



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"*

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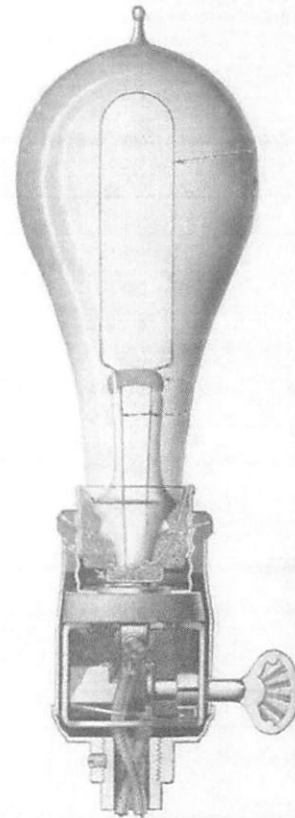
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Lewis H. Latimer (1848-1928) was an **African American inventor whose innovations in designing carbon filaments ushered in the age of electric light.**

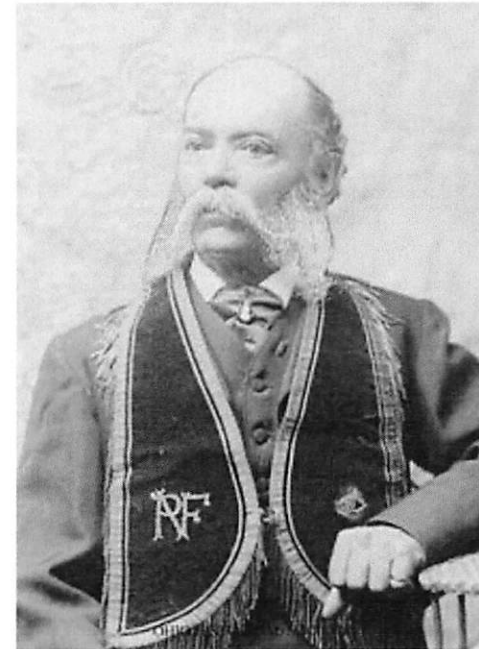
Latimer was the son of self-emancipated enslaved Virginians, a self-taught master draftsman, an expert on patent law, a poet, and a painter - in short, a Renaissance man.



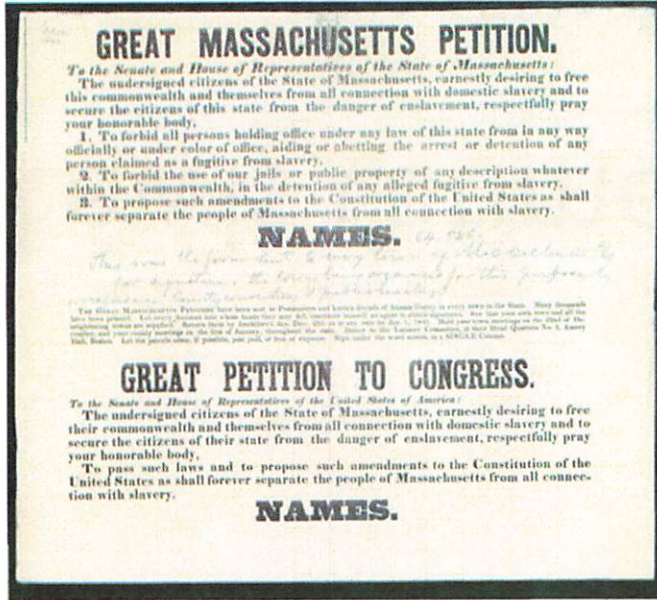
THE EDISON LAMP AND SOCKET
Photogram.

Abolitionism and the Fugitive Slave Debate

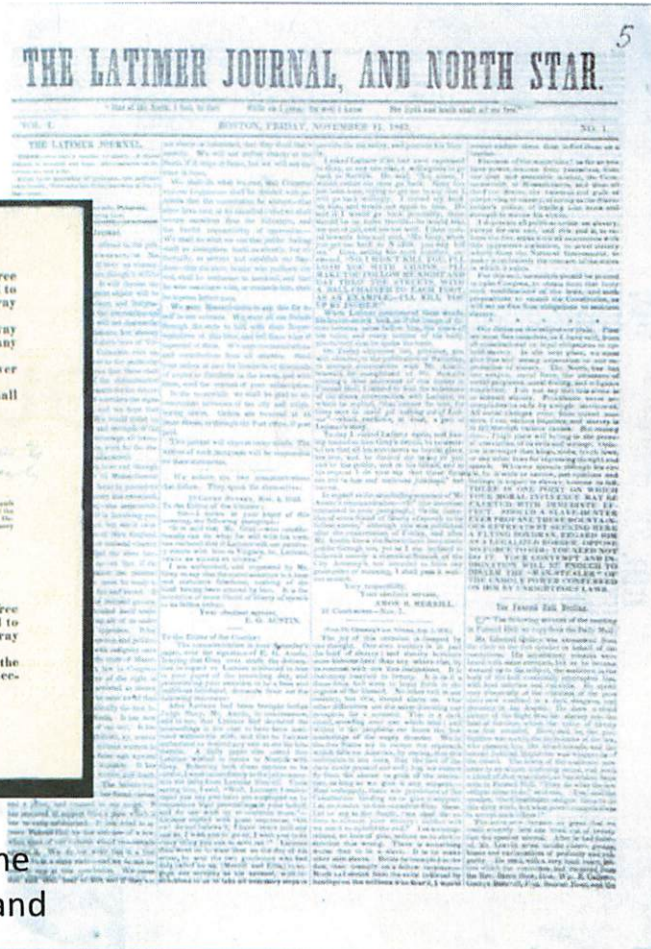
Lewis Latimer's Paternal Grandfather was Mitchell Latimer, a plantation owner and slaveholder in Norfolk, Virginia who had a son with one of the enslaved woman on his plantation, Margaret Olmstead, in the early 1800's. Their son, George Latimer grew up enslaved. In early 1828 George Married Rebecca Smith 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.



