February 13, 2024 Arts & Cultural Affairs Committee Mtg. Presentation # 2 Lewis Latimer House Museum



Lewis Latimer

Electrical Pioneer

"Like the light of the sun, it beautifies all things on which it shines, and is no less welcome in the palace than in the humblest home"

Contact Us

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https://lewislatimerhouse.org/



Lewis H. Latimer (1848-1928) was an African American inventor whose innovations in designing carbon filaments ushered in the age of electric light.

Latimer was the son of selfemancipated enslaved Virginians, a self-taught master draftsman, an expert on patent law, a poet, and a painter - in short, a Renaissance man.



Abolitionism and the Fugitive Slave Debate

Lewis Latimer's Paternal Grandfather was Mitchell Latimer, a plantation owner and slaveholder in Norfolk, Virginia who had a son with one of the enslaved woman on his plantation, Margaret Olmstead, in the early 1800's. Their son, George Latimer grew up enslaved. In early 1828 George Married Rebecca Smith who was enslaved on a nearby plantation. When they learned they were going to become parents the escaped to Boston.



 By the 1840's, Boston had become a center of abolitionist activity.

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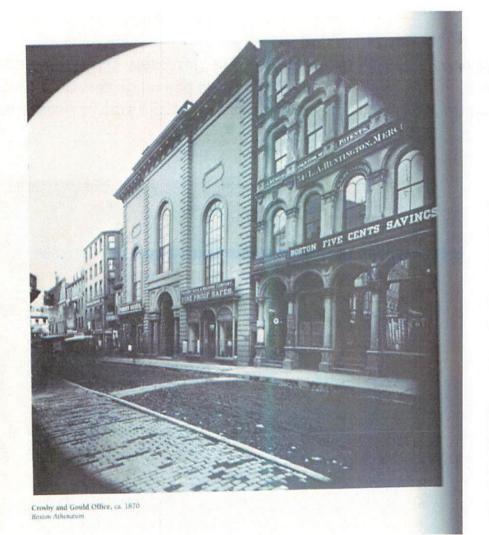
 The issue of fugitive slaves became hotly debated in Massachusetts and across the country. Not long after his arrival in Boston, George Latimer was recognized as an escaped slave. He was arrested and and imprisoned, and an effort was made to return him to Virginia. At this news Boston abolitionists rallied to action. Meetings were held throughout Massachusetts on Latimer's behalf, and a new abolitionist paper, The Latimer Journal and North Star, was born to detail the progress of his case. Ultimately Latimer spent one month in jail. Abolitionists succeeded raising \$400 to buy his freedom.

Lewis Latimer's Early Life



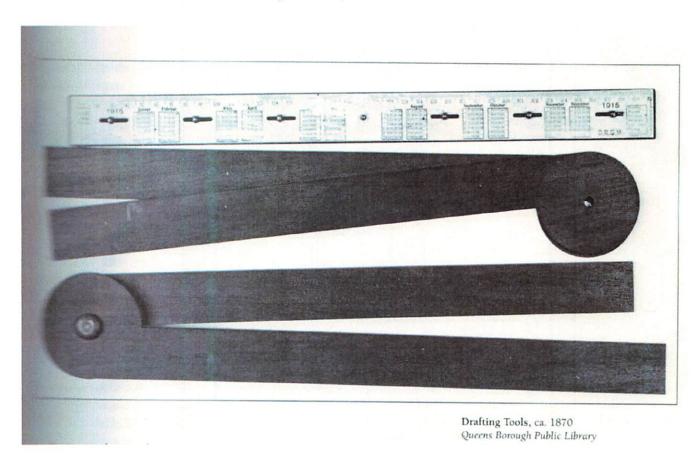


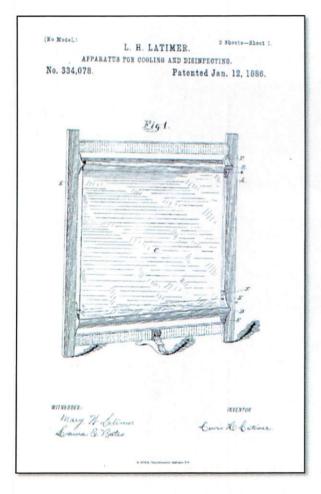
Lewis was 12 years old when the Civil War began, Latimer's older brothers joined in the union army, and when Lewis was 16 he lied about his age in order to join the Union Navy. He served aboard a side-wheel gunboat, the USS *Massasoit*, and was honorably discharged in 1865.

