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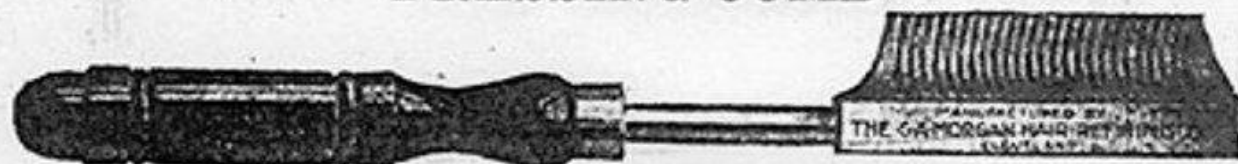
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Garrett Morgan

Garrett Augustus Morgan, Sr. (March 4, 1877 – July 27, 1963) was an African-American inventor and community leader. His most notable inventions included a type of protective respiratory hood (or gas mask), a traffic signal, and a hair-straightening chemical. He is renowned for a heroic rescue in 1916 in which he and three others used the safety hood device he had developed to save workers trapped within a water intake tunnel, fifty feet beneath Lake Erie.^[1] He is also credited as the first African American in Cleveland, Ohio, to own an automobile.^[2]

1 Biography

Morgan was born in Paris, Kentucky to Sydney, a son and former slave of Confederate Colonel John H. Morgan, and Eliza Reed, also a former slave^[3] who was half American Indian.^[2] Morgan moved at the age of 14 to Cincinnati, Ohio in search of employment. Most of his teenage years were spent working as a handyman for a wealthy Cincinnati landowner. Like many African Americans of his day, he had to quit school at a young age in order to work. However, the teen-aged Morgan was able to hire his own tutor and continued his studies while living in Cincinnati. In 1895, he moved to Cleveland, Ohio, where he worked repairing sewing machines for a clothing manufacturer. His first invention, developed during this period, was a belt fastener for sewing machines.^[4] He married his first wife, Madge Nelson, in 1896, but that marriage ended in divorce. Word of his skill at fixing things and experimenting spread quickly throughout Cleveland, opening up various opportunities for him.

In 1907, Morgan opened his own sewing machine and shoe repair shop. It was the first of several businesses he would own. In 1908, Morgan helped found the Cleveland Association of Colored Men.^{[5][3]} That same year, he married his second wife, Mary Anne Hassek, and together they had three sons. In 1909, he and his wife expanded their business ventures by opening a shop called Morgan's Cut Rate Ladies Clothing Store.^[6] The company had 32 employees, and made coats, suits, dresses, and other clothing.^[3]

A few years later, he developed his safety hood invention. He filed for a patent on it in 1912, and launched the National Safety Device Company in 1914. At around the same time, in 1913, he launched the G. A. Morgan Hair Refining Company, which sold hair care products, including a hair straightening cream, a hair dye, and a hair straightening comb invented by Morgan.

His safety hood invention led him to nation-wide fame and a much higher level of commercial success. The hair care company was also successful enough to become a long-lasting established business.^[4]

He then went on to develop his traffic control signal, for which he filed for a patent in 1922.

He developed glaucoma in 1943, and was functionally blind and in poor health in his later life.^{[7][8]}

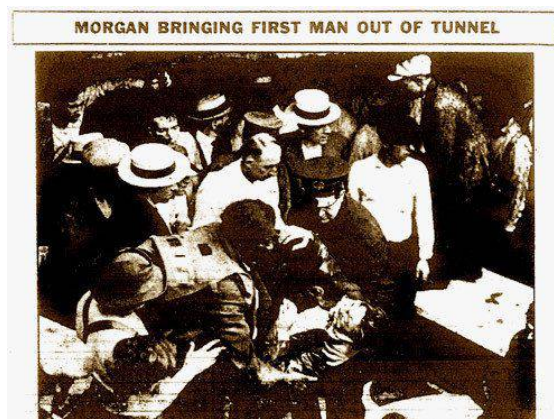
Morgan died on July 27, 1963,^{[3][8][9]} at the age of 86, and is buried at Lake View Cemetery in Cleveland, Ohio.^[3]

