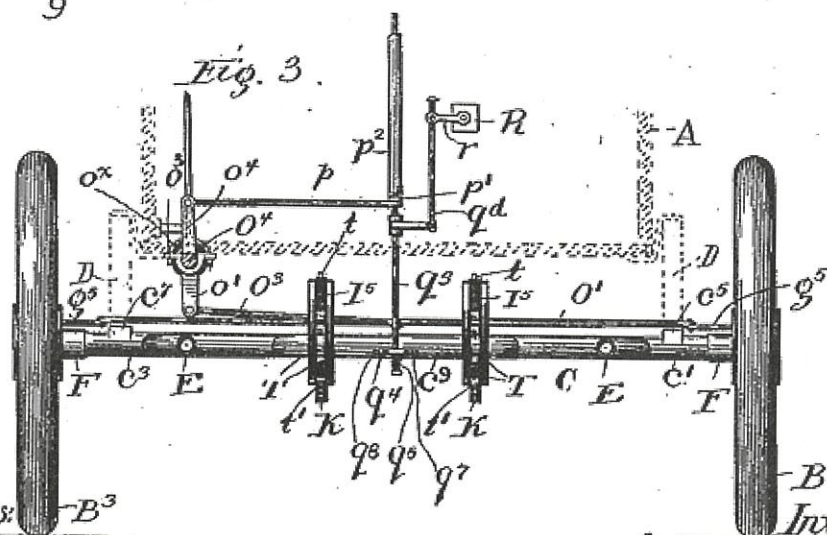
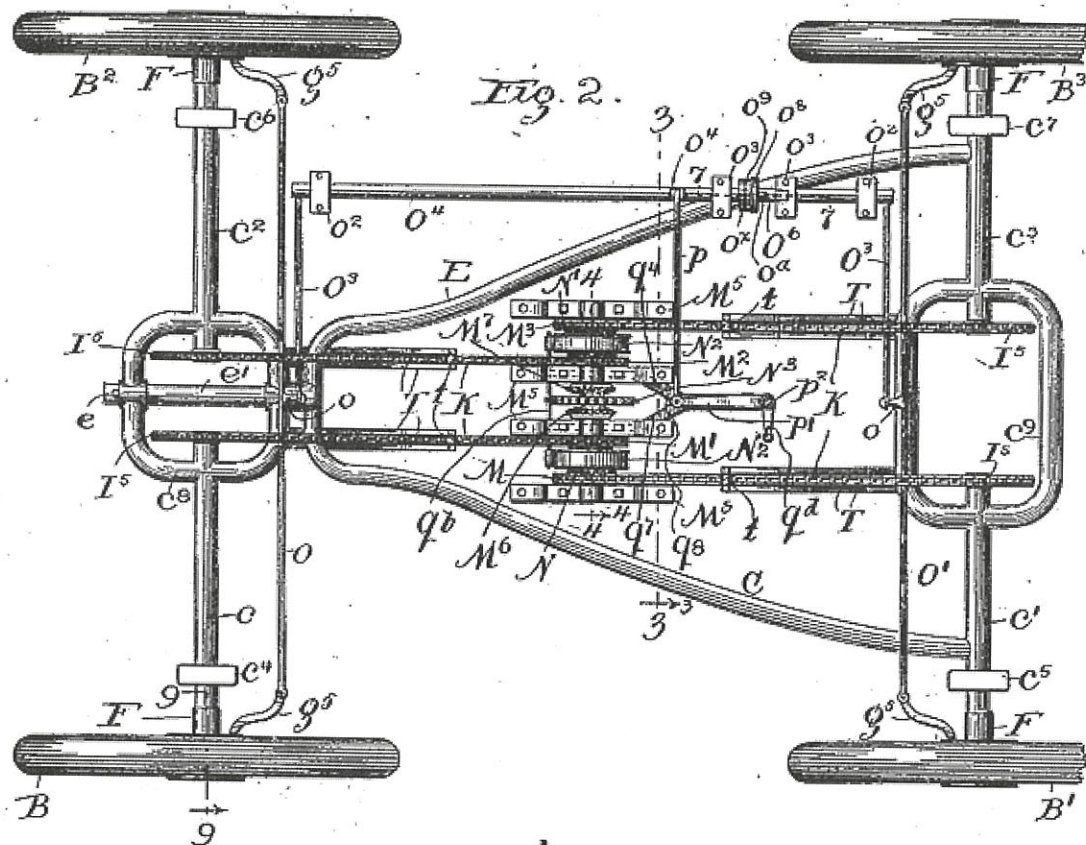
Patented May 20, 1902.

C. COTTA.
AUTOMOBILE.

(Application filed Oct. 5, 1900.)

(No Model.)

4 Sheets—Sheet 2.



Witnesses:
Chas. O. Shervey
S. Bliss.

Inventor:
Charles Cotta
by Niles & Palmer
Attys.

No. 700,175.

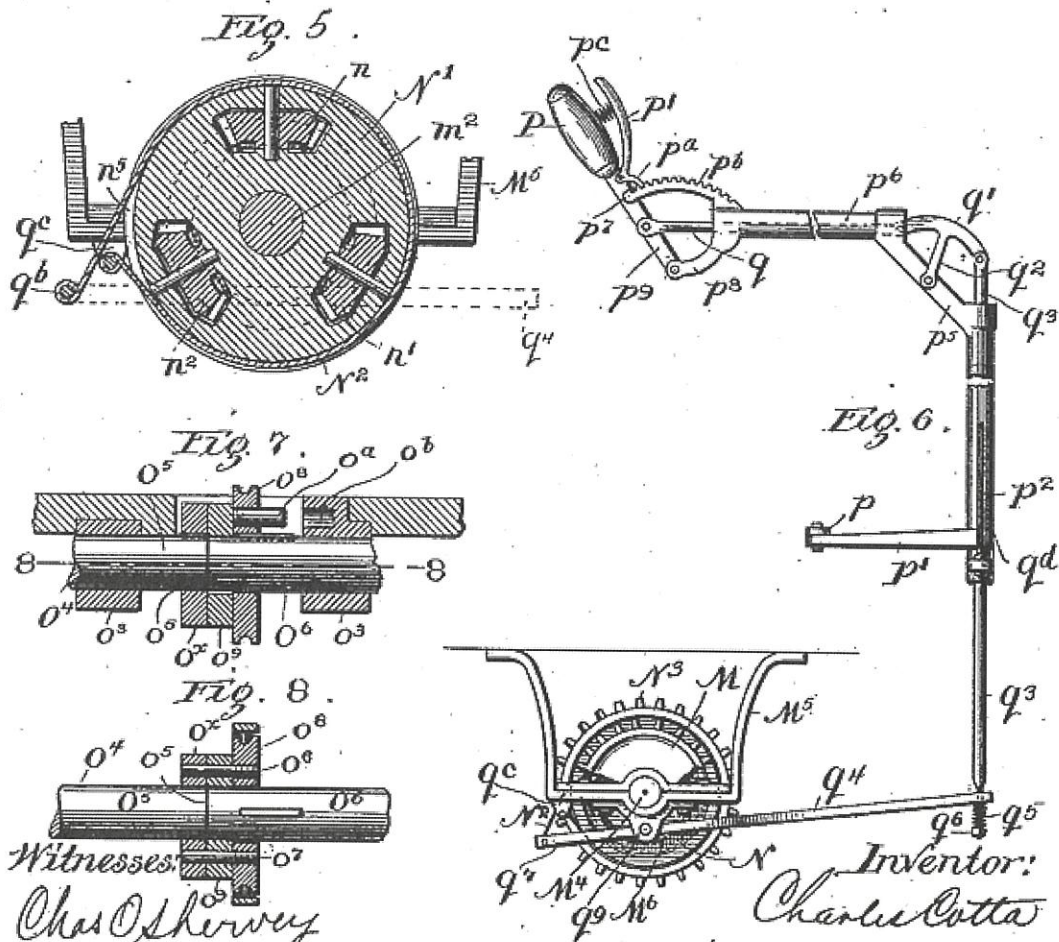
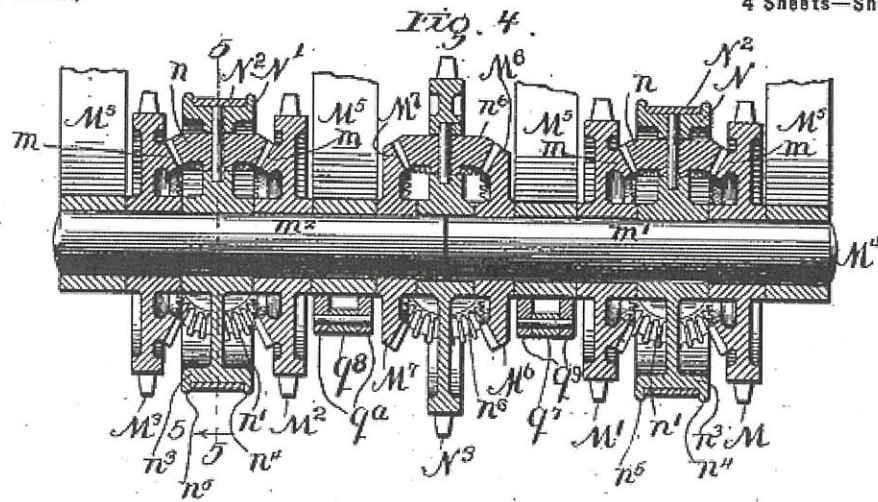
C. COTTA.
AUTOMOBILE.

