



William Elvis Sloan (1867-1961)



The inventor of the Flushometer and founder of Sloan Valve Company, William Elvis Sloan, was born in Liberty, Missouri. After serving as an apprentice pipe fitter, he traveled to Chicago and became a foreman, a superintendent, and finally, an independent contractor.

Through intense self-education, W.E. Sloan developed a superior knowledge of electrical circuitry and hydraulics, which led to a total of 64 inventions during his long, productive life. Among these were a relay booster for telegraph lines and a fire-safety curtain for theaters. The later invention was inspired by the Iroquois Theater fire in Chicago, which claimed hundreds of lives. The fire started backstage and spread rapidly into the auditorium. Sloan's conception was a fireproof curtain with heat fusible linkage, which would drop instantly and automatically in the event of a fire; it was simple, practical and, like most good inventions, immediately obvious-once somebody thinks of it.

Sloan then developed the idea for his Royal Flushometer with its revolutionary design and ingenious simplicity. The Royal is a diaphragm-type valve and was the original product of Sloan Valve Company when it started in business in 1906. It is still the largest selling Flushometer in the Sloan line (literally millions are in use throughout the world). While there have been many refinements and improvements in component parts over the years, the working principle and fundamental hydraulic design have not changed.

No figure in our industry ever faced a greater sales challenge than W.E. Sloan in launching his new company, and none ever persevered more courageously in the face of resistance and discouragement. The benefits of using Flushometers instead of toilet tanks in commercial structures were considerable and undeniable: a saving of water, much less maintenance; a relative freedom from breakage and vandalism, and virtually no recycling time between flushes. These benefits would pay every day for the life of the building. But to get them, you had to accept a somewhat higher initial cost because the pipe size of the branch line supplying the fixture had to be larger than that required for a toilet tank.

But the real problem W.E. Sloan had to overcome was the normal human resistance to change. Plumbers were afraid to install Flushometers because they knew nothing about them. Architects would not specify them for the same reason. Owners did not want to be the guinea pigs. Lenders were leery of unproven products. Some fixture manufacturers even refused to furnish their fixtures when Sloan Flushometers were to be installed.

The first year, he sold one Flushometer. The next year, he doubled his business and sold two. In the third year, he sold a phenomenal 150 Flushometers and from then on, sales shot upward. Whenever a building engineer would permit, Sloan would install a Royal Flushometer for demonstration letting the tradesman see firsthand the savings and benefits. The flush valve proved so incomparably better that the trade began to relax its opposition.

W.E. Sloan also developed piston-type Flushometers. Over the years, the original Royal was joined by the Star, the Crown, the Gem and the Naval; plus automatic urinal flushing systems and the Act-O-Matic showerhead. He made his product names bywords in the industry through powerful, consistent advertising in plumbing, architectural, and institutional publications, using cover positions whenever available.

W.E. Sloan died just short of turning 93 years old. The company he founded and built is today the world leader in Flushometers. Its foundry and plants are among the most modern and efficient in the plumbing industry.

And the Sloan legacy of innovation and leadership lives on with grandson Charles Allen Sloan, and great-grandsons Kirk, James and Graham, at the helm.