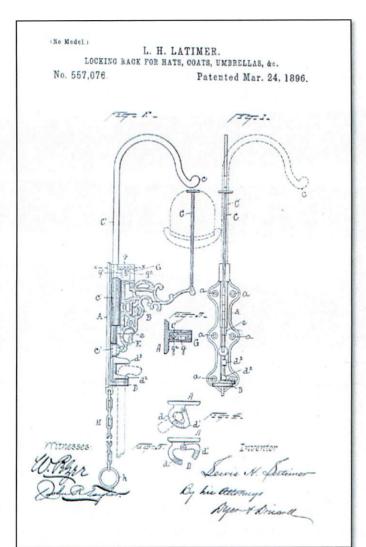


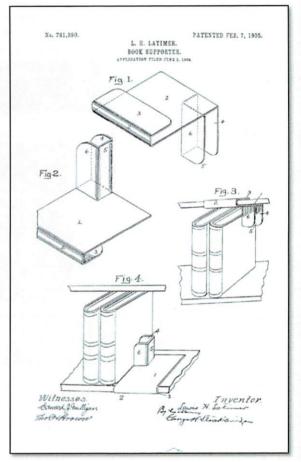
After the Civil War, Latimer sought employment in Boston. He found work at a patent law firm, Crosby and Gould.

Latimer would work his way from an office boy with "a taste" for drawing to the head draftsman at the firm during his 11 year tenure at the firm.









C. W. BROWN & L. H. LATIMER. Water-Closets for Railroad-Cars.

No.147.363.

9 43. Hickory

Working at Crosby and

Gould, Latimer became

for new inventions. In

patented a device to

improve the quality of

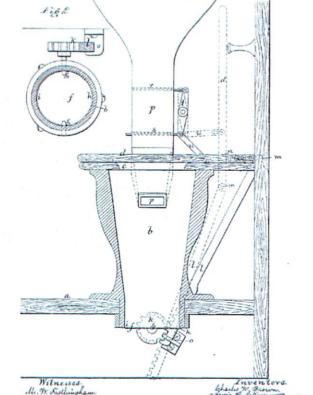
bathrooms used on trains.

adept at drawing models

1874 he and C.W. Brown

Fin I

Patented Feb. 10, 1874.



AN PROSPECTIONARIANCE CARECURARY CHARGE

UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE.

CHARLES W. BROWN, OF SALEM, AND LEWIS H. LATIMER, OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS.

IMPROVEMENT IN WATER-CLOSETS FOR RAILROAD-CARS.

Specification forming part of Letters Patent No. 147,363, dated February 10, 1871; application filed

To all schow it may concern:

Middlesex, all in the State of Massachusetts, have invented certain Improvements in Water-Closets for Railway Passenger-Cars; and we do hereby declare that the following, taken in connection with the drawings which accompany and form part of this specification, is a description of our invention sufficient to enable these skilled in the art to practice it.

In the construction of water-closets for rail-way passenger-cars it is customary to make the hopper with an open bettom, and without any pan beneath. For this reason the apparatus, although cleanly so far as relates to the adhereuse of excrementions matter, is neither agreeable to use nor wholly safe, the draft through the hopper being always excessive, while the annoyance from dast, cinders, and other matters thrown up from the track is so great as to forbid or discourage the use of the apparatus except under extreme circumstances. Our invention has reference to such a construction of a water-closet apparatus for railway-cars as shall obviate the objections to the use of such closets as they are now built or applied.

In our invention, we apply to the hopper a pivoted bottom, that is automatically closed y the raising of the sent-cover, and automatically opened by the closing of the said cover, this bottom being, preferably, pivoted at its center, and so as to be rotated one hundred and eighty degrees at each opening or closing movement of the sent-cover, in which case the bottom is always closed, whether the sent-cover is in a raised position or closed position, it be-ing turned bottom up by the raising of the seatcover. We also prefer to construct the apparatus with an earth-closet mechanism; by which a supply of dry earth, sand, or equivalent ma-

position to close the end of the hopper and re-ceive the excrement when the sent-cover is Be it know that we, CHARLES W. Brown, iof Salem, in the country of Essex, and LEWES in size, and is automatically thrown open by II. LATENIE, of Somerville, in the county of

The drawing represents an apparatus em

The drawing represents an apparatus em-bodying the invention.