Patented May 20, 1902.

(Application filed Oct. 5, 1900.)

(No Model.)

4 Sheets—Sheet 3.



Witnesses:
Chas Osherway
S. Bliss.

Inventor:
Charles Cotta
by *Nils Gunnar Peterson*
Atty.

No. 700,175.

C. COTTA.
AUTOMOBILE.

Patented May 20, 1902.

(Application filed Oct. 5, 1900.)

(No Model.)

4 Sheets—Sheet 4.

Fig. 9.

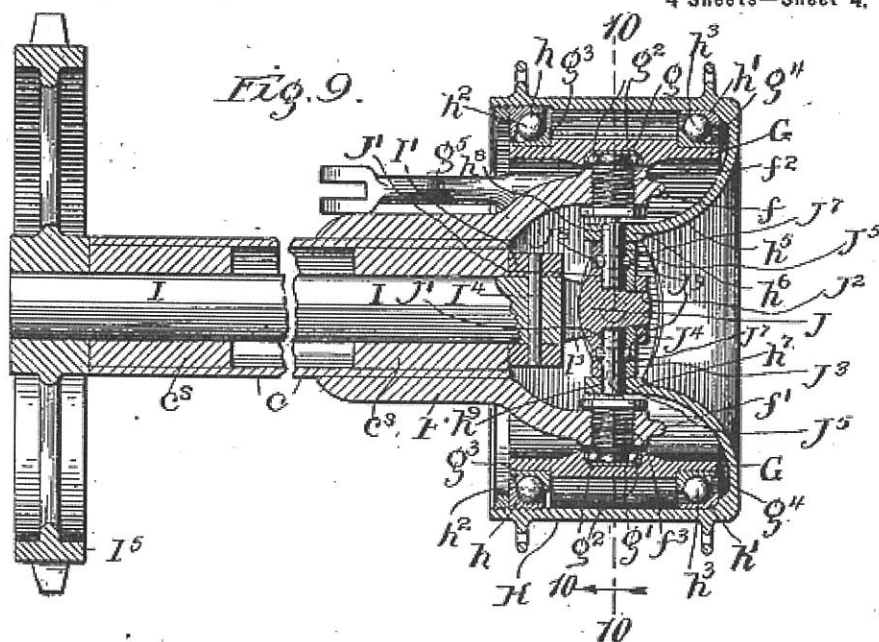


Fig. 10.

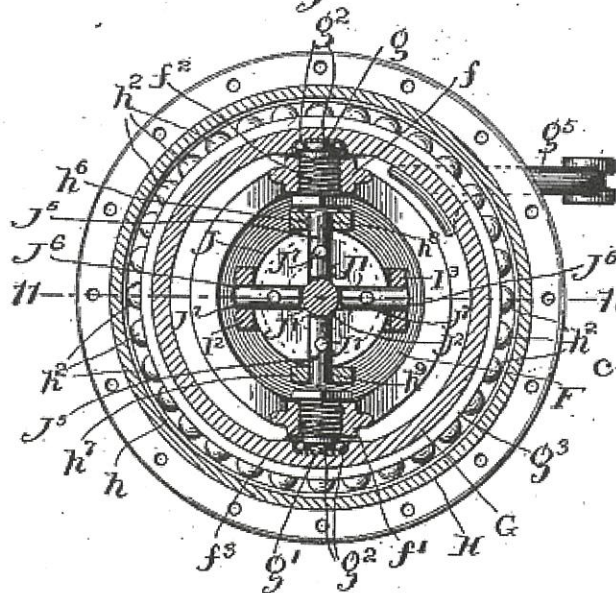
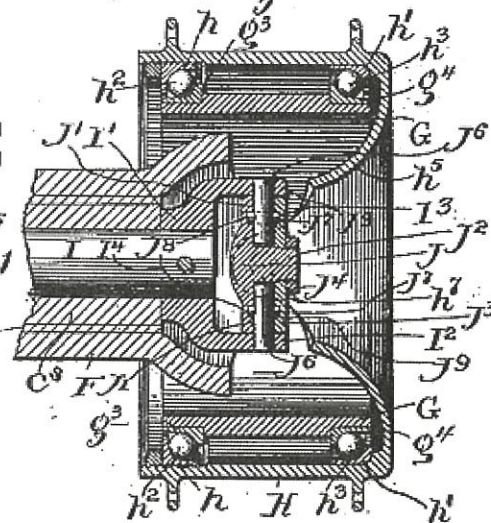
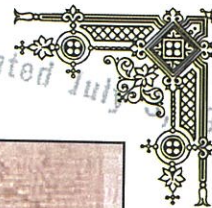
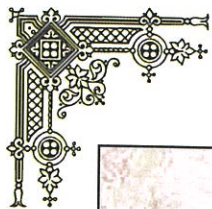


Fig. 11.



Witnesses:
Chas. O. Shewey
S. Bliss.

Inventor:
Charles Cotta
by Hilsgartner & Cohn
Attys.



Charles Cotta & wife Edith Burt Cotta. Seated in the Cotta-mobile taken in front of their residence 220 W. Franklin St. in Lanark, IL on Thanksgiving Day November 28, 1901.

Charles Cotta and His Four Wheel Drive Steamer by Walter Risley

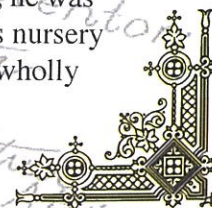
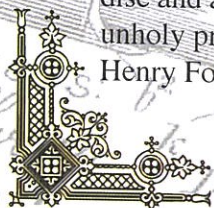
(Summer 1956)

He was a wise inventor in those dim first years of the automobile, who could trace a precise line between the creative idea and the uncertainties of the manufacturing plant. Many an anticipated horseless carriage fortune degenerated into a wistful story of what might have been because an ambitious but inexperienced tinkerer mistook his workshop model for a salable piece of merchandise and allowed himself to become involved in an unholy promotion thereof. Master mechanics like Henry Ford and Walter Chrysler profitably com-

bined inventive genius with a happy knack for the assembly line but there were not many like them.

On the other hand, there was Charles Cotta, for instance, who spoke his automotive lines briefly and concisely but who left the pitfalls of the early motor car manufacturing to the less wary individual.

Cotta boasted no experience in the mechanical trades prior to his self-introduction to the horseless carriage. Born and raised in Illinois, he was associated with his father in a prosperous nursery business near Lanark in Carroll County, wholly



unaware that one day he would exchange his trowel for a greasy monkey-wrench. When the automobile reared its complicated mechanism in the mid-nineties, Cotta's interest was in all probability whetted by reading of the new marvel in Mauve Decade equivalents of home mechanics and do-it-yourself magazines. Anyhow, he certainly worked from scratch and without the benefit of a machine-shop background.

One can only piece together fragments of wispy recollection and resort to perilous conjecture regarding Cotta's first car. Outstanding among its features was its system of four wheel drive but as to the intimate details, those who once knew are either beyond the telling or else they keep the secret wrapped in cloudy memories. In 1900, though, the result of Cotta's labors took official form as U.S. Patent, number 652,949—an "automobile running gear and transmission device." The unspecific designation failed to mention four wheel drive but this qualification would hardly have meant anything to a turn-of-the-century patent clerk who probably knew nothing of motor vehicles, anyway.

But to those who had become even remotely familiar with the new transport medium, the Cotta was a strange and uncertain deviation. One contemporary motor journal called it "ingenious but impractical." The press did, however, concede that the four wheel traction principle might possibly be adopted sometime in the future.

