

Gray's Life and Times

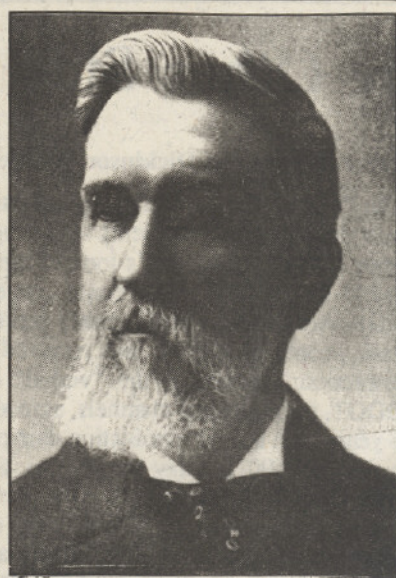
Elisha Gray, the son of David and Christiana Edgerton Gray, was born in 1835 a few miles south of Barnesville at Boston. His father had migrated to this area from Pennsylvania. The premature death of that man when Elisha was 12 forced him to quit school to help feed the family of 10. Work as an apprentice blacksmith was halted when his mother decided to return to Pennsylvania. There, Gray worked as a carpenter, boat builder and laborer. Encouraged by an Oberlin College professor to go to college, he attended three years of prep school and two years of college. It was at Oberlin that he would discover his gift for electrical communication.

Gray joined the faculty at Oberlin and continued to experiment with gadgets using electricity. He eventually left Oberlin and went to Cleveland where he became a partner in a small machine shop that had made models of some of his early inventions. In 1869 the shop moved to Chicago to be near its biggest customer, the Western Union Company.

After the great fire of Chicago, Gray's firm gained prominence for the job it did in restoring the city's electrical installations, as well as Western Union's telegraphy network.

It was about this time that he teamed up with Enos Barton to organize the firm Gray and Barton which would become Western Electric Manufacturing Co., one of this country's leading communications suppliers. An off-shoot of his company, Graybar Electric Co., is in existence today.

Elisha Gray was to invent and patent many devices, nearly 70, most having to do with communications. His most famous one, the voice transmitter, occurred in



Elisha Gray

1874 and 1875.

His fame and that of Barnesville might have been universal had the United States Supreme Court not decided in favor of Bell. The 5-4 decision by the high court sealed Gray's fate in telecommunications history.

Through the years, many scholars have written in great detail about who was the first to discover how to transmit the human voice. While the true answer may never be known, many believe that Gray was that man.

Gray received several honorary degrees in his lifetime, was decorated by the French government, and served as chairman of the first International Electrical Congress in 1893. He had become a wealthy man as well.

In January 1901, death claimed the Barnesville native in Boston, Massachusetts where he was experimenting with underwater signaling to vessels at sea.

Even though Elisha Gray was not to occupy a prominent place in our country's history of the telephone, he is proof that God fashioned man for accomplishment.