

Tennessee Innovators:  
Clarence Saunders and David Crosthwait  
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## Clarence Saunders and David Crosthwait

*Essential Questions: What innovations did Clarence Saunders introduce to food purchasing and retail marketing? What contributions did David Crosthwait make to engineering?*

Clarence Saunders was born in 1881 in Virginia. His parents were very poor. The Saunders family soon moved to Montgomery County, Tennessee where Saunders grew up. He took a job working for a wholesale grocer in Clarksville. In his early 20's Clarence Saunders moved to Memphis and took a sales position in a Memphis grocery. He enjoyed the work, but disliked the inefficiency of the sales methods used in grocery stores of the day.

Grocery stores placed items on shelves with counters between the customers and the sales items. Shoppers would tell store clerks standing behind the counters what they wanted and the clerks would pull it off the shelves. The process took a long time and led Saunders to develop the idea of self-service. The idea of self-service was not entirely new but Clarence Saunders was the man who was instrumental in selling the idea to the consumer. With his more modern approach to grocery sales Clarence Saunders opened his first store September 11, 1916.

Piggly Wiggly stores opened with the idea of self-service and lower costs for the consumer. When asked where he got the name for the store, Saunders told people he chose the name so that people would ask that very question. It was a marketing tool to build interest. By 1917, Saunders was selling franchises and in 1923 the Piggly Wiggly chain was the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest retail grocery in the nation with 1,268 stores. Soon, Piggly Wiggly stock was being traded on the New York Stock Exchange.

Later Saunders tried to corner Piggly Wiggly stock by setting up a shell company and buying as much Piggly Wiggly stock as possible. When this was discovered, Saunders was forced out of Piggly Wiggly and had to reimburse stockholders. This caused Saunders to lose millions and he declared bankruptcy. But soon Saunders was reinventing the wheel again.

Clarence Saunders saw the need for more innovation in grocery sales. He soon opened a chain of stores called Sole Owner Stores. Clarence Saunders now added meat departments, delis, and bakeries to his stores. The Sole Owner Stores did well until the Great Depression when Saunders lost the stores due to the economy. Clarence Saunders is truly the Father of the modern supermarket.

Again Clarence Saunders made an attempt to innovate grocery sales by developing his Keedoozle Stores. The Keedoozle was an attempt to have groceries sold entirely by automation. The Keedoozle was like a large vending machine where customers would insert keys into slots to have the product dropped to a conveyer belt. The product would then be moved to a checkout center. Often the products would be damaged upon arrival at the check-out counter. The

Keedoozle never operated profitably. Saunders's ideas were ahead of his time.

Clarence Saunders died October 15, 1953 having made and lost two fortunes. Through his ideas and innovations Clarence Saunders influenced the way the American public purchases groceries and there are still Piggly Wiggly stores open and selling groceries today.

David Crosthwait was born in Nashville, Tennessee in 1898. He moved to Kansas City, Kansas as a child and attended an all-black school. Crosthwait showed an early interest in science and engineering which was encouraged by his parents and teachers. After graduating from high school, Crosthwait attended Purdue University on a full academic scholarship. He graduated in 1913 with a degree in mechanical engineering.

Crosthwait was employed by Dunham Company designing and installing heating systems. His largest and best known project was designing the heating system for Rockefeller Center and Radio Center Music Hall. However, Crosthwait received thirty nine U.S. patents and eighty international patents for inventions relating to heating, refrigeration, vacuums, and temperature regulating devices. Crosthwait retired from Dunham Company in 1969 and returned to his alma mater, Purdue, to teach engineering classes. Crosthwait died in Indiana in 1976.

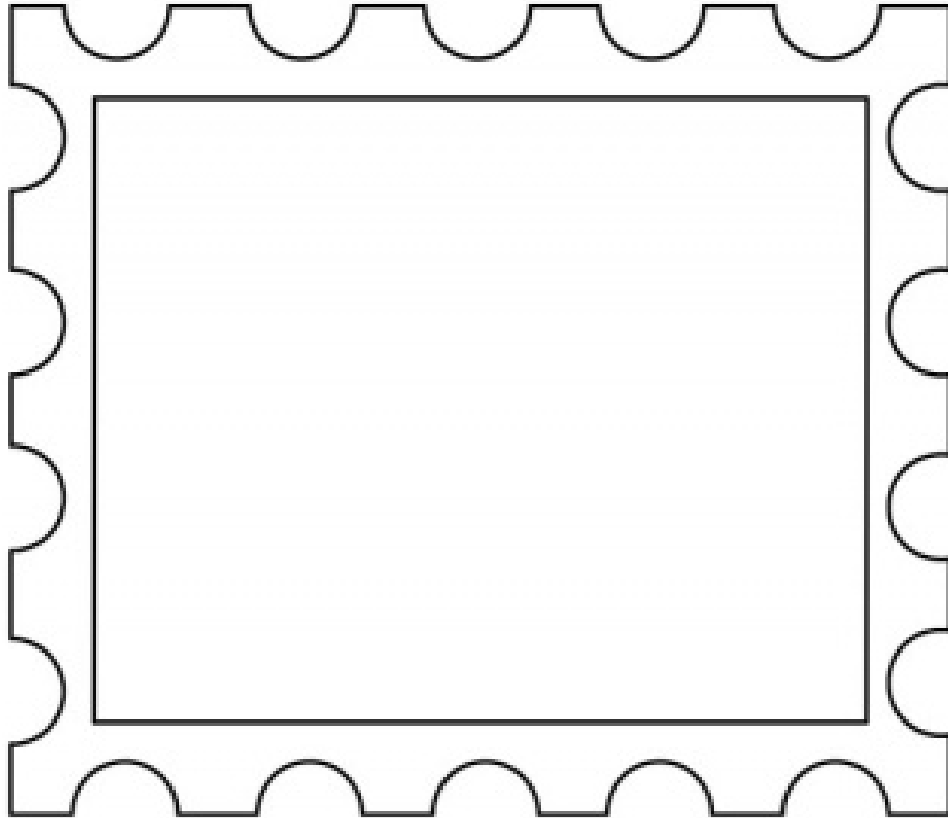
Sources: "Clarence Saunders." *Tennessee Encyclopedia and History and Culture* 1st edition. 1998. Print.