- The issue of fugitive slaves became hotly debated in Massachusetts and across the country.

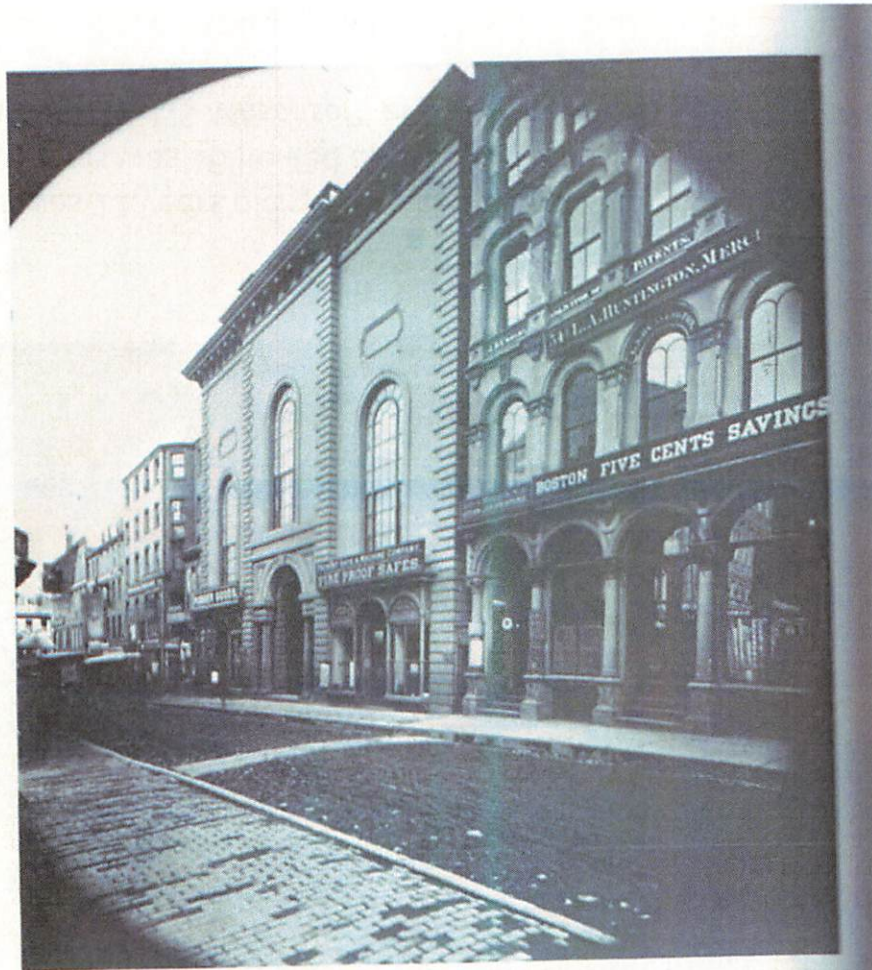


Not long after his arrival in Boston, George Latimer was recognized as an escaped slave. He was arrested and imprisoned, and an effort was made to return him to Virginia. At this news Boston abolitionists rallied to action. Meetings were held throughout Massachusetts on Latimer's behalf, and a new abolitionist 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



