

# Lewis Latimer



## Key Facts:

**Born:** 4<sup>th</sup> September 1848

**Died:** 11<sup>th</sup> December 1928

**Inventions include:** Carbon filament (for use in lightbulbs), improved sewage systems and toilets in trains and a system to make lifts in buildings safer.

## Who Was Lewis Latimer?

Lewis Latimer was a Black American inventor and engineer. Latimer was born in the USA state of Massachusetts. His parents (Rebecca and George Latimer) were two people who had been enslaved but had managed to escape and travel north to freedom. George Latimer was recaptured but people who campaigned to end the enslavement of people raised \$400 to buy his freedom. Sadly, in 1857, Lewis Latimer's father disappeared and he never saw him again. The reason for this is still unknown.

## The American Civil War

When his father left, Lewis Latimer had to find a job. This led to him lying about his age and joining the Navy at the age of 16, where he served during the American Civil War.

## After the War

When the war ended, Latimer got a job working in Boston for a law firm that dealt with patents. Patents protect the person who invented or discovered something from having it copied without their permission.

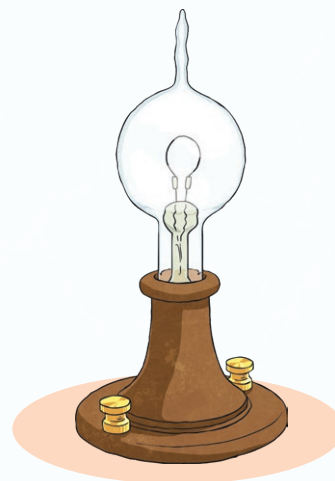
During this time, Latimer became very interested in the technical drawings that the company made and taught himself how to create mechanical drawings. He got a promotion and he created several important technical designs, such as a system to make lifts in buildings safer.

## The Lightbulb

In 1880, Latimer started working for a well-known inventor called Hiram Maxwell. He was a rival to Thomas Edison and was also working on electrical discoveries. It was during this time that Latimer designed something called a carbon filament. This made the electric lightbulb glow for longer and was an important improvement.

In 1884, Latimer started working for Thomas Edison, as a member of his research team. He helped him by creating detailed diagrams of his version of the lightbulb and helping to improve it.

In 1890, Latimer wrote the first book about electric light. He then helped places, including New York, Philadelphia and London, install electric lighting throughout their cities.



## Personal Life

In 1873, Latimer married Mary Wilson and later, had two daughters called Emma and Louise. He died on the 11<sup>th</sup> December 1928 in New York.

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## Who Was Lewis Latimer?

Lewis Latimer was a Black American inventor and engineer, who was responsible for improving the invention of the lightbulb, as well as creating many other important technological designs. Latimer was born on the 4<sup>th</sup> September 1848 in the USA state of Massachusetts. He was the youngest son of Rebecca and George Latimer - two people who had been enslaved but - six years earlier - had managed to escape enslavement and travel north

to freedom. George was recaptured and there were plans to force him back into enslavement but abolitionists (people who campaigned to end the enslavement of people) raised \$400 (around £9000 today) to buy his freedom. Sadly, in 1857, Latimer's father disappeared and he never saw him again. The reason for this is still unknown.

## The American Civil War

After their father's disappearance, Latimer and his siblings had to find jobs. This led to Latimer lying about his age and joining the Navy at 16, where he served during the American Civil War. A civil war is fought between two sides from the same country. The war lasted for four years and Latimer fought on the eventual winning side.

## After the War

When the war ended, Latimer got a job working in Boston as an office clerk for a law firm that dealt with patents. Patents are licences that protect the person who invented or discovered something from having it copied without their permission.

During this time, Latimer became very interested in the technical drawings that the company made and taught himself mechanical drawing by watching others. This earned him a promotion and led to him creating several important technical designs, including: improved toilets and sewage systems for trains; an early version of an air-conditioning unit; the patent for the telephone invented by Alexander Graham Bell and a system to make lifts in buildings safer.

## The Lightbulb

In 1880, Latimer started working for a well-known inventor called Hiram Maxwell. He was a rival to Thomas Edison and was also working on electrical discoveries. It was during this time that Latimer designed something called a carbon filament (an item which glows as electricity flows through it). His design meant that the electric lightbulb was able to glow for longer, meaning it was cheaper and could be used more in public and at home.

In 1884, Latimer started working as a member of Thomas Edison's research

team, known as "Edison's Pioneers." He supported Edison by creating detailed diagrams of his version of the lightbulb. He also helped Edison to improve the design and did all the legal work to make sure that Edison got the credit for it.

In 1890, Latimer used his knowledge and experience to write the first book about electric light. He then helped places, including New York, Philadelphia and London, install electric lighting throughout their cities.



## Personal Life

In 1873, Latimer married Mary Wilson and later, had two daughters - Emma and Louise. He was also a member of several groups which supported people who had fought in the American Civil War. He died on the 11<sup>th</sup> December 1928 in New York.



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**Inventions include:** Carbon filament (for use in lightbulbs), improved sewage systems and toilets in trains and a system to make lifts in buildings safer.