"Clarence Saunders Had Self-Service in Store With His Piggly Wiggly Supermarkets." *Investors.com*. Investors' Business Daily, 2010. Web. 30 July, 2014. <<http://www.newhaven.edu/98630.pdf>>

Rupert, A. (2009, February 22) David Nelson Jr. Crosthwait (1898-1976). Retrieved from <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/crosthwait-david-nelson-jr-1898-1976/> 16 June 2019.

## Clarence Saunders and David Crosthwait

Design a postage stamp in honor of Clarence Saunders or David Crosthwait. Afterwards, write a paragraph explaining why Saunders or Crosthwait deserves to have a stamp made in his honor. Use the text to provide specific examples of his accomplishments.



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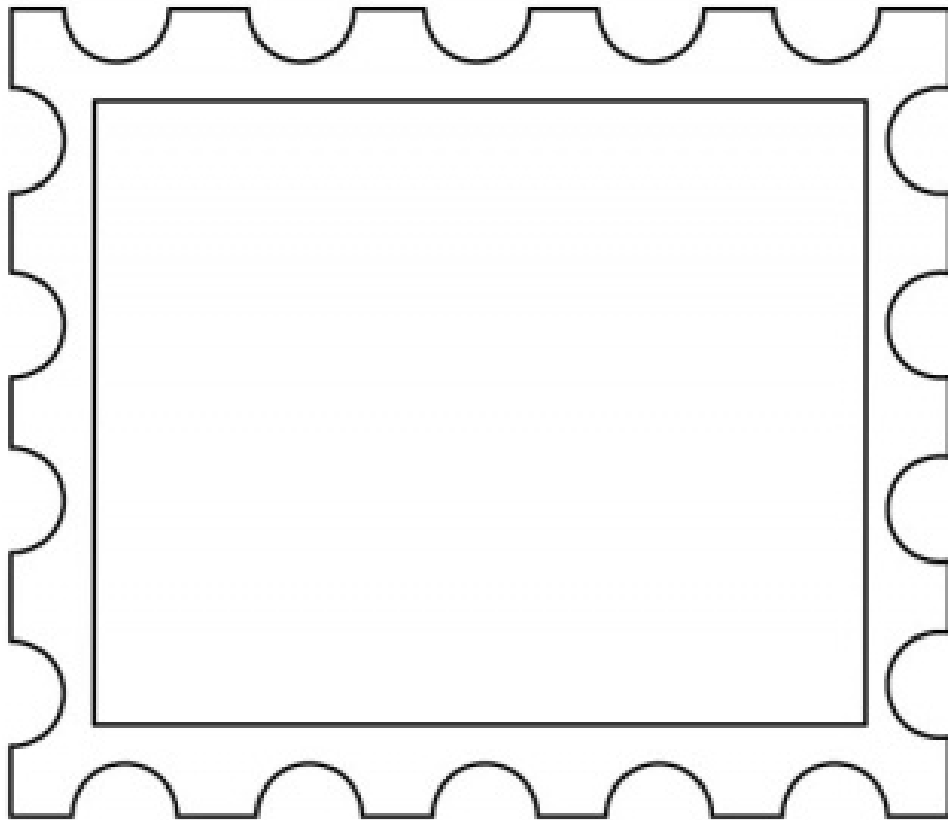
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# Clarence Saunders and David Crosthwait Key

Design a postage stamp in honor of Clarence Saunders or David Crosthwait. Afterwards, write a paragraph explaining why Saunders or Crosthwait deserves to have a stamp made in his honor. Use the text to provide specific examples of his accomplishments.



Answers will vary, but should include Sanders development of new style of shopping and success of Piggly Wiggly.

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## Clarence Saunders Primary Source Set

The following items are available from the Library of Congress. Click on the title to access the full record and a downloadable version of the image.



[Clarence Saunders](#)



[Shelves in a Piggly Wiggly self-service grocery store in or near Memphis, Tennessee](#)



[Interior view of a Piggly Wiggly self-service grocery store showing scales on top of counter and paper bags stored under counter](#)



[Interior of Piggly Wiggly store, Tenn., showing entrance turnstile with small wicker shopping baskets, and check-out counter; 1st self-service grocery store in U.S.](#)