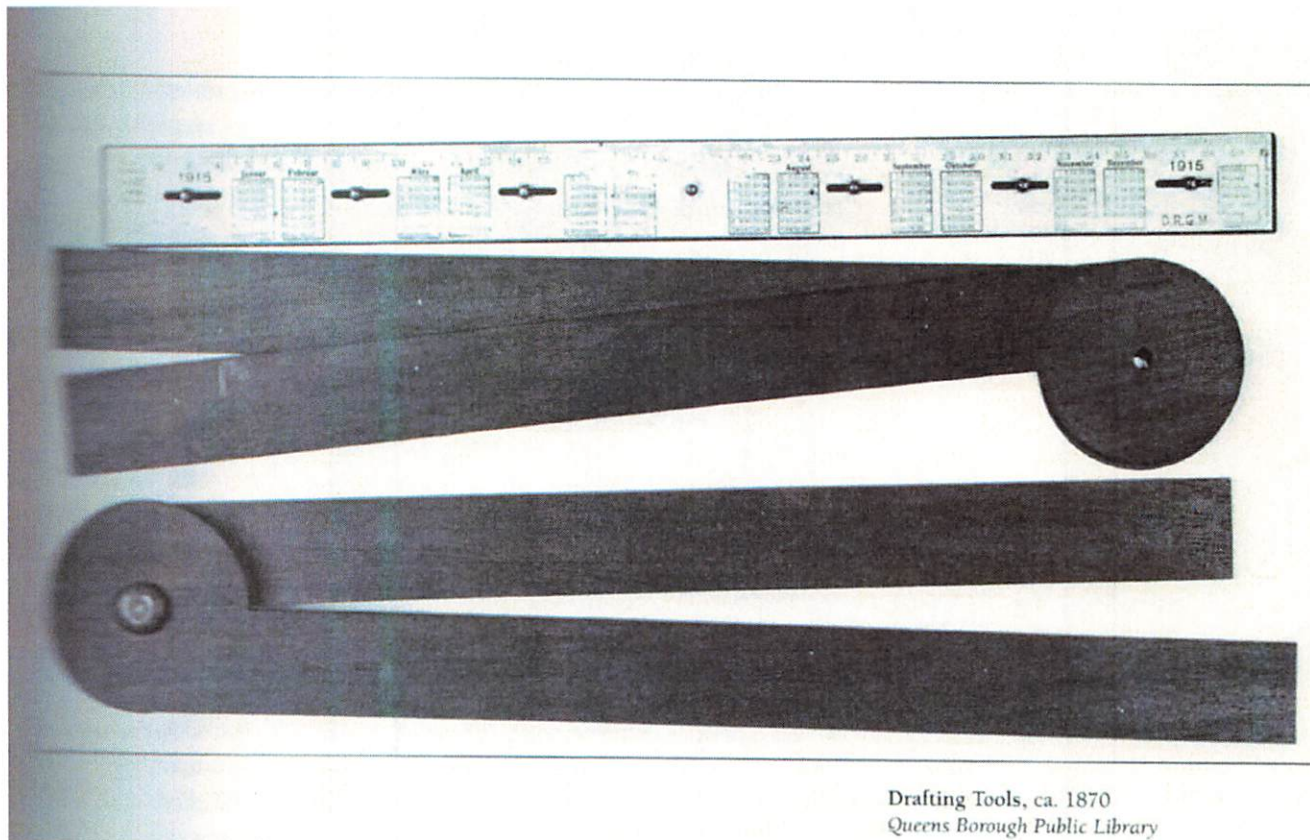
Lewis was 12 years old when the Civil War began, Latimer's older brothers joined in the union army, and when Lewis was 16 he lied about his age in order to join the Union Navy. He served aboard a side-wheel gunboat, the USS *Massasoit*, and was honorably discharged in 1865.



Crosby and Gould Office, ca. 1870
Boston Athenaeum

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.



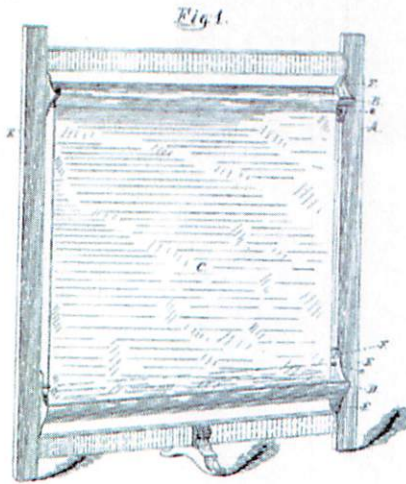
Drafting Tools, ca. 1870
Queens Borough Public Library

(No Model.)

L. H. LATIMER.

2 Sheets—Sheet 1.

APPARATUS FOR COOLING AND DISINFECTING.
No. 334,078. Patented Jan. 12, 1886.



WITNESSES:

Mary H. Latimer
Emma S. Bates

INVENTOR

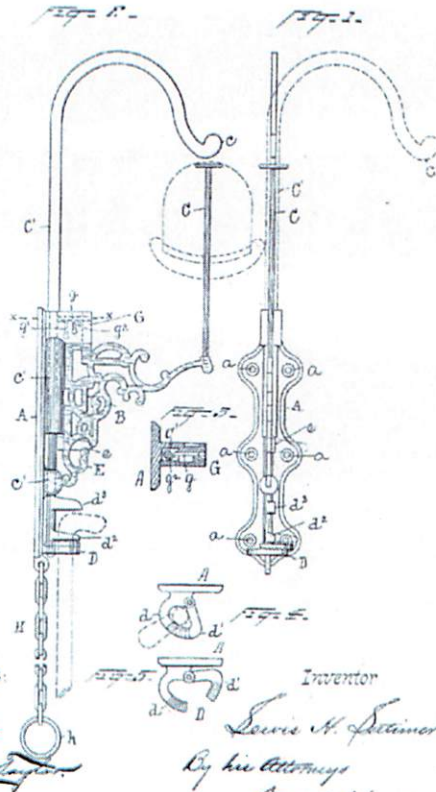
Louis H. Latimer.

U.S. PATENT OFFICE

(No Model.)

L. H. LATIMER.

LOCKING HOOK FOR HATS, COATS, UMBRELLAS, &c.
No. 557,076. Patented Mar. 24, 1886.



Witnesses:

W. P. ...
John A. ...

INVENTOR

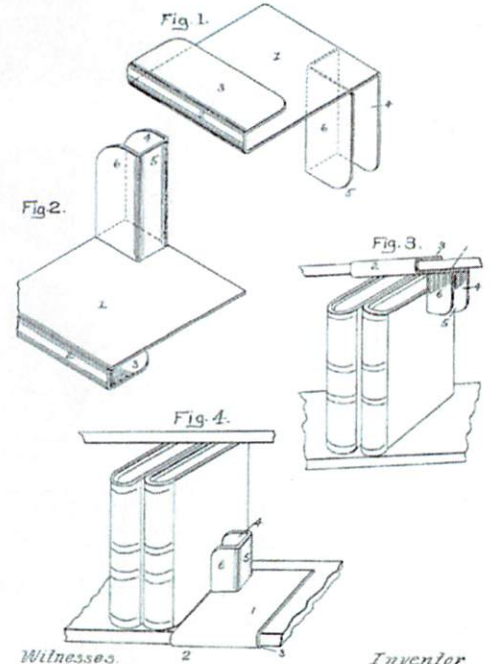
Louis H. Latimer

By his attorneys
Ryder & Arnold

No. 781,890.

