

## Samuel Finley Breese Morse

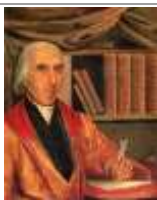
*b. April 27, 1791, Charlestown, Mass., U.S.A.*

*d. April 2, 1872, New York City, U.S.A.*



**Samuel F. B. Morse was an artist by training and worked successfully as a portrait painter until the 1830s. Today, however, Morse is primarily remembered as the inventor of the electric telegraph and the related code system that bears his name.**

Samuel Finley Breese Morse, born in Charlestown, Mass., 27 April, 1791, was the oldest son of Reverend Jedidiah Morse and Elizabeth Ann (*nee* Breese) Morse. His dad, Jedidiah Morse, (1761-1826) was an American Congregational pastor and wrote a series of widely used geography textbooks. Since the age of four, Morse had been interested in drawing. When he was four, Samuel etched his teacher's face on a chest of drawers. At the age of eight Morse was taken to Phillips Academy, where his father was a trustee. He was unhappy under their rule, and twice as homesick, so he fled back to Charleston. He entered Yale College at 1805 where he majored in chemistry and natural philosophy.



***Rev.  
Jedidiah  
Morse  
- Samuel's  
father***



***Elizabeth Ann  
(Breese)  
Morse -  
Samuel's  
mother***

Portraits of Rev. Dr. and Mrs. Morse, painted by Savage in 1794, are in the possession of their grandson Gilbert Livingston Morse. The family of the late Richard Cary Morse own a portrait of his mother in candle-light, painted by her artist-son: and there is a portrait of Dr. Morse, in his later years, by the same hand. Jedidiah and Elizabeth Ann (Breese) Morse had eleven children, of whom, however, only three survived their infancy. **Information on Morse's family is [here](#).**

### **The Morse Family**

Samuel F. B. Morse, Watercolor on paper, ca 1810

National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.


Samuel F. B. Morse's watercolor depicts his father, Jedidiah Morse, at the center of his family, lecturing on geography. The setting includes a prominently displayed terrestrial globe and a book (probably meant to be one of Morse's own), opened to show an extended diagram or map. Sidney and Richard Morse stand to their father's left, while Samuel Morse leans forward on his right, intent on his father's words and gestures.

Elizabeth Breese Morse also listens closely, her sewing scissors discarded tiny implements overshadowed by the bulk and visual authority of the globe and lecturer.





In Yale Morse received his first instruction in electricity from Prof. Jeremiah Day, also attending the elder Silliman's lectures on chemistry and galvanism. In 1809 he wrote: " Mr. Day's lectures are very interesting; they are upon electricity; he has given us some very fine experiments, the whole class, taking hold of hands, form the circuit of communication, and we all received the shock apparently at the same moment. I never took an electric shock before; it felt as if some person had struck me a slight blow across the arms." However, his college career was perhaps more strongly marked by his fondness for art than for science, and he employed his leisure time in painting. One day, he wrote a letter to his parents from his college saying that he was made to be a painter. He wrote: "My price is five dollars for a miniature on ivory, and I have engaged three or four at that price. My price for profiles is one dollar, and everybody is willing to engage me at that price."



***Samuel F. B. Morse, Self-portrait*** (one of the earliest)


	<p>Mr. and Mrs. Morse were afraid that he couldn't make a living as a painter, so they made him be a bookseller, when he was released from his college duties in 1810. He worked as a bookseller but at night he would paint. He had no profession in view, but to be a painter was his ambition. Finally his parents realized how he loved art so they found the money for Morse to study art. Morse moved to Boston and became the private pupil and friend of Washington Allston, who introduced him to a traditional program of academic study that encompassed drawing, anatomy, and art theory. With Allston's encouragement he went to London in 1811, where he met Benjamin West, befriended Charles Robert Leslie, and was accepted as a student at the Royal Academy of Art.</p>
	<p><b><i>Samuel F. B. Morse, Self-portrait</i></b> (Oil on millboard, 1812, National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian, Washington D.C.). This self-portrait was made when Morse was only twenty-one years old.</p>

He remained in London for four years, meeting many celebrities and forming an intimate friendship with Charles R. Leslie, who became his room-mate. Under the tuition of Allston and Benjamin West he made rapid progress in his art, and in 1813 exhibited a colossal "Dying Hercules" in the Royal Academy, which was classed by critics as among the first twelve paintings there. The plaster model that he made to assist him in his picture gained the gold medal of the Adelphi society of arts. This was given when Great Britain and the United States were at war, and was cited as an illustration of the impartiality with which American artists were treated by England. The first portrait that he painted abroad was of Leslie, who paid him a similar compliment, and later he executed one of Zerah Colburn. He then set to work on an historical composition to be offered in competition for the highest premium of the Royal Academy, but, as he was obliged to return to the United States in August, 1815, this project was abandoned. Settling in Boston, he opened a studio in that city, but, while visitors were glad to admire his "Judgment of Jupiter," his patrons were few. Finding no opportunities for historic painting, he turned his attention to portraits during 1816-'17, visiting the larger towns of Vermont and New Hampshire.