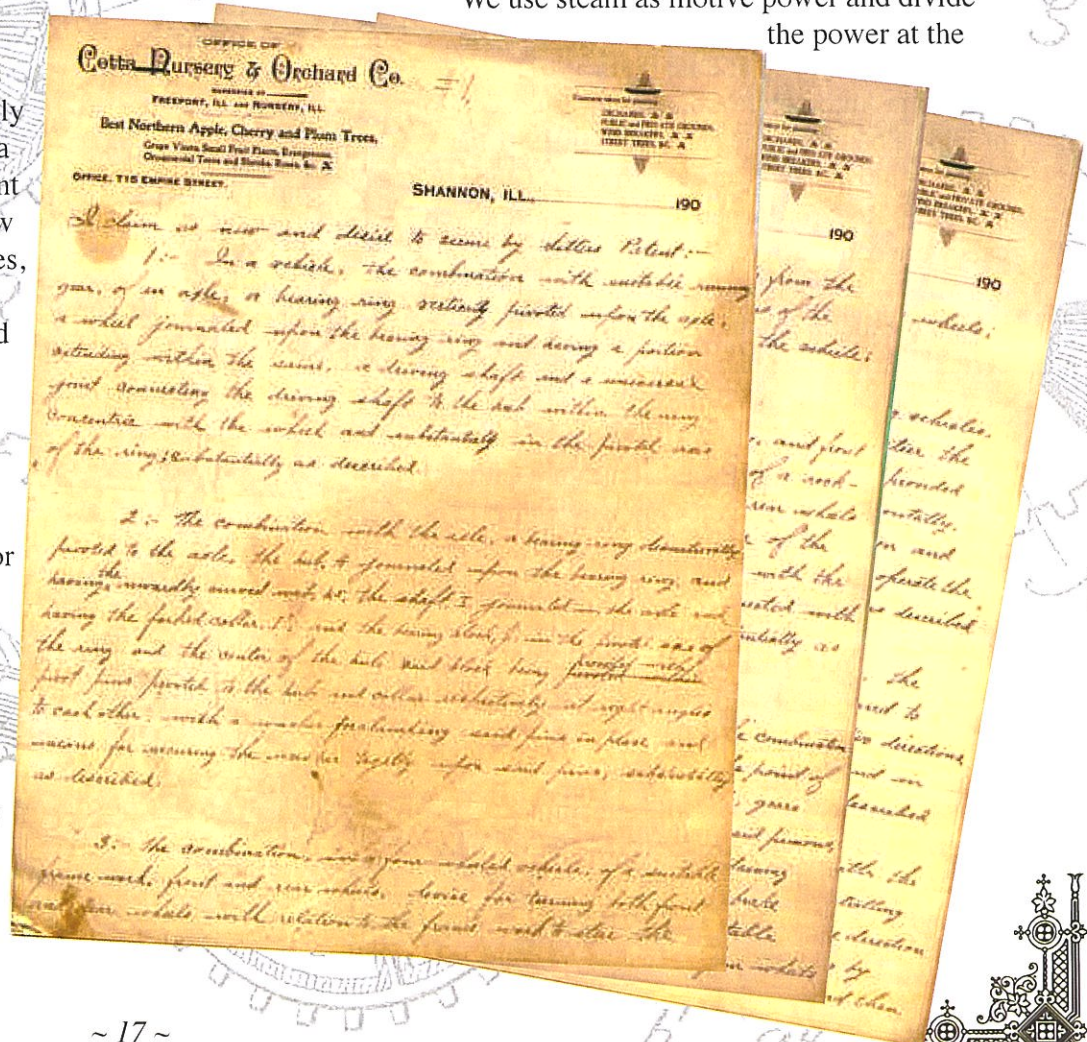
As an actual road vehicle, the Cotta was

no thing of beauty even by the vague standards of its day. The car looked as though it might have once been a two passenger Stanley or something but it served to prove the inventor's point. Said Mr. Cotta in explanation of this carriage:

"An automobile, in order to be a successful traction vehicle, must not only be able to travel on dry roads, but must be able to travel and propel itself successfully in all seasons and under all conditions of roadway. It must have ability to ascend and descend slippery grades. It must have ability to raise itself out of mud-holes and ruts and mount obstacles and be guided over rough and uneven surfaces without danger of jerking the steering lever out of the operator's hand.

"The difficulties of operating automobiles as above have come under our observation so vividly that we have designed, patented and built a vehicle which overcomes them all.

We use steam as motive power and divide the power at the



THE LANARK GAZETTE.

Devoted to the Interests of Carroll County; the Garden of Illinois.

TERMS: \$1.50 in Advance

Charles Cotta (cont.)

driving shaft, by our compensating gear, into four equal and independent parts and transmit it to each of the four wheels . . . Each wheel does exactly its own one-quarter of the driving.

"The steering pivot in front of the operator, the engine under the footboard and the compensating gear under the body. The axles are tubular with a shaft running through them transmitting the power from the sprocket wheel to a universal joint in the hub"

(Motor Age, Jan. 30, 1902)



Charles Cotta aboard his Cotta-mobile in 1901.

Such was the first Cotta vehicle, evidently completed at Lanark, in 1901. The Cotta Automobile Company was created to provide a name for the endeavor. In 1902 the inventor moved lock, stock, and copper-tube boiler to nearby Rockford where one or two improved cars were constructed.

Mr. Cotta had now arrived at that critical line between experiment and manufacture. It is uncertain just what he had in mind as the next step or how he came to his decision but, at least, we know what course he took. In 1903, Cotta sold his patent to a budding Milwaukee venture called the Four Wheel Drive Wagon Company which later produced heavy trucks employing the Cotta transmission and drive principles. This firm eventually moved upstate to Clintonville where its successor still builds FWD truck and similar machines. Back in 1911, incidentally, it harkened to the passenger car siren and turned out a few huge four cylinder, four wheel drive touring cars.

Meanwhile, Cotta became a manufacturer after all. He headed the Cotta Transmission Company and later, the Cotta Gear Company, both of Rockford and both eminently successful firms. The

pioneering inventor passed away several years ago and none of the three or four cars he built have survived. To our generation, Cotta may at best be an obscure name but the experiments and the trials of this small town Illinoisan have their secure place in America's motor history for he helped make possible the versatile four wheel drive commercial carriers that are so much a part of today's transportation.

*The Lanark Gazette**

Cotta Bros. shredded corn for Wallace Deuel last Friday and Saturday.

**(Dec. 8, 1897)*

MARRIED.

At the residence of George Nichols last Thursday evening, Mr. Chas. Cotta of Nursery and Miss Edith Burt of Shannon, Rev. Mosher of Shannon officiating. The Gazette congratulates and joins a myriad of friends in best wishes for future happiness and success.

**(Jan. 5, 1898)*

(COTTA'S HOG SALE) J.V. Cotta & Son are receiving a large number of inquiries daily for their catalogue, and their March 15th sale bids fair to be one of the most successful ever held in this state. It is remarkable the interest shown among stockmen. So far these requests have come from the states named. We give them in order received: Illinois, Michigan, Texas, Kansas, California, Missouri, Wisconsin, Oklahoma, Mississippi, S. Dakota, Maine, and Quebec, Canada. There are still a few of the back country districts to be heard from, but at the present rate it is fair to presume the whole country will be pretty well represented by the day of sale.

** (Feb. 12, 1898)*

Chas. Cotta of Shannon, has invented an automobile which he designates as a simple and entirely practical device by which the power of the motor is applied equally and independently to each of the four wheels, making each wheel a traction wheel. Here are a few of the many advantages claimed for his mechanism: Not a fair weather concern, but a thoroughly reliable vehicle in all seasons and conditions of weather; no slipping of wheels no matter how muddy or icy the roadway; no cutting of tires; starting, stopping, regulating of speed, applying the brake and steering operated with the same lever; guides either with two or four wheels; no jar on lever on rough roads; steering pivot in

direct center of wheels; a perfectly flexible frame; no twisting or straining of tubing on uneven roads. The Gazette man has not seen Mr. Cotta's machine, but we hope it is all he claims, and that he will succeed in making a fortune out of it.

** (Sept. 26, 1900)*

Better see Ben Sheller before you buy fruit trees for fall delivery. Cotta Orchard and Nursery Co.

** (Oct. 31, 1900)*

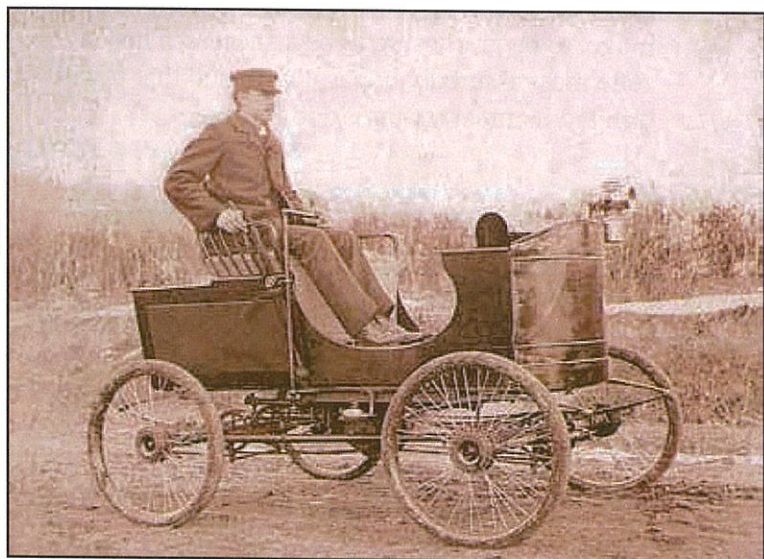
CHAS. COTTA'S AUTOMOBILE,

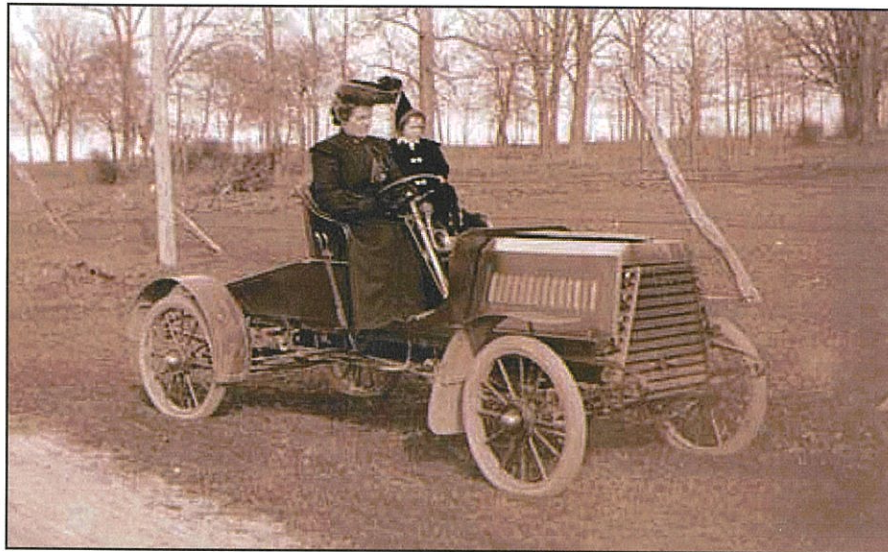
Work on Chas. Cotta's automobile, which is being constructed in Weed's machine shop, in south Lanark, is progressing nicely, and will, in all probabilities, be in its completeness by the first of June. The points of construction in Mr. Cotta's automobile are entirely in advance of those presented by any other inventor, and are wholly original with him, he having been working on the plans and specifications for several years past, and is certainly deserving of the success that his invention merits.