L. H. LATIMER.
BOOK SUPPORTER.
APPLICATION FILED JULY 2, 1904.

PATENTED FEB. 7, 1905.



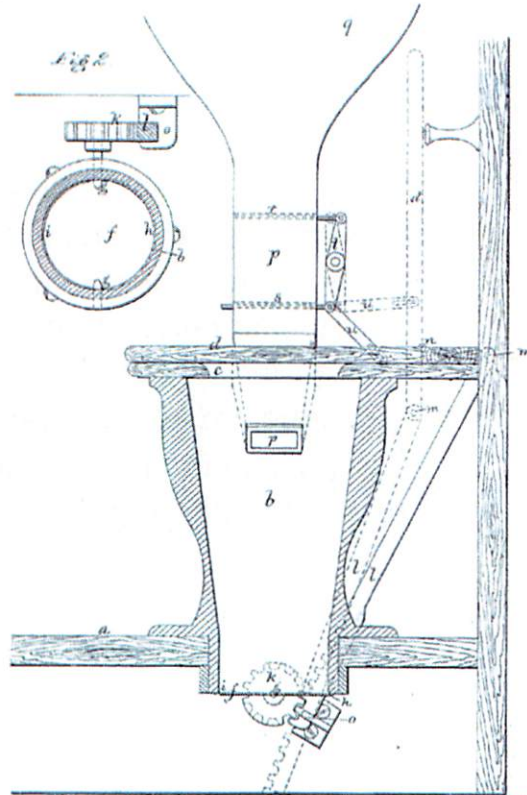
Witnesses:
Edward ...
Theodore ...

INVENTOR

Louis H. Latimer

By his attorneys
Ryder & Arnold

C. W. BROWN & L. H. LATIMER,
 Water-Closets for Railroad-Cars.
 No. 147,363. *Fig. 1* Patented Feb. 10, 1874.



Witnesses,
 W. M. Nottingham,
 J. B. Kicker.

Inventors,
 Charles W. Brown,
 Lewis H. Latimer,
 Crosby & Gould

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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, 1874; application filed January 14, 1871.

To all whom it may concern:

Be it known that we, CHARLES W. BROWN, of Salem, in the county of Essex, and LEWIS H. LATIMER, of Somerville, in the county of 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 those skilled in the art to practice it.

In the construction of water-closets for railway passenger-cars it is customary to make the hopper with an open bottom, and without any pan beneath. For this reason the apparatus, although clearly so far as relates to the absence of excrementious matter, is neither agreeable to use nor wholly safe, the draft through the hopper being always excessive, while the annoyance from dust, 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 by the raising of the seat-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 seat-cover, in which case the bottom is always closed, whether the seat-cover is in a raised position or closed position, it being turned bottom up by the raising of the seat-cover. We also prefer to construct the apparatus with an earth-closet mechanism; by which a supply of dry earth, sand, or equivalent material is lodged upon the bottom or receiving and discharging plate whenever the seat cover is raised, and before the apparatus is used.

Our invention consists, primarily, in a railway-car water-closet apparatus, in which the hopper is provided with a pivoted bottom; or bottom-plate that is always automatically brought to

position to close the end of the hopper and receive the excrement when the seat-cover is raised, and is automatically thrown open by the closing of the seat-cover.

The drawing represents an apparatus embodying the invention.

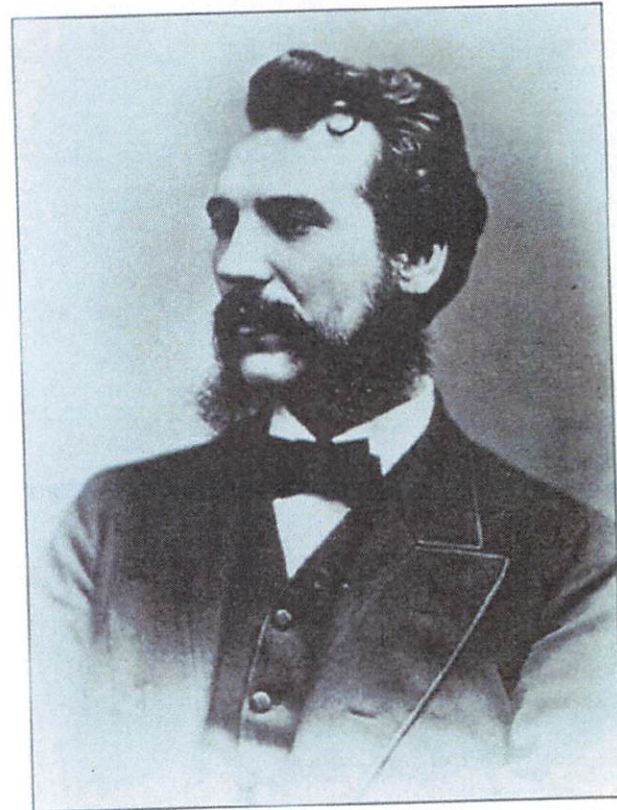
Figure 1 shows the apparatus in sectional elevation. Fig. 2 is a sectional plan of the bottom of the hopper.

a denotes the floor of the car; *b*, the hopper; *c*, the seat, and *d*, the seat-cover. Under the 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*, *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 ledge. On one of the gudgeons *g* is a pinion, *k*, into which meshes the teeth of a gear-bar, *l*, which bar, at its upper end, is joined to an arm projecting from the rear edge of the seat cover *d*, as seen at *m*, the seat-cover being hinged at *n*, and the arm extending beyond the hinge, and turning down, as seen by the dotted lines, when the seat-cover is turned up. The turning down of the arm when the seat-cover is raised forces down the gear-bar *l*, which is guided by a bearing, *o*, causing the bar to turn the pinion *k*, thereby reversing the position of the plate *f*. Leading into the upper part of the hopper is seen the spout *p* of an earth-reservoir, *q*, and in the spout are two valves, *r*, *s*, joined 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 earth-closets.