	<p>Meanwhile he was associated with his brother Sidney E. Morse, in the invention of an improved pump. In January, 1818, he went to Charleston, S. C., and there painted many portraits, his orders at one time exceeding 150 in number, but in the following winter he returned to Charleston, where he wrote to his old preceptor, Washington Allston: "I am painting from morning till night, and have continual applications."</p>
	<p><b><i>Samuel F. B. Morse, Self-portrait</i></b> (Oil on wood, 1818, Brick Store Museum, Kennebunk, ME)</p>

	<p>Among his orders was a commission from the city authorities for a portrait of James Monroe, then president of the United States, which he painted in Washington, and which, on its completion, was placed in the city hall of Charleston.</p> <hr/> <p><b><i>Portrait of James Monroe</i></b> (Oil on canvas, 1819-20, The White House, Washington D.C.)</p>
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		<p>On 6 Oct., 1818, Morse married Lucretia Walker, daughter of Charles Walker of Concord, N.H., by whom he had children, Charles Walker, Susan and James Edward Finley. In 1825, Lucretia died of heart trouble. Morse was so sad that he almost gave up painting. Finally he left his kids with the wife's sister to paint in Europe again.</p> <hr/> <p><b><i>Portrait of Lucretia Pickering Walker Morse</i></b> (Oil on panel, 1822, Mead art Museum, Amherst College)</p> <hr/> <p><b><i>Lucretia Morse &amp; her Children</i></b> (Oil on canvas, 1824, private collection)</p>
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	<p>In 1823 he settled in New York city, and after hiring as his studio "a fine room on Broadway, opposite Trinity churchyard," he continued his painting of portraits, one of the first being that of Chancellor Kent, which was followed soon afterward by a picture of Fitz-Greene Halleck, now in the Astor library, and a full-length portrait of Lafayette for the city of New York. During his residence there he became associated with other artists in founding the New York drawing association, of which he was made president.</p> <hr/> <p><b><i>Marquis de Lafayette by Samuel Morse</i></b></p>
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This led in 1826 to the establishment of the National academy of the arts of design, to include representations from the arts of painting, sculpture, architecture, and engraving. Morse was chosen its president, and so remained until 1842. He also twice ran for Mayor of New York, but unsuccessfully. He was likewise president of the Sketch club, an assemblage of artists that met weekly to sketch for an hour, after which the time was devoted to social entertainment, including a supper of "milk and honey, raisins, apples, and crackers." About this time he delivered a series of lectures on "The Fine Arts " before the New York athenveum, which are said to have been the first on that subject in the United States. Morse also patented a machine for cutting marble in 1823, by which he hoped to be able to produce perfect copies of any model.



Thus he continued until 1829, when he again visited Europe for study, and for three years resided abroad, principally in Paris and the art centers of Italy. This period culminated in the large Gallery of the Louvre (1832-33, Terra Museum of American Art, Chicago), a pictorial summation of European art with which he hoped to improve American culture after his return to New York in 1832.

*Gallery of the Louvre by Samuel Morse*



***Bust of S.F.B. Morse, 1831  
by Horatio Greenough, marble***

Strictly as an artist Morse did not exert a major impact on the stylistic development of nineteenth century American art, and his ideas and art appealed exclusively to the cultural elite. With the exception of the romantic Lafayette portrait, his most ambitious works failed before an unreceptive public. Unable to earn a living through painting historical subjects he was forced into portraiture, and many of these paintings are of negligible quality. Morse was further humiliated in 1837 when the Congressional Committee on Public Buildings decided not to commission him to paint a mural for the Capitol Rotunda. This rejection may in part have been brought about by Morse's reputation for radical politics; in the middle 1830s he became associated with the Native American party and wrote several widely-read and vitriolic anti-Catholic diatribes whose xenophobic tone bordered on paranoia. Disillusioned by failure, Morse ceased painting in 1837 at the age of forty-six, and devoted the last thirty-five years of his life to perfecting the electromagnetic telegraph.

