

Something New Under the Sun

Carol Jean Lambert



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The more I learned about my great-grandfather, the more impressed I was. One of ten children in an entrepreneurial, hard-working family, he was front and center for the industrial revolution that characterized his age. At only thirty John designed, built and drove the first gasoline-powered car in America. John's prototype was different from other efforts of his day. Others took an existing stationary engine and fastened it to a carriage built to be pulled by a horse. John built his machine to carry the weight of his engine which became famous for is unique transmission design of two perpendicular spinning disks, a technology still in use today. John was known as the Father of the Gradual Transmission. Cries of "Get a horse!" did not deter him. In January 1891 John Lambert drove his three-wheeled wonder through the streets of Ohio City, Ohio offering rides to the amazed citizenry and then indulged his dare-devil nature under the moonlight pressing the power of his vehicle across the frozen fields of friendly farmers. L. Scott Bailey, the Editor of Antique Automobile magazine and editor of the definitive and beautiful book The American Car Since 1775, after five full years of extensive investigation and research, elucidated the claim that John Lambert built the first car to run by gasoline in America in an article entitled, "Historic Discovery: 1891 Lambert, New Claim for America's First Car" (Antique Automobile, Oct/Nov 1960). In correspondence, Mr. Bailey encouraged me to tell John's story. I am thrilled to offer this rendering of my quest to know John and his extraordinary life.

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