Each valve slides under, or rests upon, a valve-seat, and has a suitable passage, connecting, at proper time, with a corresponding passage through its valve-seat, and the movements imparted to the respective valves are such that at each time the seat-cover is shut down the lower valve is closed and the upper one opened, thereby letting the earth from the reservoir *q* down through the upper valve, to lodge upon the lower one; while, when the seat is raised, the upper valve is closed, to stop the supply from the reservoir, and the lower one is opened, to let the earth lodged upon the

Alexander Graham Bell, ca. 1874
National Archives

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





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



The Race for Electric Light



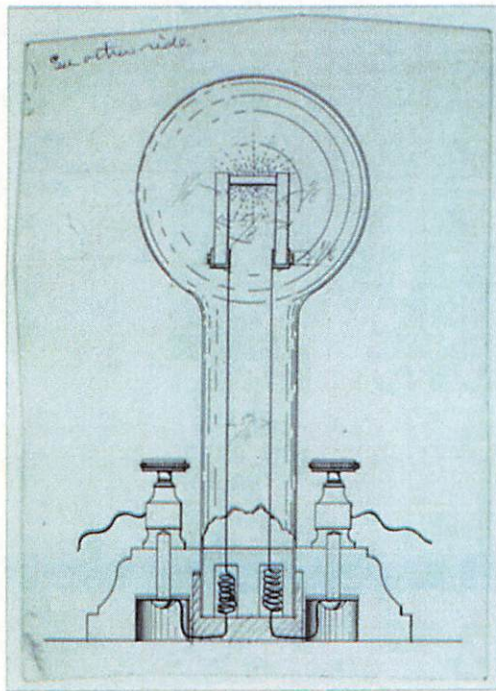
Bridgeport Industrial Scene, ca. 1880
Bridgeport Public Library

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.

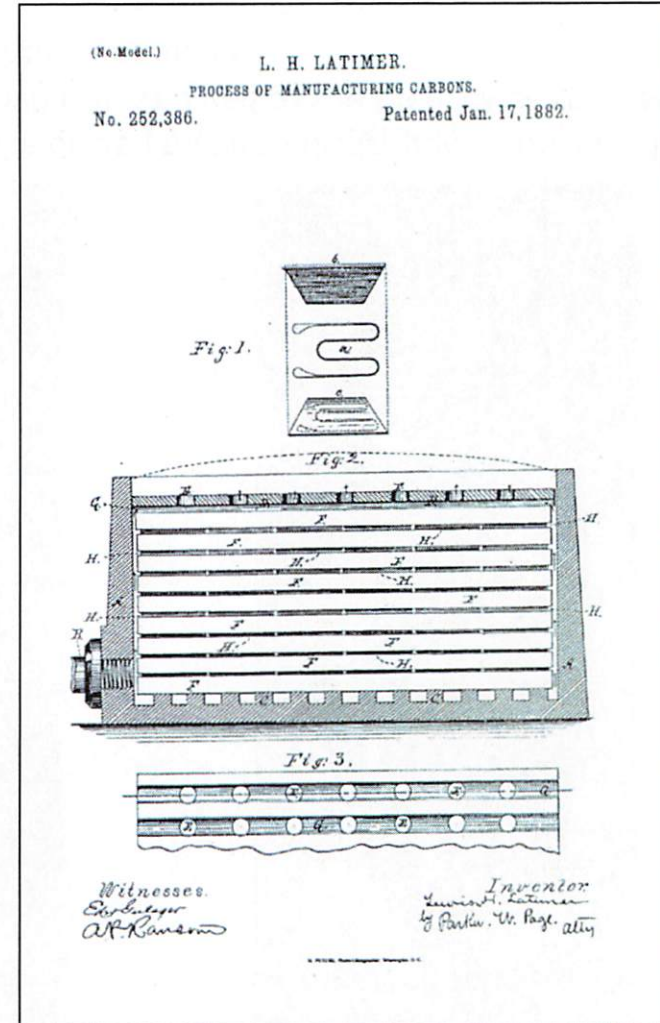
- Perfecting the incandescent light proved challenging. The filament contained within the glass bulb lasted only a short time and it was difficult and expensive to keep replacing lightbulbs.

