

# African American Inventors: Lewis Latimer

by RV Staff Writer A.A.

Lewis Howard Latimer was born in 1848 in Chelsea, Massachusetts. His parents had escaped slavery in Virginia, and they were determined that their children would be born into freedom. In 1863 when he was just 15, Lewis joined the U.S. Navy to fight in the Civil War.

After the war ended, Lewis began working for a law firm that dealt in inventors' patents. He started as an office boy and worked his way up to draftsman, which is the person who does technical drawings of items like inventions. Lewis eventually became the head draftsman. He made the drawings for Alexander Graham Bell's patent for the telephone.

Lewis was always interested in inventing things himself. He received his first patent on one of his inventions in 1874. In 1881 he invented and patented one of his most important discoveries. It was for the production of a carbon filament, or thin strand, for electric light bulbs.

Thomas Edison's company, Edison Electric Light Company, hired Lewis in 1884. He would continue to work on improvements to the light bulb and other inventions. He would eventually have seven patents.

Lewis Latimer died in 1928 in New York. He has been included in the National Inventors Hall of Fame for his important work.

**Questions**

1. Where was Lewis Latimer born?
2. How old was Lewis Latimer when he began to serve in the Civil War?
3. What is a draftsman?
4. What was one of Lewis Latimer's most important discoveries?
5. How many patents did Lewis Latimer have?