## Who Was Lewis Latimer?

Lewis Latimer was a Black American inventor and engineer, who was involved in the creation of a range of important technological designs. One of his inventions involved important improvements to the internal workings of the electric lightbulb.

## Early Life

Latimer was born on the 4<sup>th</sup> September 1848 in the USA state of Massachusetts. He was the youngest son of Rebecca and George Latimer - two people who had been enslaved but - six years earlier - had managed to escape enslavement and travel north to freedom. George was recaptured and there were plans to force him back into enslavement but abolitionists (people who campaigned to end the enslavement of people) raised \$400 (around £9000 today) to buy his freedom. Sadly, in 1857, Latimer's father disappeared and he never saw him again. The reason for this is still unknown but possibly linked to something called the Dred Scott Decision, in which freedoms of former enslaved people were questioned by the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court is the highest court in the USA and its job is to check how the laws made by Congress and the President are carried out.

Dred Scott was also an enslaved man who escaped before being recaptured. Abolitionists fought against this and the case was taken to the Supreme Court, who ruled that Black people were "not included, and were not intended to be

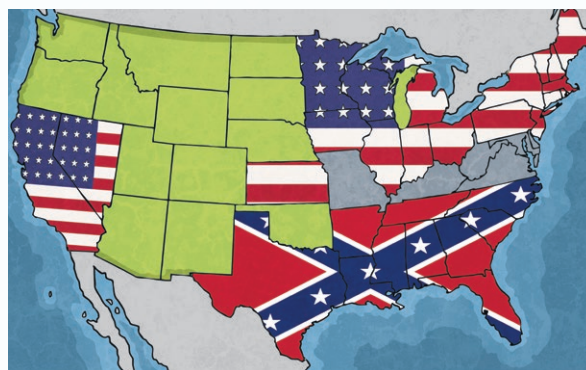
included, under the words 'citizens' in the Constitution, and can therefore claim none of the rights and privileges" that White people had. This meant that Dred Scott was forced back into enslavement. It is speculated that George Latimer - Lewis' father - was so worried about being re-enslaved that he fled.

### The American Civil War

After the disappearance of their father, Latimer and his siblings had to fend for themselves and find jobs of their own. This led to him lying about his age and joining the Navy at 16, where he served during the American Civil War, fighting on the eventual winning side.

The American Civil War was fought between two sides of people from America, who disagreed on certain issues. One of the most contentious issues was enslavement. Most of northern USA had banned enslavement; however, many southern areas wished to continue the enslavement of Black

people. This led to eleven states leaving the USA and forming a union called the Confederate States of America. The north eventually won after four years and the victory meant that all Black people were free, including those who lived in the southern states.



### After the War

When the war ended, Latimer got a job working in Boston as an office clerk for a law firm that dealt with patents. Patents are licences for inventions or discoveries. They are designed to protect the person that created an invention or made a discovery from having it copied without their permission.

During this time, Latimer became very interested in the technical drawings that the company made and taught himself how to do mechanical drawings by observing others. This earned him a promotion to the position of draughtsman (someone who specialises in these technical diagrams that show how things work) and led to him creating several important technical designs, including: improved toilets and sewage systems for trains; an early version of an air-conditioning unit; the patent for the telephone invented by Alexander Graham Bell and a system to make lifts in buildings safer.

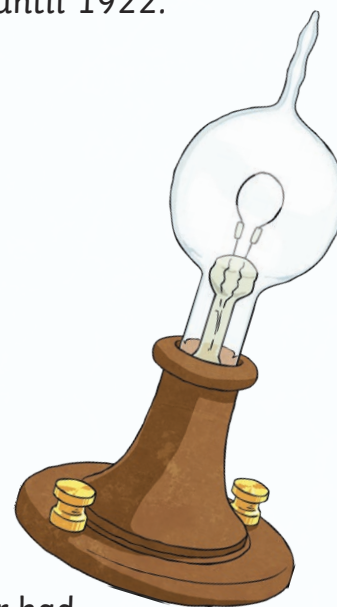
## The Lightbulb

In 1880, Latimer started working for a well-known inventor called Hiram Maxwell. He was a rival to Thomas Edison and was also working on electrical discoveries. It was during this time that he designed something called a carbon filament. These are found inside the lightbulb and the electricity flowing through them causes the light to glow. This was a crucial improvement to the lightbulb, which improved it significantly, as it meant that it was longer lasting and therefore more affordable. Due to this development, the lightbulb could be used more widely in public and at home.

In 1884, Latimer started working for Thomas Edison. As a member of Edison's research team (known as 'Edison's Pioneers'), he supported Edison by creating detailed diagrams

of his version of the lightbulb. He also helped him to improve the design and did all the legal work to make sure that Edison got the credit for it.

In 1890, Latimer used his knowledge and experience of patents and electrical engineering to write the first book about electric light. He then helped places, including New York, Philadelphia and London, install electric lighting throughout their cities. Additionally, he continued to work as a patent consultant until 1922.



## Personal Life

In 1873, Latimer married Mary Wilson and they later had two daughters - Emma and Louise. He was also a member of several groups which supported people who had fought in the American Civil War. In addition to this, he supported the actions of some civil rights groups. He died on the 11<sup>th</sup> December 1928 in New York.