



Granville T. Woods

Granville T. Woods was born to Tailer and Martha Woods in Columbus, Ohio on April 23, 1856. Born a few years before the Civil War began, Woods was a



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Courtesy of the Ohio Historical Society

free black man. Although he was born free, Ohio still had “Black Codes.” These codes were laws that restricted the participation of blacks in the state militia and in public education. At the age of 10, Woods was forced to quit school and become an apprentice as a machinist and blacksmith. Even though he had no further formal schooling, he believed that education was important. He continued to learn on his own with books that his white friends borrowed from libraries.

In 1872, he worked as a fire fighter on the railroad in Missouri. Woods’s interest in electricity and its application to the railroad began there. He moved to Cincinnati, Ohio in 1880 and began his career as an inventor. His first patent in 1884 was for a steam boiler furnace. Along with his brother Lyates, Woods opened the Woods Electric Company in Cincinnati to produce and market his own inventions. He is most famous for his invention of “telegraphony.” Telegraphony was a communication device that combined the telegraph with the telephone, both orally and with signals. Before Woods’s invention, the telegraph could only send messages in Morse Code.

Woods dedicated his life to developing a variety of inventions. He was known as the “Black Edison.” Woods registered more than 45 patents; most related to railway systems.

On January 30, 1910, Woods suffered a stroke and died in New York City at the age of 53. In 1969, Elementary Public School No. 335, Brooklyn, NY, was dedicated in Woods’s name. Sixty-four years after his death on October 11, 1974, Ohio Governor John J. Gilligan issued a proclamation recognizing Woods’s achievements in science and invention.