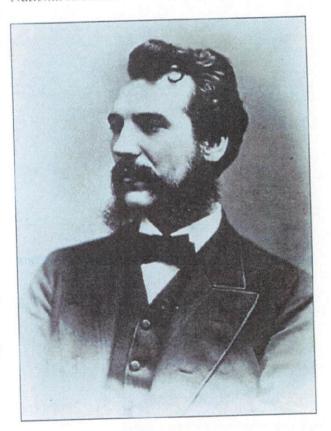
Figure 1 shows the apparatus in sectional elevation. Fig. 2 is a sectional plan of the bor-tom of the hopper,
a denotes the foor of the car; b, the hopper;
c, the seat, and d the seat-cover. Under the homes- and cleaning its end, is seen the bottom

hopper, and closing its end, is seen the bottom or receiving and discharging plate f. This plate is hung on its center, as seen at g, and in such manner that one edge laps under one side of the hopper tube, as seen at h, while the opposite edge (seen at i) is in position to turn up into the tube. On one of the gudgeons a gear-bar, k, into which meshes the teeth of a gear-bar, k, which bar, at its upper end, is jointed to an arm projecting from the rear edge of the seat cover if, as seen at in, the seat-cover being hinged at a, and the arm extending be yend the hinge, and turning down, as seen by the dotted lines, when the sent-cover is turned up. The turning down of the arm when the up. The turning down of the arm when the seat-cover is raised feress down the gearbar I, which is guided by a bearing, o, causing the bar to turn the pindu, k thereby reversing the position of the plate f. Leading into the upper part of the hopper is seen the spoat por an earth-reservoir, q, and in the spoat are two valves, r. a, jointed to a lever, t, one arm of which lever, by a link, u, is connected to the seat-cover, the valves and their method of operation being the same as in many carth-closets.

Each valve slides under, or rests upon, a valve-seat, and has a suitable passage, connecting, at proper time, with a corresponding pas-sage through its valve seat, and the movements imparted to the respective valves are such that at each time the sear-cover is shut a supply of dry earth, sant, or squareserving down the lower valve is cross a maximum price circle is ledged upon the bottom or receiving one opened, thereby letting the earth from the and discharging plate whenever the scat cover one opened, thereby letting the earth from the reservoir of down through the upper valve, to and discharging plate whenever the seaf cover one opened, thereby setting the entrol from the six missed, and before the apparatus is used.

Our invention consists, primarily in a railwaycar water-closet apparatus, in which the hopper is provided with a pivoted bottom or bottomis provided with a pivoted bottom or bottomplate that is always untomatically brought to is opened, to let the earth lodged upon the Two years later, Latimer put his experience to work assisting Alexander Graham Bell in his effort to secure a patent for the telephone. Bell's application was filed on February 14, 1876. Several hours later another inventor, Elisha Gray, submitted his own plans for a telephone, but was too late. Bell had won the race with Latimer's Help

Alexander Graham Bell, ca. 1874 National Archives





While working at Crosby and Gould, Latimer met Mary Wilson. The couple was married on September 20, 1873



The Race for Electric Light



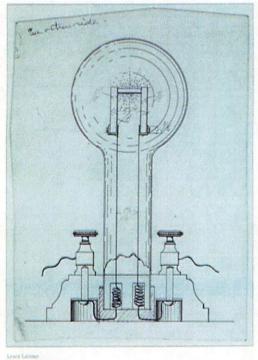


Bridgeport Industrial Scene, ca. 1880 Bridgeport Public Library

Economic expansion, immigration, and urbanization shaped the development of the industrial Northeast in the post-Civil War years. By the turn of the century, Bridgeport had become Connecticut's foremost manufacturing city.

In 1879, Lewis Latimer would make pivotal move to Bridgeport Connecticut to work for Hiram S. Maxim, an inventor who was at the time, chief engineer at the United States Electrical Lighting Company.