During 1826-'7 Prof. James F. Dana lectured on electromagnetism and electricity before the New York athenaeum. Mr. Morse was a regular attendant, and, being a friend of Prof. Dana, had frequent discussions with him on the subject of his lectures. But the first ideas of a practical application of electricity seem to have come to him while he was in Paris. James Fenimore Cooper refers to the event thus: "Our worthy friend first communicated to us his ideas on the subject of using the electric spark by way of a telegraph. It was in Paris, and during the winter of 1831-'2." On 1 Oct., 1832, he sailed from Havre on the packet-ship "Sully " for New York, and among his fellow-passengers was Charles T. Jackson, then lately from the laboratories of the great French physicists, where he had made special studies in electricity and magnetism. A conversation in the early part of the voyage turned on the recent experiments of Ampere with the electromagnet. When the question whether the velocity of electricity is retarded by the length of tile wire was asked, Dr. Jackson replied, referring to Benjamin Franklin's experiments, that "electricity passes instantaneously over any known length of wire." Morse then said : "If the presence of electricity can be made visible in any part of the circuit, I see no reason why intelligence may not be transmitted instantaneously by electricity."



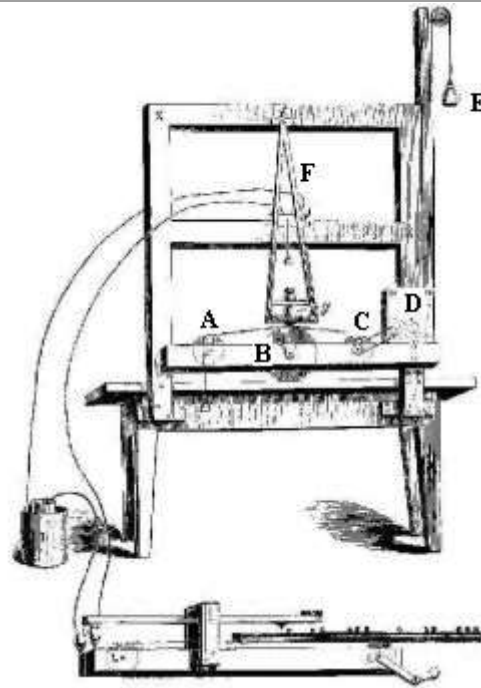
*Samuel Morse's Studio/Laboratory*

The idea took fast hold of him, and thenceforth all his energy was devoted to the development of the electric telegraph. He said: "If it will go ten miles without stopping, I can snake it go around the globe." At once, while on board the vessel, he set to work and devised the dot-and-dash alphabet. The electromagnetic and chemical recording telegraph essentially as it now exists was planned and drawn on shipboard, but he did not produce his working model till 1835 nor his relay till later. His brothers placed at his disposal a room on the fifth floor of the building on the corner of Nassau and Beekman streets, which he used as his studio, workshop, bedchamber, and kitchen. In this room, with his own hands, he first cut his models; then from these he made the moulds and castings, and in the lathe, with the graver's tools, he gave them polish and finish.



*Samuel Morse*

In 1835 he was appointed professor of the literature of the arts of design in the University of the city of New York, and he occupied front rooms on the third floor in the north wing of the university building, looking out on Washington square. Here he made his apparatus, "made as it was," he says, "and completed before the first of the year 1836. I was enabled to and did mark down telegraphic intelligible signs, and to make and did snake distinguishable signs for telegraphing; and, having arrived at that point, I exhibited it to some of my friends early in that year, and among others to Prof. Leonard D. Gale." His discovery of the relay in 1835 made it possible for him to re-enforce the current after it had become feeble owing to its distance from the source, thus making possible transmission from one point on a main line, through great distances, by a single act of a single operator. In 1836-'7 he directed his experiments mainly to modifying the marking apparatus, and later in varying the modes of uniting, experimenting with plumbago and various kinds of inks or coloring-matter, substituting a pen for a pencil, and devising a mode of writing on a whole sheet of paper instead of on a strip of ribbon.



***First telegraph model, ca. 1835***

Made from an old artist canvas stretcher, homemade battery and wooden clockworks. Code was generated by the wooden arm riding across the metal sawtooth dies representing dots and dashes and printed out on the paper tape moved by the clockworks.

The apparatus consisted of a train of clock-wheels to regulate the motion of a strip of paper about one and a half inches wide; three cylinders of wood, **A**, **B**, and **C**, over which the paper passed, and which were controlled by the clock-work **D** that was moved by the weight **E**. A wooden pendulum, **F**, was suspended over the centre of the cylinder **B**. In the lower part of the pendulum was fixed a case in which a pencil moved easily and was kept in contact with the paper by a light weight. An electromagnet was fixed on the pendulum. The wire from the helices of the magnet passed to one pole of the battery, and the other to the cup of mercury. The other pole of the battery was connected by a wire to the other cup of mercury.