He has a simple and thoroughly practical device by which the power of the motor is applied equally and individually to each of the four wheels, making each wheel a traction wheel. It will not be a fair-weather concern, but a thoroughly reliable vehicle in all seasons and conditions of weather, a feature not possessed of by any other vehicle now on the market. The motive power of the machine is steam, thus doing away with all the objectionable noise that is so characteristic with the gasoline and electric vehicles.

Competent parties have pronounced Mr. Cotta's invention as the most practical of the numerous machines out, and should he decide to dispose of the same he could do so at a handsome figure. Up to date he has withheld from all offers and propositions, and has not decided definitely as to the future arrangements for manufacturing and marketing of his invention.

** (May 1, 1901)*





Edith Burt - Cotta and daughter Winifred driving down Montague Road in 1905 in the newly styled Charles Cotta Cotta-mobile.

Chas. Cotta will move to Lanark from Shannon about the first of the month. He has rented the Cottrell property, recently vacated by W. L. Morrison.

**(Feb. 13, 1901)*

We are closing out the Carroll County Nursery and have apple trees as low as 15 cents, and plum trees, bearing size, as low as 35 cents. Other trees in proportion. A large quantity of evergreens for wind brake or hedging purposes, at very low rates. Stock strictly first class. Come early, we are selling fast. CHAS. COTTA, LANARK

**(Apr. 17, 1901)*

Clyde Curtice, of Shannon, the mechanic who is working on Chas. Cotta's automobile, went home Saturday evening to spend Sunday with his parents.

**(May 1, 1901)*

Catalpa posts are better and last longer than cedar. You can get them in all sizes at Weed's Shop. Chas. Cotta

**(June 5, 1901)*

Charlie Cotta is progressing nicely on his automobile which he is building in Weed's machine shop south of town. The body has been finished, the boiler has been installed and the engine will be put in its place within the next week. It differs in point of construction with other vehicles in that

the boiler is situated in front of the seat instead of back. The running gears of the machine will be a deep rich red, and the body will be solid black with a red panel on either side. The machine is exceptionally well proportioned, being built rather long and reasonably low to the ground, and has a neat looking appearance in every particular. The inventor hopes to have it in its completeness within three weeks.

**(Aug. 28, 1901)*

Chas. Cotta is making a strong effort to have his new automobile ready for the Carroll County Fair. It is a handsome machine, built on different lines from anything now on the market, and said by those who have inspected it and are competent to judge, to be pretty sure to be a success. The Gazette most assuredly hopes it will, and that it will bring to its inventor fame and fortune.

**(Sept. 4, 1901)*

Chas. Cotta is this morning putting the finishing touches on his automobile, and will doubtless appear on the streets with it either this afternoon or tomorrow. Monday he blocked up the wheels and gave the engine an exhaustive test in the shop, and everything appeared to be satisfactory in the highest degree. If it works as well on the road,---and there is now no known reason why it should not---it may be termed a grand success. As has been stated before the machine is built from original

The Rockford Daily Register-Gazette.

VOL. XXVII NO. 294. ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS—12 PAGES.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 21, 1903.

TEN CENTS PER WEEK.

JUST REGION Notes of the Day!

BEAD WAGONS AUTO RIDE IN

ideas and on different lines from anything now on the market. It is well proportioned, finely finished, and altogether a handsome, and we believe, a practical and durable vehicle. The Gazette sincerely hopes that its inventor and builder will reap the reward his brain and industry so richly merits.

** (Sept. 25, 1901)*

Charlie Cotta had his new automobile out last Wednesday evening for a trial trip. The machine worked fine, but through his own mismanagement of a temporary lever, he backed it into the ditch opposite the James Sites place and damaged it to some extent. Several Lanark correspondents to papers published in other towns, wrote the matter up and placed his loss at about \$200, while the real facts, as learned from Mr. Cotta himself, are that the necessary repairs cost him about one dollar and a half in cash, and two days work, which makes quite a difference. On Sunday afternoon he had it out again and rode all over town and the surrounding country in it. It worked like a charm, taking some steep hills with ease. There are a few unimportant features about it which Mr. Cotta believes he can improve upon. He did not expect the machine to be perfect on the first trial, but on

the whole its initial performance was splendid and even more satisfactory than its sanguine inventor had hoped for.

** (Oct. 2, 1901)*

The Gazette enjoyed a ride in Chas. Cotta's new automobile last Friday and was very favorably impressed with its work. It certainly reflects great credit upon its inventor and builder.

** (Oct. 9, 1901)*

The Automobile

Charles Cotta, who became infatuated with the idea of horseless power while working in his father's nursery business in Lanark, looked upon the gadget in practical terms. Taking note of a traveling environment suited – if not designed for – the horse, Cotta decided speed was not of the essence.

"An automobile, in order to be a successful traction vehicle, must not only be able to travel on dry roads, but must be able to travel and propel itself successfully in all seasons and under all conditions of roadway," he said.

"It must have the ability to ascend and descend slippery grades. It must have the ability to raise itself out of mudholes and ruts and mount obstacles and be guided over rough and uneven surfaces

without danger of jerking the steering lever out of the operator's hand."

And so it was that in 1901 – two years before Barney Oldfield piloted Henry Ford's souped-up creation to an incredible speed of 59.6 miles per hour around the Grosse Point, N.Y., race track – that Charles Cotta astounded his neighbors by chugging



Edith Burt-Cotta and daughter Winifred 1905.

through the muddy, wagon-rutted Carroll County countryside in a two-cylinder steamer.

Resembling a high-wheel carriage, it was powered by a small, flame-heated copper boiler and steam engine – not unlike most of the early steamers of the automobile age.

What was unique about the Cottamobile was that the vehicle had four-wheel drive, an innovation so far ahead of its times that one contemporary motor journal deemed it “ingenious, but impractical.”

It also had four-wheel steering, so that, as Cotta described it, “the rear wheels travel in the same track as the front ones.”

In 1900, Cotta who supposedly had no machine shop background at all, received U.S. Patent no. 652,949 for what was simply described as “an automobile running gear and transmission device.” At the time, most automobile experimenters were still trying to gain locomotion with odd assortments of rope- and belt-driven pulleys and variations of the bicycle chain.

(The Rockford Register Star October 20, 1985)

Cotta Four Wheel Drive

1901 - Cotta Automobile Company - In 1901, Charles Cotta built the Cottamobile in Lanark, Illinois. He used a simple and thoroughly practical device using chains by which the power of the motor was applied equally and individually to each of the four wheels, making each wheel a traction wheel. It was to be a thoroughly reliable vehicle in all seasons and conditions of weather; a feature not possessed of by any other vehicle on the market. The motive power of the machine was steam, thus doing away with all the objectionable noise that was so characteristic with the gasoline and electric vehicles. Although Cotta began building the car in 1901, it wasn't completed until 1904. The Cotta Steamer also had four-wheel steering and a special type of transmission with non-clashing gears. Cotta advertised the cars through 1902 in magazines such as the Cycle and Automobile Trade Journal, from which the ad below was taken.

www.therangerstation.com

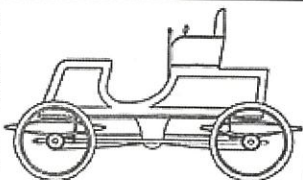
Cotta Four Wheel Drive

STEAM TOURING CAR

No road too slippery, muddy, sandy nor icy. Will travel anywhere. No matter what condition the weather or road. Boiler under hood in front, engine under footboard. All four wheels drive, gas, and guide loop, no slipping of wheels when you "Auto No."

RUNNING GEAR AND COMPLETE CAR.
Secure the agency for the only four wheel drive in the country.

Cotta Automobile Co., ROCKFORD ILL.



"A Story of Automotive History Unfolds..."

This week's feature story is one that had its beginning in the office of the historian for American Motors Corporation in Detroit, Michigan. Several weeks later, while searching for answers and an ending to my story, I interviewed an elderly Carroll County resident who ultimately related a story to me of automotive history that, I believe, very few people in America could tell today.

I spent almost two hours with this man who literally lived his entire life in the automotive business – a man who played a part in the manufacturing of what is believed to be one of the first, if not the first, four-wheel driven automobiles ever to be built – a man who was acquainted with men that today's teenagers associate with America's leading automobile trade-names – a man of keen senses who recounted to me his association with the 'horseless carriage' of almost forty years.