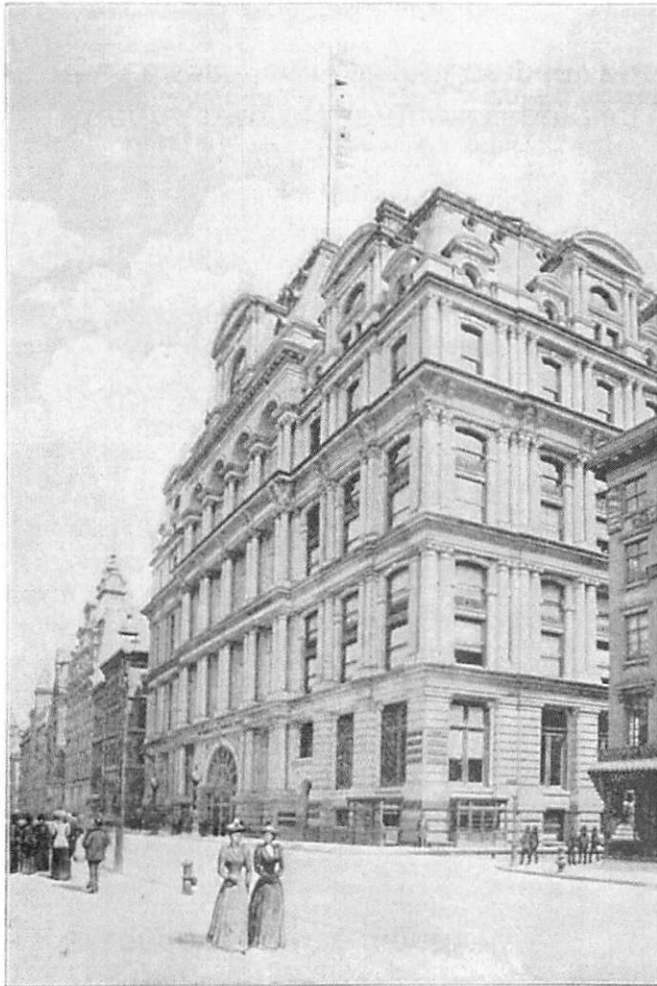


Lewis Latimer
Electric Light Bulb, 1880
The Latimer-Norman Family Collection

On the back of this drawing, Latimer noted, "The first drawing made by me for Edison. Maxon was made from this drawing in Bridgport, Conn. in 1880."

- 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.

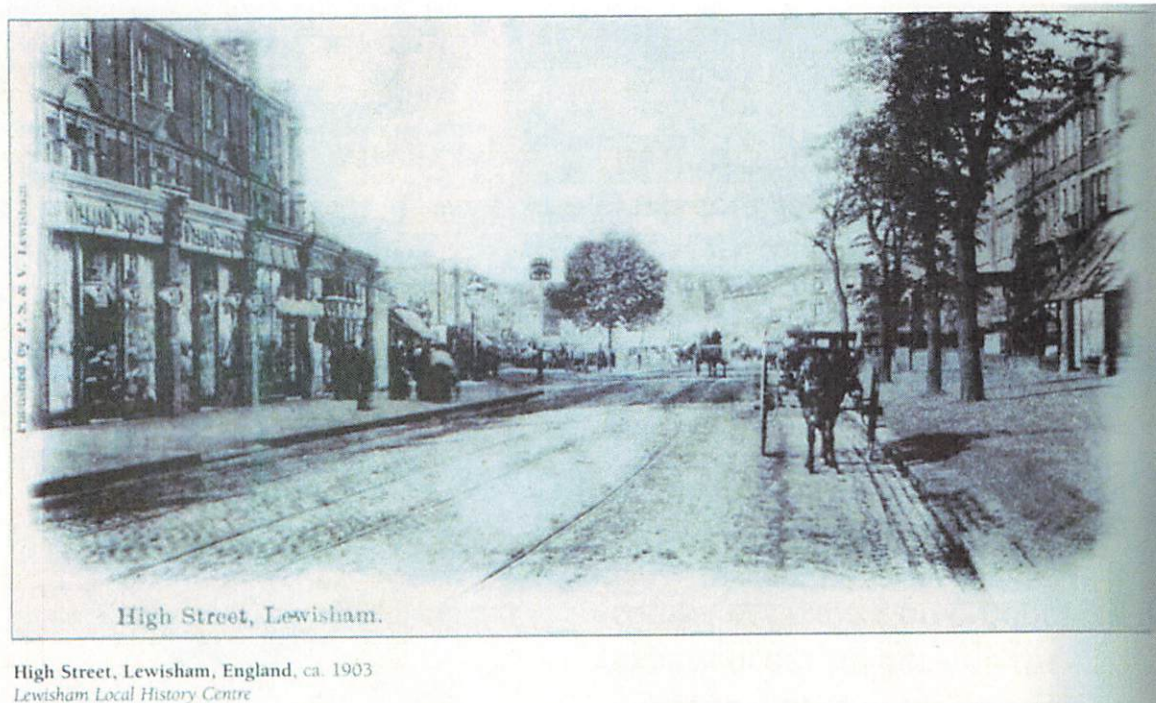




THE EQUITABLE LIFE-ASSURANCE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES.
BROADWAY, BETWEEN PINE AND CEDAR STREETS.

