

"With all of his achievements, recognition, and possessions, one fact remained to be true until his last breath ... he was a plain man ... proud to be an American, proud of his race."

Karen Morgan, Garrett A. Morgan's granddaughter

Garrett A. Morgan, the son of a former slave, was born in 1877 in Paris, Ky., and attended school through the sixth grade. Through hard work, he was able to open his own sewing machine shop in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1907.

While experimenting with a liquid that would polish sewing machine needles, Morgan wiped his hands on a piece of pony fur cloth. The liquid straightened the fur. He experimented further on a neighbor's dog and on himself, and the G.A. Morgan Hair Refining Company was born. The business prospered enough for Morgan to buy a car, becoming the first black person in Cleveland to own one.

In 1912, Morgan patented a gas inhalator, but couldn't sell it. In 1916, he and his brother wore the masks to rescue 24 men from a smoky gas-filled tunnel 250 feet under Lake Erie. The gas mask revolutionized fire-fighting and saved the lives of thousands of soldiers during World War I. In 1923, Morgan invented the three-way traffic signal, the forerunner of today's electric traffic light. He died in 1963.



Planters and LifeSavers Divisions, Winston-Salem, N.C.