On February 10, 1968, our editor of the Lanark Gazette, Miss Thelma Swartz, received a letter from John A. Conde, the historian of American Motors Corporation. He was inquiring about the Cotta Steamer, which he claimed was invented and built in Lanark (on the site of the present Miller hatchery) by the Cotta Automobile Company about 1901. He wrote about this 'most unusual automobile that had four-wheel steering and drive and independent springing of each wheel' and he further stated 'that certainly they were revolutionary features for motor vehicles built that early. Mr. Conde wanted this information for a book he was writing about U.S. built steam cars.

On February 22, issues of the Lanark Gazette and the Shannon Reporter carried a picture and story of the famed Cotta Steamer and asked if any of our readers remembered this famous car. To date, the Review Publications has received two letters in answer to this story. The first letter dated February 25, resulted in a personal interview with Harry C.

Harry Clyde Curtice

Curtice, of Shannon, who actually assisted Cotta with the construction of this car. His fascinating story unfolded like this.

Mr. Curtice recalled that Charles Cotta contacted him in 1901 and asked for his assistance with the building of his steam car. Curtice, then a young man of 20, had a community reputation for being an expert mechanic. For six months, Mr. Curtice resided in the Lanark home of Mr. and Mrs. Cotta and during that period of time worked many hours on the design and construction of the Cotta Steamer, that apparently was not finished until three years later. The undertaking of such a project was almost beyond the realm of imagination.

One had nothing to pattern, nothing to copy, few tools available, no parts were manufactured and the only means of communication anywhere else in the country was by letter – a slow and tedious method 67 years ago. The manufacturing of the parts that were used in the Cotta Steamer was a slow, tedious and complicated project. Each individual part had to be designed and machined into being – welding as we know it today was unheard of. A process known as joint braising was used – a method where brass chips were heated to fluid consistency and then poured into joints.

Roads were dirt – usually mud. Horseless carriages were simply silly dreams in the hearts of unpractical men – and those feelings remained universal for years to come. The establishment of the automobile in American history was an extremely slow



accomplishment, and the road was paved with sweat, tears, heartbreak and bankruptcy for many a hardy individual.

Mr. Curtice was not with Mr. Cotta when the Cotta Steamer finally hit the road – apparently about 1904. As far as can be ascertained, there was only the one Cotta Steamer constructed in the Lanark community. The car is famous today because of features apparently initiated in the automotive business by Mr. Cotta that have become universally accepted and used in many vehicle lines today.

HARRY CLYDE CURTICE

Given Name: Harry Clyde Curtice

Surname: Curtice

Sex: Male

Birth: 3 AUG 1880 in Cherry Grove Township, Carroll County, Illinois

Death: APR 1974 in Shannon, Carroll County, Illinois

Burial: Lanark Cemetery, Lanark, Carroll County, Illinois

Occupation: Garage man at the Curtice Garage SEP 1918 – 3543 W. Harrison Street, Chicago, Cook County, Illinois

Occupation: Built the Cotta steam car for Charles Cotta 1901 Lanark, Carroll County, Illinois

(Ancestry.com)

The four-wheel drive is the really unique feature of the little auto built so many years ago. This feature is universally used today by car and truck companies. The use of the Jeep in World War II, with its four-wheel drive is probably the one vehicle that everyone associates with this feature.

The Cotta Steamer also contained such features as four-wheel steering and a special type of transmission with non-clashing gears. The Cotta Transmission Company of Rockford, Illinois is an active and prosperous factory today, still producing transmission, apparently an outgrowth of Mr. Cotta's invention following his move to Rockford from Lanark in the early 1900's. Mr. Cotta founded the Cotta Transmission Company and apparently remained active in its operation until his death a few years ago.

H.C. Curtice was born on a farm near Shannon 87 years ago. The youngest child in the family, he recalls being a "loner." He spent a great deal of time in a workshop still standing near his present home in the southwestern edge of Shannon. He recalls building a steam engine when he was only 15 years old – mechanics and engineering have always been his first love. Mr. Curtice retired in 1948 and returned to the family home where he has since resided.

Mr. Curtice is proud to have had a small part in the production of the Cotta Steamer – a car that has had a real impact in the automotive world. He also stated that "people of today think that the automobile has always been there – the younger generation doesn't really know anything about them."

(Chadwick Review, March 21, 1968)

The Lanark Gazette

Dixon Star: Charles Cotta of Lanark exhibited his automobile and the possibilities at Pleasure Park at 3:30 yesterday afternoon to quite a number of persons. The machine worked perfectly and did all that he claimed for it. A number of prominent citizens were present who feel disposed to extend fi-

nancial aid to the project of an automobile line for the city. Mr. Cotta has been in the city several days with his auto and has timed his machine in various trips to the various points of the city so that it has a comparatively accurate schedule for city trips.

(Jan. 8, 1902)

Chas. Cotta, of Rockford, was in Lanark Saturday on business. Mr. Cotta informs us that he engaged in manufacturing automobiles patterned after the one he made in this city. He has several near completion and expects to find ready sale for them. There is a possibility of a company being formed to manufacture them on a large scale in the near future.

(July 2, 1902)

YOUNG MOTHER DIES SUDDENLY

MRS. CHARLES R. COTTA DEAD
AFTER ILLNESS OF ONE DAY.
LEAVES TWO DAUGHTERS.

Mrs. Edith N. Cotta, wife of Charles R. Cotta, 520 Horsman street, died suddenly at 10 o'clock Sunday night at her home. She had been somewhat ill for several days but was kept to her bed for only one day, meningitis being the cause of her passing.

The family came here from Lanark ten years ago. Mrs. Cotta was 39 years of age and was born in Shannon. She is survived by her husband and two daughters, Winifred, aged 9 years, and Genevieve, aged 4 years.

She was a member of the Evangelical church at Shannon where she formerly lived.

Funeral services have not been fully arranged but probably will be held Wednesday afternoon at 2:30 o'clock at the home and interment in the West Side cemetery.

THE ROCKFORD MORNING STAR.

FIFTEENTH YEAR

ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS THURSDAY, MAY 22, 1902

TWO CENTS

OLD WORK OF

WILD ALARM

The Weather

Locality paid much more than the United States.

CROSS WRITE

Obituary

Mrs. Edith M. Cotta, beloved wife of Charles Cotta, of 520 Horsman Street, Rockford, Ill., departed this life Sunday night, February 11, 1912. She was the youngest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. R.R. Burt and was born at Shannon, Ill. March 10, 1872, her age at death being 39 years, 11 months and one day. She was a graduate of the high school in Shannon and for a number of years was very successful as a teacher in our public schools. She was also a student at Mount Morris College, where she completed her school course. She was married to Charles Cotta, December 29, 1897. To this union there were born three children, Winifred, now 8 years of age; Genevieve, 3 years old, and an infant son who preceded her to the spirit world five years ago.



Following their marriage Mr. and Mrs. Cotta lived in Lanark, Ill. Some three years and moved to Rockford March 1, 1902, where they have resided ever since. Mrs. Cotta gave her heart to God in her early girlhood and united with the Evangelical church at Maple Grove, Ill. With which society her family were connected. She was an active member of the church and was identified with the different organizations in that society. She was a good musician, blessed with a musical voice, and for a long time sang in the choir of her home church.

Since residing in Rockford her home cares have been quite multiplied but she was identified with the home department of the Court Street Sunday school and church. She was a devout Christian, kindly in spirit, amiable in disposition, a devoted and loving wife, a true and affectionate mother. Death came to her quite unexpectedly. For some weeks she had suffered from a severe cold but no

apprehension of the seriousness of her illness was either in her mind or that of her friends. Her death is greatly lamented by a large circle of friends and relatives. She leaves, beside her devoted husband and the two little daughters mentioned above, her aged father and mother, one brother and four sisters. Charles W. Burt of Tower City, N.D.; Mrs. G.W. Nichol of Lanark, Mrs. Mae Porter of Shannon, Mrs. H.H. Porter of Murchison, S.D., and Mrs. R.L. Miller of Shannon. Funeral services were conducted by Rev. F.F. Farmiloe at the home. He paid a tender and beautiful tribute to her memory. Mrs. Charles Reistch and Mrs. Daley Scott sang some appropriate selections and the remains were interred in the West Side Cemetery.

The pall bearers were John Witherstine, Ben Evans, Fred Blake, I.B. Shirley, C.W. Flory and B.E. Parker.

(Rockford Morning Star Feb. 15, 1912)

Society

Charles Cotta Takes Bride.


Announcement is made of the marriage of Charles Cotta of Rockford to Miss Lucinda Smith of Aurora which was celebrated this afternoon at 3 o'clock at the home of the bride. Mr. and Mrs. H.R. Cotta and T.A. Cotta and daughter, Olive, were Rockford guests at the wedding.

The groom is manager of the Cotta Gear Company and after a brief wedding trip he and his bride will be at home to their friends at 626 North Church Street.

(RDR Oct. 11, 1913)

LOCAL NIMRODS BAG THREE FOXES AT BIG LANARK HUNT

Charles Cotta, Frank Colehour and George Birks, three of the city's most enthusiastic hunters, returned from the Lanark fox and wolf hunt Friday



afternoon with three fine specimens of red fox carcasses, the result of their unerring aim.