- 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



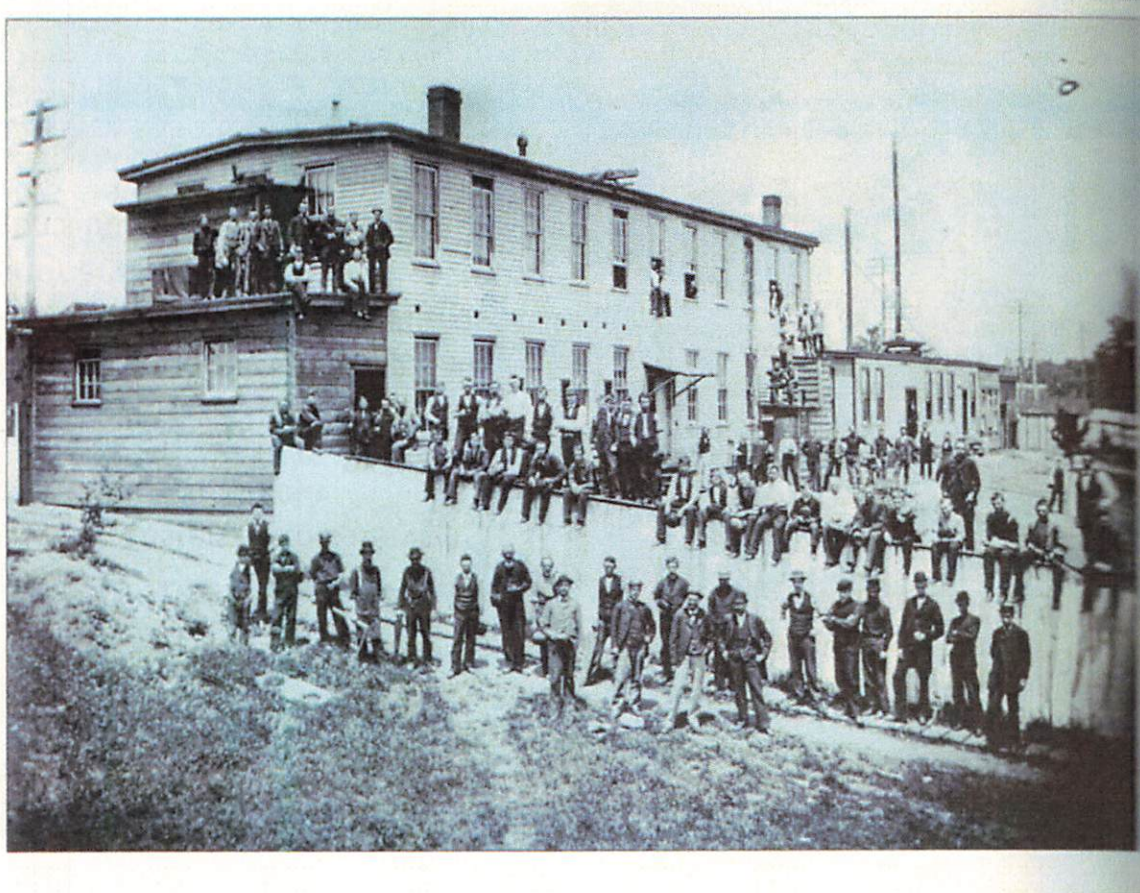
Lewis Latimer was hired by Thomas Edison in 1883 and found many outlets for his talents within the rapidly growing Edison Electric Light Company of New York.

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.

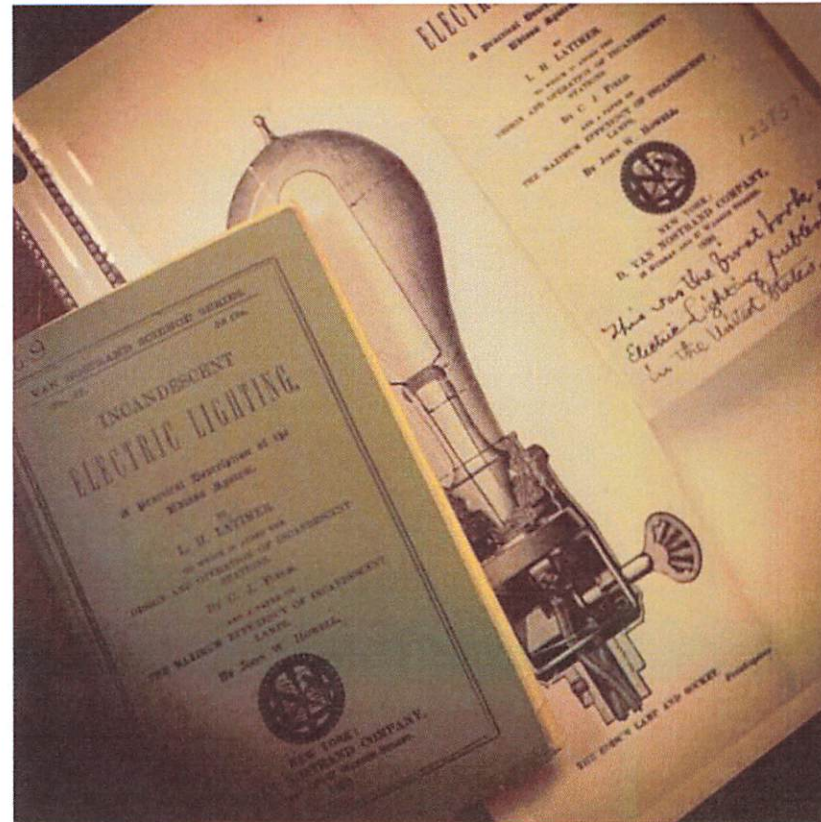
Shortly after joining the company, Latimer became a member of the engineering department as a draftsman



- 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.