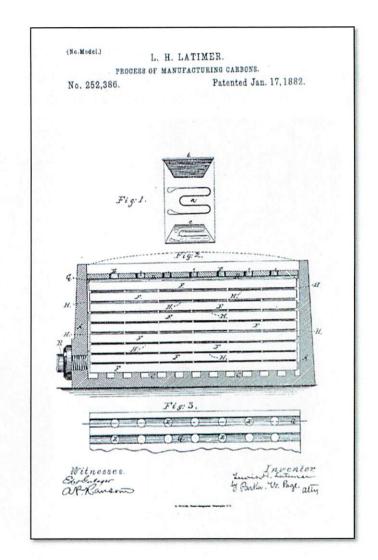
Perfecting the incandescent light proved challenging.
 The filament contained within the glass bulb lasted only a short time and it was difficult and expensive to keep replacing lightbulbs.

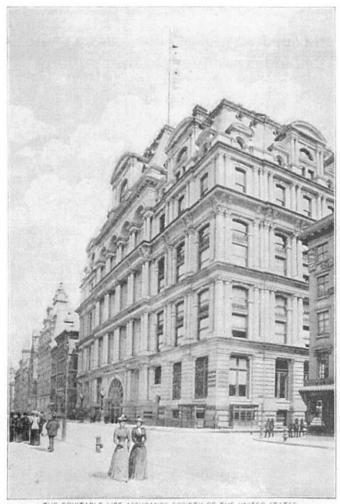


Leas's Light Bulb. 1880.

The Laisney-Mormon Hamb Collisions
On the back of this showing, Laisney need. "The first drawing mode by me for House

 In 1881, Latimer invented a method for manufacturing cheap, long-lasting light bulb filaments. His patent opened the door to a new era of artificial lighting.

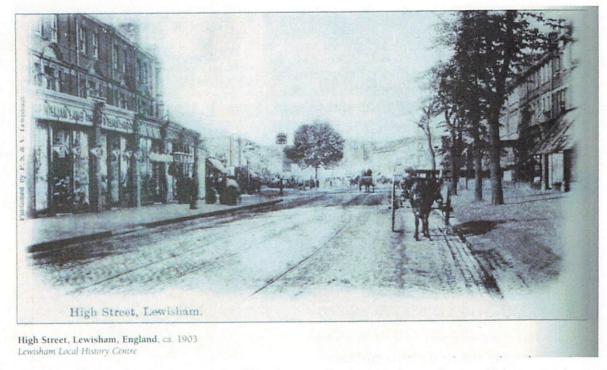




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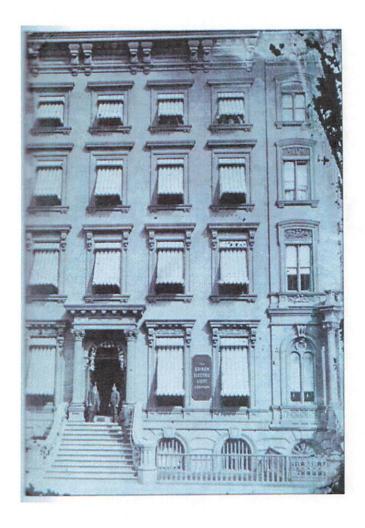
- Latimer's work for U.S. Electric exposed him to many new experiences. He became the company's expert on outdoor electrical lighting and received several patents for improvements in the process of bulb manufacture.
- His work took him to Philadelphia, Montreal and New York and London.

In 1882, Latimer was sent to London, England to establish a light bulb factory. He remained in London for nine months.



After his return, Latimer accepted an offer from Thomas Edison himself for employment at the Edison Electric Light Company and settled in New York.

An Edison Engineer

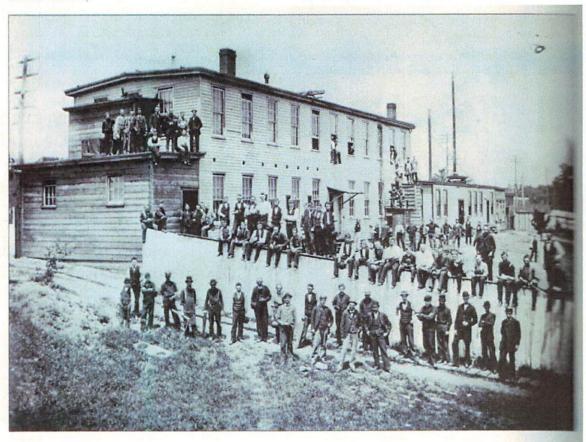


Lewis Latimer was hired by Thomas Edison in 1883 and found many outlets for his talents within the rapidly growing Edison Electric Light Company of New York.

