

Morse Samuel Finley Breese.

by : Gregorio Yarasca.

Morse was born in Charlestown, Mass., Apr. 27, 1791. Between 1811 and 1811 and 1815 he studied art in London at the Royal Academy and in the studio of Benjamin West. After returning to the United States, Morse hoped to establish himself in the Boston area as a painter of historical and religious subjects. Finding little patronage of any kind of painting other than portraits, he lived the life of an itinerant painter for almost a decade until settling, in 1824, in New York City. Within a year his reputation in the New York art world was sufficient for him to receive the important commission of a lifesize portrait of the Marquis de Lafayette. Between 1829 and 1832, he traveled in Europe to study from Old Master paintings and to prepare for an anticipated commission to paint one of the panels for the Rotunda of the U.S. Capitol. In 1836 he learned that the work had been given to another artist and this news, coupled with the telegraph, led to his abandonment of painting. Although he continued to be active in art organization, Morse painted his last works in 1837.

Throughout his life Morse was interested in a variety of subjects. He was the eldest son of the Rev. Jedidiah Morse, the "father of America geography," and among his ancestors were several notable scholars and theologians. While earning a meager living as an itinerant portraitist, he experimented with designs for a water pump and other mechanical inventions. His interest in electricity and telegraphy are thought to date from his return voyage from France in 1832, when he was shown an apparatus for the transmission of electricity over long distances, acquired by a fellow passenger, Charles T. Jackson. In his laboratory at New York University, Morse experimented with the electromagnetic telegraph, completing his first model in 1835. In February 1838, Morse sent the world's first telegraphic message: "Attention, the Universe, by Kingdom's Right Wheel." Morse's invention operated by a sender that transmitted signals by opening and

Morse Samuel Finley Breese.

by : Gregorio Yarasca.

closing an electric circuit, a receiver to record the signal, and a code for translating the signal into letters and numbers. The code of dots and dashes that he devised still bears his name. Although Morse applied for a patent for his invention in 1837, he had to wait almost seven years for it to be granted. In 1843 Congress appropriated \$ 30,000 for the construction of an experimental line from Washington to Baltimore but failed to buy the rights to the invention. Morse formed a company of his own and, as the telegraph was adopted for use around the world, spent many years involved in law suits to protect his invention. In addition to his work on the telegraph, Morse was active in politics and experimented with photography. In 1847 he purchased Locust Grove, an estate in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., where he spent much of his time until his death on Apr. 2, 1872, in New York City.s