2 Products and inventions

2.1 Hair care products

Morgan experimented with a liquid that gave sewing machine needles a high polish that prevented the needle from scorching fabric as it sewed. In 1905, Morgan accidentally discovered that the liquid could also straighten hair.^[3] He made the liquid into a cream and launched the G. A. Morgan Hair Refining Company to market it. He also made a black hair oil dye and invented a curved-tooth comb for hair straightening in 1910.^[6]

2.2 Safety hood



Newspaper photograph of Morgan's rescue in 1916

Garrett Morgan invented a safety hood smoke protection device after seeing firefighters struggling from the smoke they encountered in the line of duty.^[2] His device used a wet sponge to filter out smoke and cool the air.^[10] It also

took advantage of the way smoke and fumes tend to rise to higher positions while leaving a layer of more breathable air below, by using an air intake tube that dangled near the floor.^[7] He filed for a patent on the device in 1912,^[7] and founded a company called the National Safety Device Company in 1914 to market it. He was able to sell his invention around the country, sometimes using the tactic of having a hired white actor take credit rather than revealing himself as its inventor.^[2] For demonstrations of the device, he sometimes adopted the disguise of "Big Chief Mason", a purported full-blooded Indian from the Walpole Island Indian Reserve in Canada.^[11] He would demonstrate the device by building a noxious fire fueled by tar, sulphur, formaldehyde and manure inside an enclosed tent.^[7] Disguised as Big Chief Mason, he would enter the tent full of black smoke, and would remain there for 20 minutes before emerging unharmed.^[7]

His safety hood device was simple and effective, whereas the other proto-"gas mask" type devices in use at the time were generally difficult to put on, excessively complex, unreliable, or ineffective.^[7] His safety hood was used to save many lives during the period of its use.^[7]

He also developed later models that incorporated an air bag that could hold about 15 minutes of fresh air.^{[7][8]}

His invention became known nationally when he led a rescue that saved several men's lives after a 1916 tunnel explosion under Lake Erie.^{[7][10][12]} Before Morgan arrived, two previous rescue attempts had failed. The attempted rescuers had become victims themselves by entering the tunnel and not returning. Morgan was roused in the middle of the night after one of the members of the rescue team who had seen a demonstration of his device sent a messenger to convince him to come and to bring as many of his hoods as he could.^[7] He arrived on the scene still wearing his pajamas, and brought his brother Frank and four of the hoods with him.^{[7][8][10]} Most of the rescuers on the scene were initially skeptical of his device, so he and his brother personally went into the tunnel along with two other volunteers, and succeeded in pulling out two men from the previous rescue attempts.^{[7][10]} He emerged carrying a victim on his back, and his brother followed just behind with another.^[8] Others joined in after his team succeeded, and rescued several more.^[7] His device was also used to retrieve the bodies of the victims that did not survive. Morgan personally made four trips into the tunnel during the rescue, and his health was affected for years afterward from the fumes he encountered there.^[7] Cleveland's newspapers and city officials initially ignored Morgan's act of heroism as the first to rush into the tunnel for the rescue and his key role as the provider of the equipment that made the rescue possible, and it took years for the city to recognize his contributions.^{[2][7]} City officials requested the Carnegie Hero Fund Commission to issue medals to several of the men involved in the rescue, but excluded Morgan from their request.^[7] He believed that the omission was racially motivated.^[7] Later, in 1917, a group citizens of Cleveland tried to correct for

the omission by presenting him with a diamond-studded gold medal.^[7]

