



2024 NATIONAL INVENTORS
HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE

Born: Nov. 1, 1850
Died: June 24, 1922

10 Things You Need to Know About

Mary Florence Potts

Cold-Handle Sad Iron

U.S. PATENT NOS. 103,501 & 113,448

1. Born Mary Florence Webber in 1850, Potts grew up in Iowa.
2. She was married and raising a young son in Iowa when she began developing a series of improvements to the sad iron.
3. Potts lacked the financial resources to manufacture and sell her invention on her own. She began working with third-party manufacturers who marketed Potts' invention as Mrs. Potts' Cold Handle Sad Iron, promoting the fact that a woman had designed it.
4. The irons were featured at the Centennial International Exhibition of 1876 in Philadelphia — the first official World's Fair in the United States.
5. When patent rights expired in the 1890s, many ironworks began to copy Potts' original sad iron design, and some advertised it as the Mrs. Potts Iron.
6. Mrs. Potts Irons were commonly used well into the 1930s, at which point they were surpassed in popularity by electric irons.
7. Today, Mrs. Potts Irons are sought after by antique dealers and collectors.
8. Potts continued to invent. In 1892, she and her husband, Joseph, received a patent (468,946) for their invention of a "Remedial or Medical Appliance," an early version of a heating pad.
9. A third inventor in the Potts family was Mary and Joseph's son, Oscero. He held patents for making optical lenses (1,332,410) and for a device for securing a cooking pot lid (1,722,394).
10. She had seven U.S. patents.