

# Jan Ernst Matzeliger



Inventor  
Scott # 2567  
Issued September 15, 1991 in Lynn, MA  
Stamp Artist: Higgins Bond

Jan Matzeliger was born in Paramaribo, Dutch Guiana on September 15, 1852.

When Jan was 18 years old, he began working in his father's machine shop. Jan had a fascination with the way machines worked and soon became adept at handling and working on them. In 1873 at 18 years of age, he emigrated to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Jan spent 3 years in Philadelphia doing mostly odd jobs and then in 1876 moved first to Boston and then to Lynn, Massachusetts. After moving to Lynn, Jan took a job in a shoe factory.

During that era, although there were machines that could cut, sew and tack shoes, no machine had ever been invented that could stitch the leather (upper) of a shoe to the sole and this operation had to be performed by hand. (The process is called Lasting.)

Jan became interested in the question of whether such a device could be produced and began to work on designs for a lasting machine. In 1880 he produced and acquired a patent on his first Lasting Machine made with cigar boxes, wood and wire.

He perfected and patented his machine in 1883 receiving patent number 274,207. Jan's Lasting Machine was able to turn out 200 to 600 pairs of shoes a day compared to the best manual rate of only 50 per day.

During the time that Jan was working on and improving his machine, he spent virtually every penny he had on perfecting it. He ate sparingly and got very little sleep. Jan Matzeliger died on August 24, 1887 at the age of 37. He succumbed to Tuberculosis, his health irreversibly damaged by his poor eating habits, long hours and lack of sleep.

Sources:  
Encyclopedia Britannica  
Encyclopedia Africana