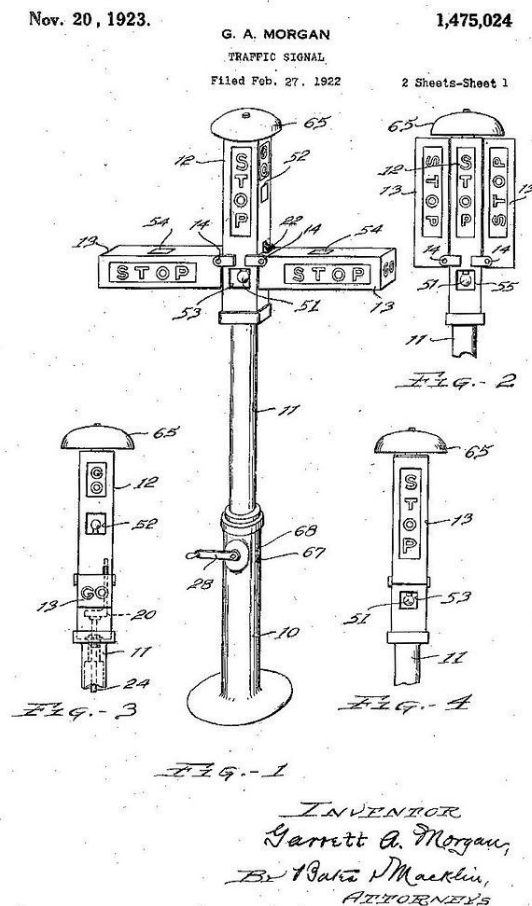
He was also given a medal from the International Association of Fire Engineers, which made him an honorary member.^[8]

Morgan's invention of the safety hood was featured on the television show *Inventions that Shook the World*.^[13]

2.3 Traffic signal

See also: [Traffic signal](#)

The first American-made automobiles were introduced



Patent drawing of Morgan's signal

to consumers just before the turn of the 20th century, and pedestrians, bicycles, animal-drawn wagons and motor vehicles all had to share the same roads. To deal with the growing problem of traffic accidents, a number of versions of traffic signaling devices began to be developed, starting around 1913.

Morgan had witnessed a serious accident at an intersection, and he invented a traffic control device and applied for a patent on it in 1922.^[7] His invention was a hand-cranked mechanical sign system using signs that could be switched relatively easily by a traffic control officer.^[7] His

device was relatively simple, yet had key additional safety features that many others at the time did not have. In addition to having “stop” and “go” indicators, it had an “all stop” signal that could be used to clear the intersection to allow pedestrians to cross or to stop cross-traffic before signaling a different direction to proceed. It also had a “half mast” warning position to indicate general caution at times when the device operator was not present.^[7] In addition to the signs, his device featured lights and warning bells powered by a battery or a connection to a main power source.^[7]

3 Community leadership

In 1908, he helped found the Cleveland Association of Colored Men, a group founded to help improve economic and social conditions for the black community (which later merged with the NAACP).^{[5][3][8]} He also served as its treasurer.^[8]

In 1916 he helped to found the *Cleveland Call* newspaper, and subsequently participated in its 1928 merger that created the *Call and Post* newspaper.^[14]

Morgan was a member of the Prince Hall Freemason fraternal organization, a predominantly black Freemason group (Excelsior Lodge No. 11 of Cleveland, Ohio).^[15]

In 1920, he helped found an all-black country club.^[2]

He was a member of the NAACP and donated money to Negro colleges.^[2]

In 1931, motivated by his view that the city was not properly addressing the needs of the black community, he (unsuccessfully) ran for a seat on the Cleveland City Council as an independent candidate.^{[4][7]}

4 Awards and recognitions



Grave of Garrett A. Morgan

At the Emancipation Centennial Celebration in Chicago, Illinois, in August 1963, Morgan was nationally recognized. Although in ill-health, and nearly blind, he continued to work on his inventions; one of his last was a self-extinguishing cigarette, which employed a small plastic pellet filled with water, placed just before the filter.

In the Cleveland, Ohio area, the Garrett A. Morgan Cleveland School of Science and the Garret A. Morgan

Water Treatment Plant have been named in his honor. An elementary school in Chicago, Illinois was also named after him.^[16] In Prince George’s County, Maryland, there is a street named Garrett A. Morgan Boulevard (formerly Summerfield Boulevard until 2002), and a Metro stop (Morgan Boulevard) named in his honor.

Morgan was included in the 2002 book *100 Greatest African Americans* by Molefi Kete Asante.^[17]

Morgan was a member of Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity.^[18]

5 References

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6 External links

- The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History - Waterworks Disasters
- Images from Morgan's patents
- Garrett A. Morgan at *Find a Grave*

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