There were 237 men engaged in the big hunt in Carroll County yesterday, the majority of these being Stephenson and Carroll County residents. Five foxes were brought in by the group and the fact that three of these went to local marksmen was gratifying to the successful nimrods of this city. Two foxes and two timber wolves proved too wary for the human enemy and escaped after being tracked to their lair, though several wolves were bagged during the later afternoon.

Many farmers near Lanark reported the loss of considerable small livestock the result of raids by fox and wolf packs during the past fortnight and yesterday's hunt was carried out to rid the neighborhood of the animal prowlers.

Cotta, Colehour and Birks plan to go to Pearl City to participate in a similar hunt next Thursday.
(Rockford Republic Jan. 17, 1925)

*Snively Forced to
Prosecute Old Friends*
**ASSISTANT STATES ATTORNEY MEETS
WITH UNPLEASANT SITUATION**

The way of the public prosecutor is often hard, but when an assistant States Attorney is forced to prosecute boyhood friends in two difference cases on the same day, fate is dealing a bit more than usual with such an official. These two incidents fell in the lot of John R. Snively in court of John B. Norton, police magistrate, yesterday.

Speeder on Trial

Charles Cotta arrested for speeding was found guilty by a jury in police court, yesterday. Fine and costs assessed by court were \$28, just one dollar for each mile that policemen claimed Cotta was traveling when arrested. Mr. Snively prosecuted the case and after the hearing Mr. Cotta approached him and reminded him that they were

friends in boyhood when both resided at Lanark, Ill. Frank Ryan represented Cotta in court.

Harry Boyer also faced Magistrate Norton on a charge of larceny of bed clothing and linens from light housekeeping rooms, which he had rented from Daniel Hart. Court held that evidence of theft was too insufficient to warrant action and he dismissed the case.

Also from Lanark

As in the other case Boyer also approached Mr. Snively and both men recalled the fact that they had been friends in boyhood at Lanark. "It is hardly a pleasant coincidence and one that I would not care to have happen many days," Mr. Snively declared when commenting on the matter.

(Rockford Morning Star Feb. 17, 1925)

*Hunters Kill
Two Reynards Near
Lanark*

**CHARLES COTTA AND FRANK COLEHOUR
DIVIDE HONORS IN ROUNDUP**

Two beautiful red foxes, apparently mates, were bagged by Rockford and Lanark hunters who invaded the haunts of Reynard between Lanark and Argo-Fay yesterday.

One of the animals, an unusually large female, was brought down by either Charles Cotta or Frank E. Colehour. Both fired at the beast at the same time, and it was impossible to determine which bagged the fox.

Another fox, a male nearly as large as the one brought down by the local men, was also killed. When the two were put on the auction block, Mr. Cotta bought it on a bid of \$14. He plans to make a choker of its skin.

Rex Rahn, living near Lanark, led the hunt. Plans for a big summer picnic in celebration of the roundup were discussed at a noon dinner meeting at Lanark yesterday.

(Rockford Morning Star Feb. 14, 1926)

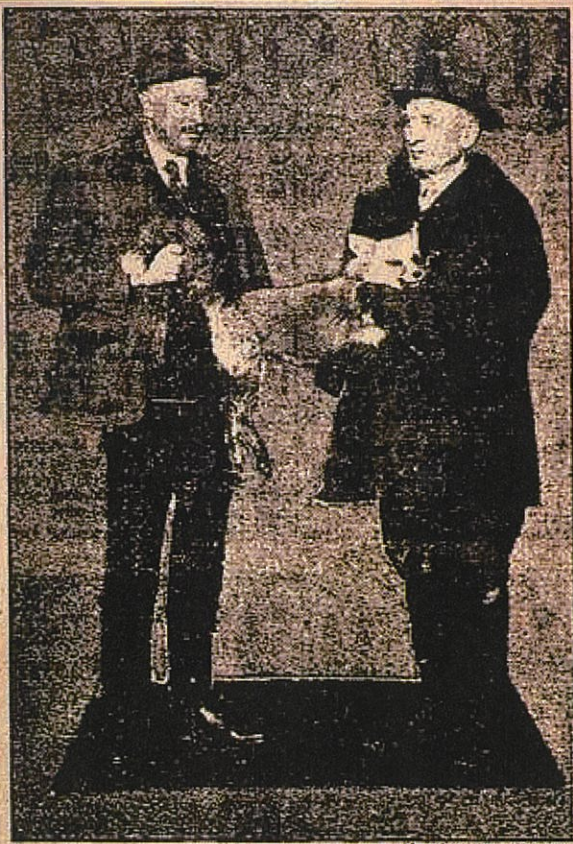
They Both Shot It

No, Charles Cotta and Frank E. Colehour, are not going to tear this foxy Reynard limb from limb! Although the fox dropped pronto when the two Rockford men pulled the triggers on their shot-guns in the big Lanark fox hunt Saturday and there is, and always will be, an element of doubt as to which killed the "varmint." Messrs. Cotta and Colehour are not quarreling over the makings of a red fox choker. The fox was put on the auction block after the hunt and Mr. Cotta bid it in for \$14. Flashlight was taken on return of the local nimrods from Lanark Saturday.

(Rockford Morning Star Feb. 17, 1926)

THE ROCKFORD MORNING STAR,
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 1926.

They Both Shot It



—Morning Star Photos

Rockford Register - Republic,
Saturday, Dec. 21, 1944 ★ 3



"Twas the night before Christmas" reads two-and-one-half-year-old Linda Rosalind Jane Taxon to her mother, the former Genevieve Cotta, and her seven months old sister, Martha Wynne, while waiting for daddy, Phillip L. Taxon, to come home. The Taxon family makes its home at 2130 Cumberland street. (Register-Republic photo.)

Chas. Cotta Is Dead at Age 73

Chas. Cotta, pioneer automobile builder and inventor and organizer of the Cotta Transmission corporation died today at the Sunny Rest sanitarium.

Ill for five years, Mr. Cotta went to the sanitarium on June 10, 1944. He was 73 years old and lived at 1712 Harlem boulevard.

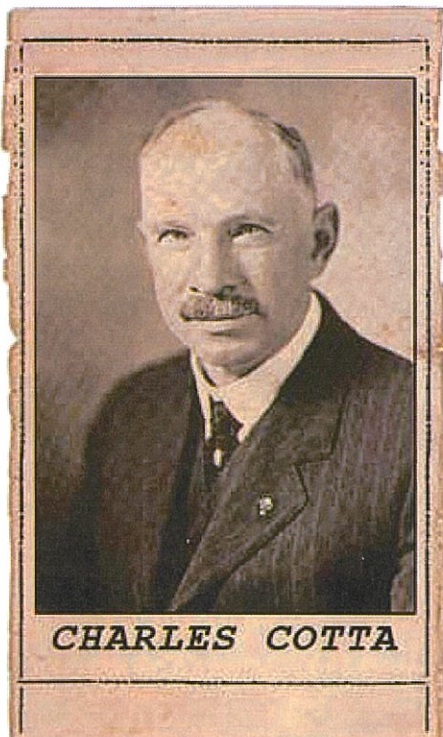
Mr. Cotta held patents on a number of devised, probably the best known being the Cotta transmission for trucks.

Forty-four years ago, while he was a young man living at Lanark he built one of the first automobiles ever seen in northern Illinois. This car was equipped with a four-wheel drive, the same sys-

tem of power transmission that is in use on big trucks and military vehicles today.

Designed Jaw Clutch

A year later, in 1902, he came to Rockford and designed a jaw clutch transmission system. He organized the Cotta Transmission for trucks in 1903.



Mr. Cotta was a charter member of the Rockford chapter of what is now the American Society for Metals and was one of its first presidents. He also was an early member of the Society of Automotive Engineers and was a former member of the Elks club.

1871 ~ 1945

Funeral services will be conducted Saturday at 1:30 p.m. in the Long-Klontz funeral home, 428 Park avenue. Dr. John Gordon, pastor of Second Congregational church, will officiate and interment will be in Greenwood cemetery. Friends may call at the funeral home Friday evening from 7 to 8 o'clock.

A native of northern Illinois, Mr. Cotta was born Aug. 26, 1871 at Nursery in Carroll county, the son of John V. and Rosalie Moeller Cotta.

On Dec. 28, 1897, he was married to Miss Edith M. Burt of Shannon. They were the parents of two daughters, Winifred and Genevieve, who is now Mrs. Phillip L. Taxon. Mrs. Cotta died on Feb. 12, 1912.

Widow Survives

Mr. Cotta and Miss Lucinda P. Smith, daughter of

David Smith of Sugar Grove, in Kane county, were married on Oct. 11, 1913.

Surviving Mr. Cotta are his wife; two daughters, Winifred at home and Mrs. Taxon, 2130 Cumberland street; two granddaughters, Linda and Martha Taxon; a brother, Theodore A. Cotta, 211 Webster avenue, and a number of nieces and nephews. Two brothers and a sister preceded him in death.

(www.findagrave.com)

Winifred B. Cotta

Miss Winifred Beatrice Cotta, 51, of 1712 Harlem Blvd., died at 10:30 a.m. today in St. Anthony's hospital after an extended illness.