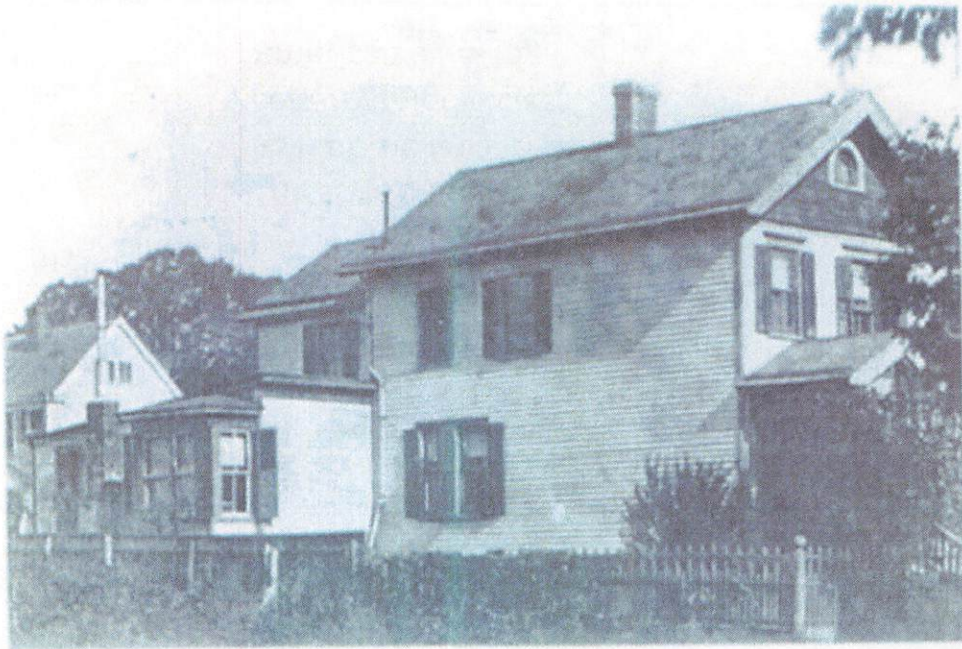
Latimer Family Home, ca. 1920
Queens Borough Public Library

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 19th-century middle class American dwelling

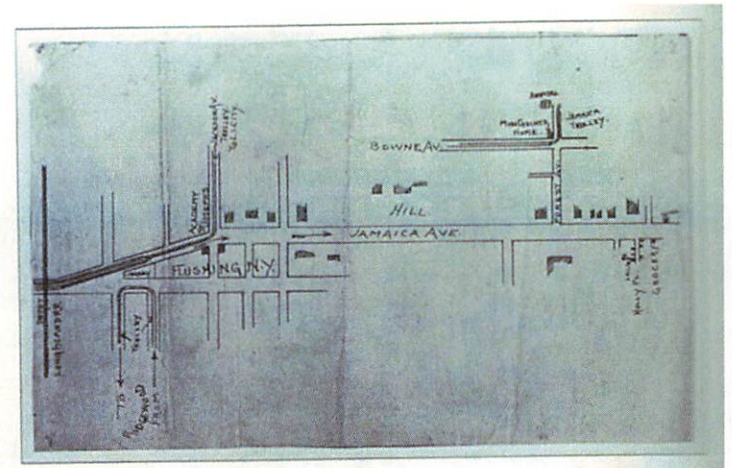




After purchasing the house on Holly Street, Latimer designed and added both a one story rear wing as his study and a dormered attic.

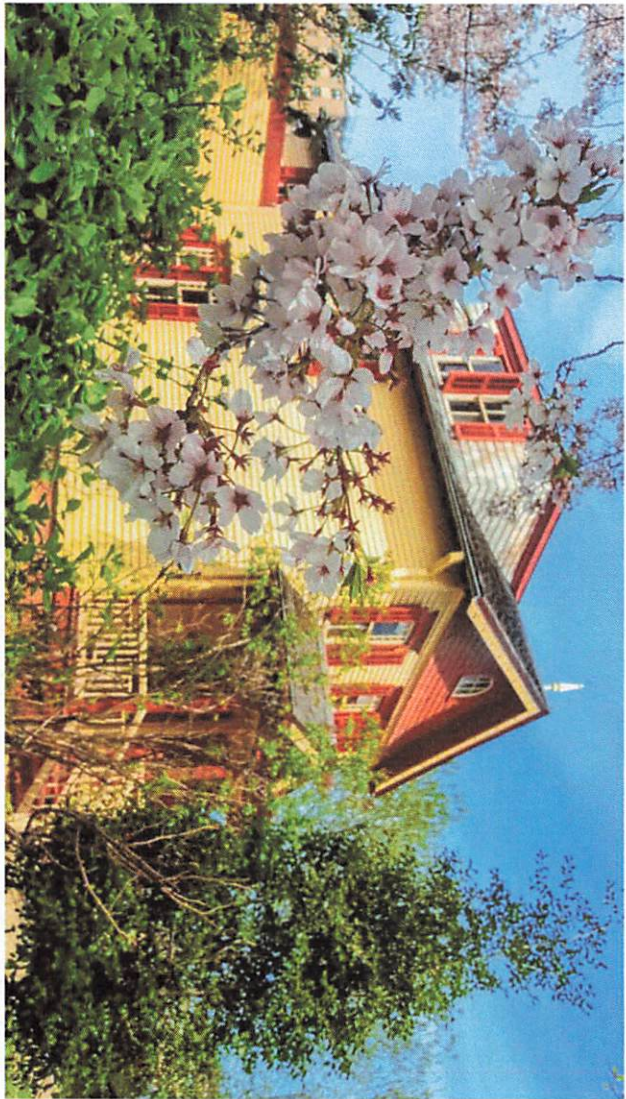
Fig. 5. Lewis H. Latimer House, c. 1902-1912, showing studio addition
Queens Borough Public Library

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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