Edison Electric Light Company, 1886 Queens Borough Public Library Edison's First Commercial Lamp Factory, 1880 U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, The Edison National Historic Site

The Menlo Park lamp factory employed a large staff. The official start of production was October of 1880, and by the end of the year this factory was turning out several hundred bulbs daily.

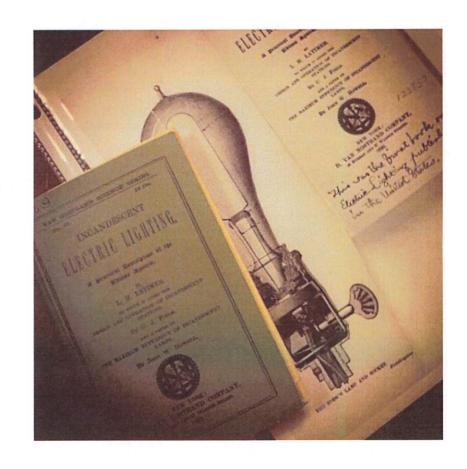
Shortly after joining the company, Latimer became a member of the engineering department as a draftsman



- In 1890, Latimer was transferred to a newly created legal department.
- Edison's patents were frequently challenged in court. Latimer served on Edison's legal team as a patent investigator and expert witness, testifying on Edison's behalf many times.



- By 1890, many of the practical problems of developing electrical lighting systems had been solved.
- Latimer wrote A Practical Description of the Edison System in 1890 as a way to explain the new field of electricity to the average citizen.



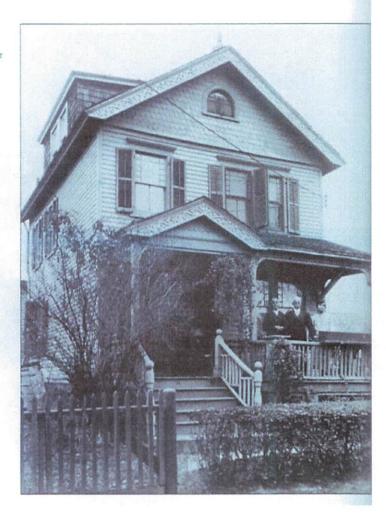
Tale of a House

 The Lewis Latimer House is a modest Queen Anne style wood-frame suburban residence. Latimer Family Home, ca. 1920 Queens Borough Public Library

Lewis Latimer with his wife Mary and daughter Louise on the porch of the family home at 64 Holly Street.

 The house was constructed between 1887 and 1889

> The style was once an icon of the late 19thcentury middle class American dwelling



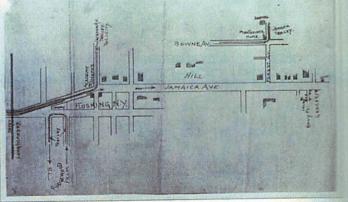


After purchasing the house on Holly Street, Latimer designed and added both a one story rear wing as his study and a dormered attic.

Fig. 3: Lewis H. Latimer Horse, c. 1902-1913, showing studies addition. Queens Borough Public Library.

Latimer's Studio Addition (Latimer Designation Report)

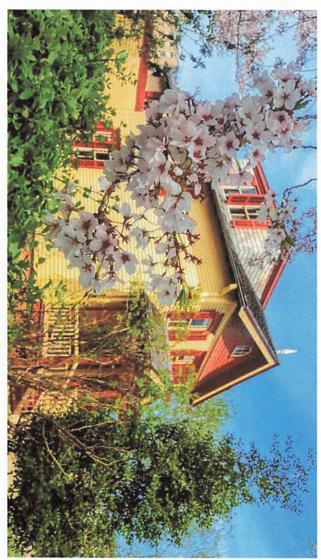




- In 1988 the house on Holly street was scheduled to be demolished.
- A group of citizens lead by Winifred Latimer Norman formed the Committee to Save the Latimer House

Latimer House being Moved (Latimer Designation Report)





ix The Ebon Venus

Let others boast of maidens fair, Of eyes of blue and golden hair; My heart like needle never true Turns to the maid of ebon hue.

I love her from of matchless grace, The dark brown beauty of her face, Her lips that speak of love's delight, Her eyes that gleam as stars at night.

O'er marble Venus let them rage Who set the fashion of the age; Each to his taste; but as for me, My Venus shall be ebony.



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