Winifred Beatrice Cotta

She was born June 22, 1903, in Rockford, the daughter of the late Charles and Edith Burt Cotta. She was a lifelong resident of Rockford.

Miss Cotta attended Rockford schools and graduated from Rockford College in 1925. For the past four years she had served as dietitian at St. Anthony hospital and prior to that had been dietitian at Swedish American hospital.

She is survived by her mother, Mrs. Charles Cotta; a sister, Mrs. Philip L. (Genevieve) Taxon; and two nieces, Linda and Martha Taxon. All are Rockford residents.

Friends may call at the Long-Klontz funeral home, 428 Park Ave. from 7 to 8:30 p.m. Friday night. Services will be 2 p.m. Saturday at the funeral home, the Rev. Victor Goff, pastor of the Church of the Christian Union, Unitarian, officiating. Burial will be in Greenwood Cemetery.

A memorial to Miss Cotta has been established by the American Cancer society in Rockford.

(*Rockford Resister Republic*, Sept. 16, 1954)

Industrialist's Widow Dies At Age of 86



Services for Mrs. Lucinda Smith Cotta, 86, 1712 Harlem Blvd., widow of a prominent Rockford industrialist, who died Sunday in her home after a heart attack, will be held at 3 p.m. Wednesday in the Long-Klontz funeral home, 428 Park Ave.

The Rev. Myron Meckel, associate pastor at Second Congregational church, will

officiate. Burial will be in Greenwood cemetery. Friends may call in the funeral home from 7 to 8 o'clock tonight.

Mrs. Cotta was born June 2, 1871, near Sugar Grove, Ill., daughter of David and Harriett Smith. She married Charles Cotta in 1913. He died in 1945.

Her husband was associated with the Cotta Transmission Company and later formed the Cotta Gear Company. He assembled a pioneer automobile around the turn of the century.

She was a member of the Church of the Christian Union, Daughters of the American Revolution, and of the Daughters of the Union Veterans of the Civil War.

She was a director of Children's Home of Rockford. She also was active in the American Cancer society. She taught school in Sugar Grove and Aurora before her marriage.

Survivors include a daughter, Mrs. Philip Taxon, Rockford; a brother, Harry V. Smith, Kansas City, Mo.; and two granddaughters.

(Rockford Morning Star Feb. 4, 1958)

Genevieve Cotta Taxon, Dies at 90

Genevieve Cotta Taxon, 90, of Rockford, died Thursday, Jan. 7, 1999, with her loving family by her side. Born Edith Genevieve Cotta on June 29, 1908, daughter of Charles P. and Edith Burt Cotta. Her mother died in 1911 and her father married



Lucinda P. Smith who reared Genevieve. Genevieve married Philip L. Taxon in Rockford on Jan. 28, 1939; he died in 1973. Graduated from Rockford College in 1928 and received a master's degree from the University of Wisconsin. She was employed as a teacher by Rockford School District, teaching at Lincoln Junior High School. Also worked at Macy's in New York City. Member of Unitarian Universalist Church since 1926, Rockford Country Club and Rockford Woman's Club, serving as an officer and a director. She was department head for literature and arts department and the garden department for the Woman's Club.

Other memberships include Mendelssohn Club, Northern Illinois Botanical Society, Rockford Community Concert Association, New American Theater, Rockford Symphony Guild, Archaeology Institute of America, Century Club, Burpee Museum of Natural History, International Crane Foundation, Rockford Historical Society, Midway Village and Burpee Art Gallery. Member of Seeing Eye Inc. and former president of the Rockford chapter. Also was president of St. Anne Place Resident Council.

Survivors include daughter, Martha Mott (Clayton) Andrews; granddaughter, Catherine Mott Owen; and great-granddaughter, Emily Clara Owen, all of Rockford; sister-in-law, Rosemarie Taxon of California; and several nieces and

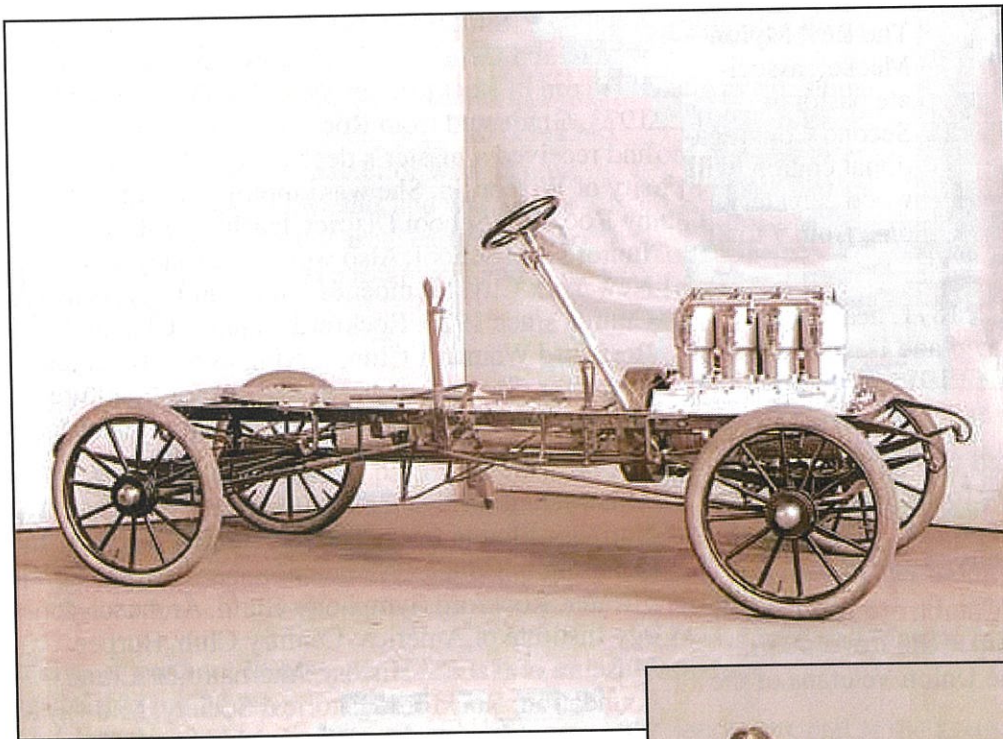
nephews. Also predeceased by parents; Charles and Lucinda; sister, Winifred Cotta; daughter, Rosalind (Linda) Allard; and grandson, Michael Taxon Mott.

A gathering of family and friends will be at 2 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 9, at 4602 Arlington St., Loves Park, the home of her daughter, Martha. Valet parking will be available. Private burial in Greenwood Cemetery. No visitation. Memorial gifts may be given to Crusader Health Foundation, Mendelssohn Club, Unitarian Universalist Church or Northern Illinois Hospice. Arrangements by Burpee-Wood Funeral Home, 420 N. Main St.

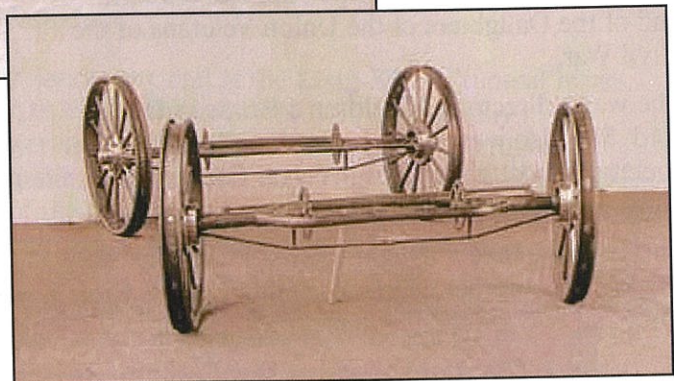
(Rockford Register Star Jan. 8, 1999)

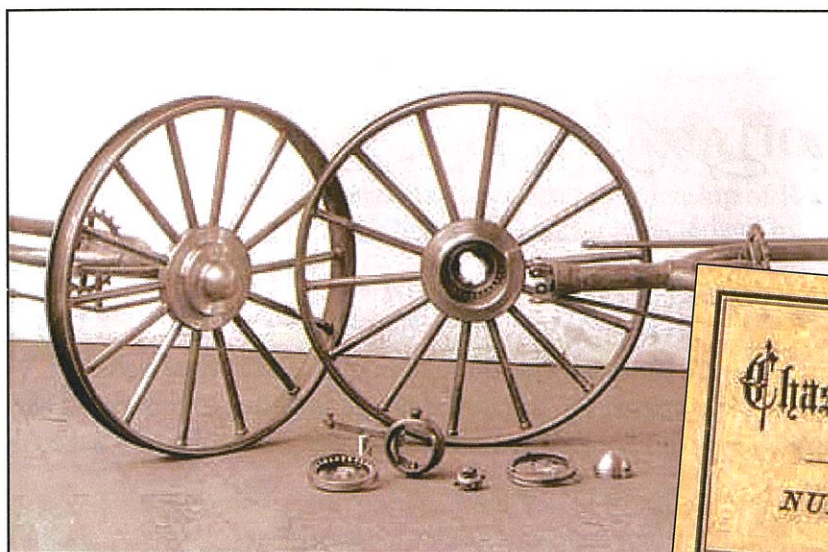


Genevieve Cotta Taxon with father, Charles Cotta, Lucinda Cotta & sister Winifred Cotta.



