

# Black Inventor Was An Edison Pioneer

CLEVELAND, OHIO — October 21, 1979 marks the 100th Anniversary of Thomas A. Edison's development of the first practical incandescent light bulb. In honor of the famous inventor, a year-long Centennial of Light is being sponsored by the Thomas Alva Edison Foundation of Southfield Michigan. A recent issue of Edison Centennial News, official publication of the international centennial, honored one of Edison's associates, Lewis Howard Latimer.



Latimer, a black inventor best known for patenting a process for making carbon filaments, was one of the original Edison Pioneers, that select group of 28 of Edison's friends and fellow investors formed in 1918. To be a member one had to have been a close associate of Edison before 1885.

Latimer came from humble beginnings and had little formal education, yet he became a respected inventor, draftsman, and engineer. Also, he was an author, poet and musician. William H. Meadowcroft, historian for the Edison Pioneers, and secretary to Edison, wrote upon Latimer's death on December 11, 1928, at the age of 80, "We hardly mourn his inevitable going so much as we rejoice in pleasant memory at having been associated with him in a great work for all peoples under a great man."

**Self-taught draftsman**  
Latimer, the son of an escaped slave, was born on Sept. 4, 1848, in Chelsea, Mass. He read voraciously as a lad, wrote short stories, and taught himself how to draw. Later, as an office boy in the Boston patent office of Corby and Gould, he taught himself the principles of drafting, and was rewarded by being made a draftsman for the company.

Soon he was chief draftsman, preparing drawings of inventions which were submitted to the U.S. Patent Office in Washington. One of his

most famous submissions at that time in his career were drawings for Alexander Graham Bell's telephone.

**First patent**  
It was not long before Latimer began drawing diagrams for his own inventions. On Dec. 10, 1873, he received his first patent for an improved washroom for railroad passenger cars, which won him recognition and a position with Hiram S. Maxim, the inventor of the machine gun, at the United States Electric Lighting Co., in Bridgeport Conn. This was in 1878. During this time Maxim was claiming he invented the incandescent lamp but eventually he lost in court.

While there, Latimer invented and patented an improved process for making carbon filaments in light bulbs, which was used to make all the Maxim lighting systems. He also assisted in installing the systems in New York, Philadelphia and Canada, and helped establish the first Maxim-Weston electric light bulb factory in London, England.

**Joins Edison**  
In 1882, Latimer returned to the U.S. to work, and in 1884 he joined the Edison Electric Light Co.

trical engineer. And, in 1890, he published the first technical electrical engineering book, "Incandescent Electric Lighting — A Practical Description of the Edison System."

Later he transferred to the legal department of the Edison General Electric Co., where he served as an expert witness on Edison patents in various patent lawsuits brought by and against Edison. When Edison General merged with Houston Electric Co. to create the General Electric Co., and then later developed a Board of Patent Control, Latimer was appointed a full-time consultant.

He continued to act as a consultant to various firms until his retirement in 1924.

Latimer, like most of the Edison Pioneers, was hired because of a particular expertise. Edison recognized in each of the Pioneers not only a special talent, but an indefatigable ability to get things done and make things work. Lewis Howard Latimer fit that mold perfectly.

as a draftsman and engineer.

By this time, Latimer had become an expert elec-

## 73 Just The Right Age For A Teacher



At 73, Mrs. Mae Gadpaille of Dorchester, Mass. works just as hard as her mother taught her to as a little girl.

"By the time I was six I could cook and clean and had several chores to do," Mrs. Gadpaille told a writer from The National Council on the Aging.

Mrs. Gadpaille is the originator and present director of the Boston area Montessori Family Center. In 1962 she was exposed to the Montessori method of teaching three to six year olds

## GOING Strong

by Gerry Johnson

and was convinced that it was the right way to educate children.

After a trip to Europe to compare the English version of Montessori to the American version, she founded the Montessori Family Chapter Center in 1963.

"We've grown from 50 to 200 children," Mrs. Gadpaille said. "We recently moved into a \$2 million building on two acres of land."

The facilities include about an acre of playground and a greenhouse and garden. They are hoping to build their own television and radio station in the near future from which they will broadcast shows dealing with the Montessori method.

Originally from Ellington, Conn., a small tobacco growing community in the middle of the state, Mrs. Gadpaille went to Radcliffe College in 1923 but quit when she learned of Howard University, a black school in Washington, D.C. "I wasn't around other blacks when I was a child," she said. "so when I heard

degrees are good, getting old teaches you so much more."

**IN LOS ANGELES**  
County, older adults are entitled to Gold Cards which allow them free admission to activities sponsored by the nine campuses in the Los Angeles Colleges System.

The Gold Card program, which was the first of its kind in the country, started in 1972 at Valley College in the San Fernando Valley. About 16,000 cards have been issued to date.

Older persons not only attend classes but are given help in finding employment, a factor that has led to greater attendance by seniors in credit classes. In fact, at Valley College, the senior student population increased 500 percent in one year.

**THE STEREOTYPE** of poor health among older persons is not supported factually. According to a study by R. M. Campbell, a Ph.D. from Houston, Texas, 81 percent of older persons are mobile and self-sufficient and 14 percent are completely free of chronic conditions, diseases or impairments.



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