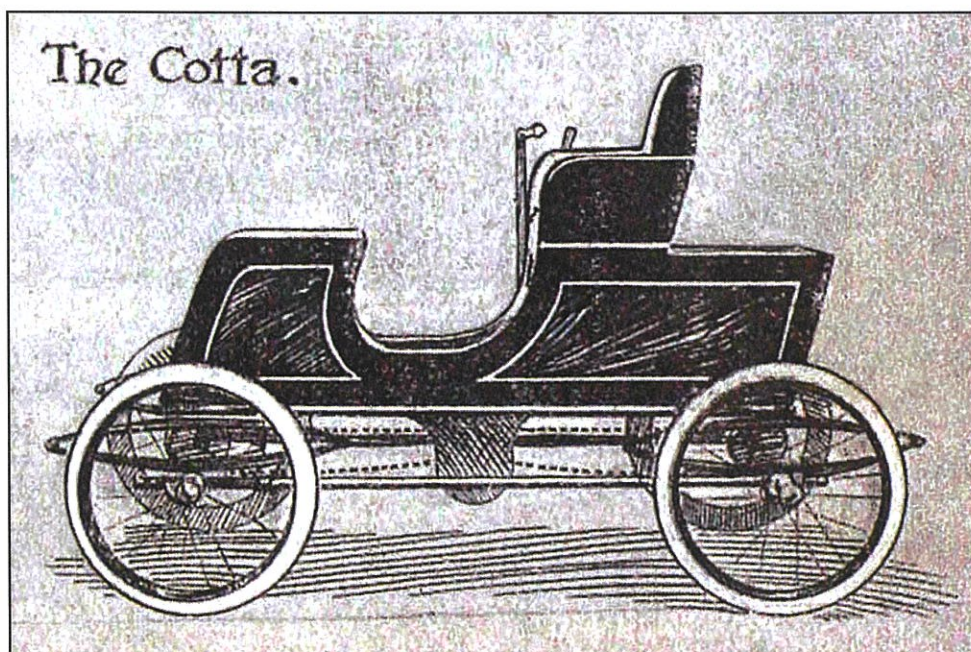
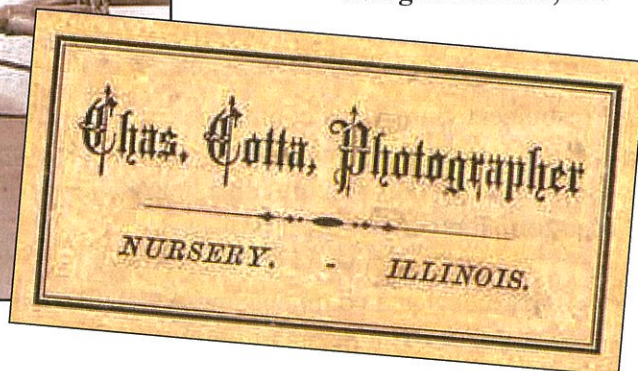
Charles Cotta's Cotta-mobile in the process of construction, using all hand-tooled parts and materials.





Cotta-mobile wheel assembly

Charles Cotta was an avid photographer while living in Lanark, IL.



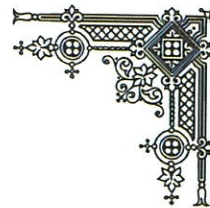
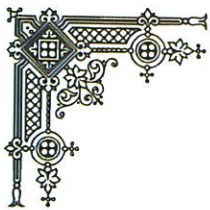
Four-by-Firsts

Four-Wheel drives that made a difference: 1902 Cotta

"No road too slippery, muddy, sandy, nor icy. Will travel anywhere, no matter what condition, the weather or the road." It's been 95 years since Charles Cotta placed this ad in the December 1, 1902 issue of Cyclone and Automobile Journal.

Was this America's first 4x4? Very likely. It's definitely one of the earliest. Cotta's Touring Car was steam-powered and featured chain drive, full elliptic springs, and tiller steering. It's unclear how many were built, but Cotta sold his design and went on to found an empire manufacturing truck transmissions.

(www.gracesguide.co.uk)



Reflection of Cotta Historical Marker Project

Vision • Project • Appreciation

The Sesquicentennial book committee formed in 2010 with the purpose to publish a historical book recording 150 years of Lanark history. It was the consensus to use the talents of the diverse committee to develop the book, thus resulting in a reasonable priced book with a nice margin of profit that would then be used for a Lanark historical project.

Your compliments and comments motivated the committee to embark on the Charles Cotta project in 2013. Research made the committee aware that Cotta's Lanark contribution to the automobile industry should be recognized with an Illinois State Historical Marker and that application was submitted in March 2014.

It is with much appreciation that we recognize the Cotta family descendants for their generosity in sharing photos, articles and memorabilia for this booklet and open house display. Their participation as Grand Marshals of the *Old Settler's Day* Parade and involvement with the dedication and sharing stories was vital to the success of the project.

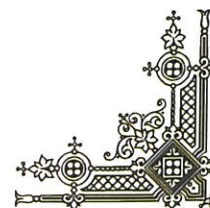
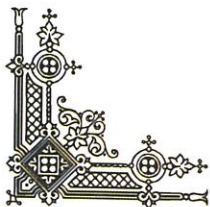
*A note of gratitude to the committee members who developed this booklet.
Tommie Healy for his outstanding graphics and composition; Caralee Aschenbrenner
for articles and research, and Ramona Koning who is an excellent sleuth in finding
historical facts and attention to details is invaluable.*

In closing, thanks to the **Lanark Public Library** at 111-B South Broad Street, Lanark, IL for making the production of this booklet possible and maintaining the Charles Cotta files. Sesquicentennial books/DVD sets can be ordered from LPL.

Charles Cotta Day ~ June 28, 2014

**LANARK, ILLINOIS THANKS FATHER OF FOUR WHEEL DRIVE
AND YOU SHOULD, TOO.**

*Cotta brochure created by:
TH.design ~ thdesign@frontiernet.net*





City of Lanark, Illinois

PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS; The City of Lanark is located in the Township of Rock Creek, in the County of Carroll, of the Northwestern region of the State of Illinois, characterized by its picturesque architecture and beautiful tree-lined streets; and

WHEREAS; the 28th day of June in the year of 2014, has been dedicated to celebrating Charles Cotta Day; and

WHEREAS; at noon on the 28th day of June in the year of 2014 a State of Illinois Historical marker will be unveiled and dedicated at 500 South Broad Street, Lanark, Illinois; and

WHEREAS; Charles Cotta, born to John V. and Rosalie Cotta on 26 August 1871, four miles east of Lanark at Nursery, on his Father's farm, business and rural post office; and

WHEREAS; Charles Cotta created and built his invention of the world's first four wheel drive (U.S. Patent 652,949) and four wheel independent steering automobile (U.S. Patent #700,175); and the site of the invention was at 500 South Broad Street, Lanark, Illinois in Weed's Garage; and

WHEREAS; Cotta's invention revolutionized the automotive industry, particularly heavy-duty vehicles, including military and precise aerospace machines; and Cotta had no mechanical experience, prefabricated parts, or access to precision machinery; and yet even after his death on 26 July 1945 his vision led the Cotta Transmission Company to worldwide sales, outer space and the future; and

WHEREAS; the Sesquicentennial Book Committee members of Lanark have chosen to honor the Cotta invention during Old Settler's Day with the Lion's Club sponsored parade theme of "Get Involved with your 4-Wheel Drive." Cotta descendants will serve as grand marshals of the parade, a reception and open house showcasing historical documents and photographs at the Lanark Public Library with souvenir booklets and re-enactors, and sponsoring a 'beautify the community' project called Chairs for Charles; and

WHEREAS; The Sesquicentennial Book Committee includes: David Shaulis-Chairperson, Sue Appel, Caralee Aschenbrenner-Historian, Diann Cassens, Janie Dollinger, Tommie Healy-Graphic Artist, John Huggins, Ramona Koning-Historian, Denise Krysiak, John Lamoreux, Jason Sword, Doris Tempel, Gretchen Wallander, Sharon Yoeckel and Matt Zumdahl-Treasurer. Members will wear light blue tee shirts showing the Cotta-mobile on the front and Cotta Pit Crew on the back; and

WHEREAS; to this day, the automobile industry has been impacted by the inventions of Charles Cotta; and

WHEREAS; Now, therefore, I, John Huggins, Mayor of the City of Lanark, IL do hereby proclaim the day of 28 June 2014,

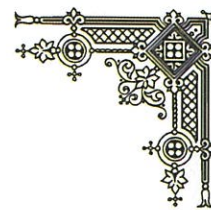
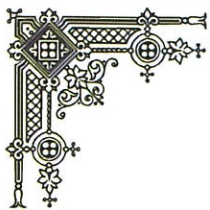
CHARLES COTTA DAY

LANARK, ILLINOIS THANKS FATHER OF FOUR WHEEL DRIVE AND YOU SHOULD, TOO.

In Witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the official seal of the City of Lanark, Illinois to be affixed in Carroll County on the 17th day of June 2014.

~ Mayor John Huggins





Notes