In September, 1837, the instrument was shown in the cabinet of the university to numerous visitors, operating through a circuit of 1,700 feet of wire that ran back and forth in that room. It was the first instrument to transform information into electrical form and transmit it reliably over long distances. The original Morse

telegraph did not use a key and sounder. Instead it was a device designed to print patterns at a distance. The transmitter, in front, had code slugs shaped in hills and valleys. These represented the more familiar dots and dashes of Morse code. These patterns were printed at a distance by the receiver. It recreated the hills and valleys as the arm was pulled back and forth by an electro-magnet, which was responding to the signals sent by the transmitter.

Morse's application for a patent, dated 28 Sept., 1837, was filed as a caveat at the U.S. patent-office, and in December of the same year he made a formal request of congress for aid to build a telegraph-line. The committee on commerce of the house of representatives, to which the petition had been referred, reported favorably, but the session closed without any action being taken. Francis O. J. Smith, of Spaine, chairman of the committee, became impressed with the value of this new application of electricity, and formed a partnership with Mr. Morse.



*Samuel F.B. Morse, 1838*

In May, 1838, Morse went to Europe in the hope of interesting foreign governments in the establishment of telegraph-lines, but he was unsuccessful in London. He obtained a patent in France, but it was practically useless, as it required the inventor to put his discovery into operation within two years, and telegraphs being a government monopoly no private lines were permissible. Mr. Morse was received with distinction by scientists in each country, and his apparatus was exhibited under the auspices of tile Academy of Sciences in Paris, and the Royal Society in London.

While in Paris during March, 1839, Morse, met inventor Jacques Louis Mandé Daguerre, and became acquainted with his process of reproducing pictures by the action of sunlight

on silver salts. He had previously experimented in the same lines while residing in New Haven, but without success. Morse promptly dispatched an account of the meeting, with an enthusiastic description of the French inventor's revolutionary new photographic process, to the editor of the New York Observer in a letter of March 9, 1839. In June of the same year, after the French government had purchased the method from Daguerre, he communicated the details to Morse, who succeeded in acquiring the process, and was associated with John W. Draper in similar experiments. For some time afterward, until the telegraph absorbed his attention, he was engaged in experimenting toward the perfecting of the daguerreotype, and he shares with Prof. Draper the honor of being the first to make photographs of living persons.



***Samuel F.B. Morse***

This head-and-shoulders portrait of Morse is a daguerreotype made between 1844 and 1860 from the studio of Mathew B. Brady. It has been claimed that this portrait of Morse may be the first daguerreotype made in America. If not the first, it is among the earliest.



***Samuel F.B. Morse***

In this portrait, he demonstrated a sophisticated awareness of the camera through his steady composure and fixed gaze.

After an absence of eleven months he returned to New York in May, 1839, as he writes to Mr. Smith, "without a farthing in my pocket, and have to borrow even for my meals, and, even worse than this, I have incurred a debt of rent by my absence." Four years of trouble and almost abject poverty followed, and at times he was reduced to such want that for twenty-four hours he was without food. His only support was derived from a few students that he taught art, and occasional portraits that he was commissioned to paint. In the mean time, his foreign competitors - Wheatstone in England, and Steinheil in Bavaria - were receiving substantial aid and making efforts to induce congress to adopt their systems in the United States, while Morse, struggling to persuade his own countrymen of the merits of his system, although it was conceded by scientists to be the best he was unable to accomplish anything. He persisted in bringing the matter before congress after congress, until at last a bill granting him \$30,000 was passed by the house on 23 Feb., 1842, by a majority of eight, the vote standing 90 to 82. On the last day of the session he left the capitol thoroughly disheartened, but found next morning that his bill had been rushed through the senate without division on the night of 3 March, 1843.



In 1844, Morse finally filed for a patent (granted 1849) of the printing telegraph which he had been developing since 1832. Most of the mechanical development of Morse's telegraph and its code was done by his assistants, most notably Alfred Vail and William Baxter. However, all advanced modifications of the Morse's telegraph were based on an electrical circuit consisting of a






battery, a key, and an electromagnet, all connected by wire. The battery created the electricity that traveled along the wire. The key, located at one end of the wire, completed the electrical circuit when depressed. Morse's important contribution was that he based his receiver on the electromagnet. This feature ultimately ensured the universal adoption of his system. When the electromagnet was energized by a pulse of current from the sender, a soft iron armature was

	<p>attracted to the magnet, producing a V-shaped deflection in the straight line being recorded on a moving strip of paper by a pencil attached to the armature. The grouping of a succession of such marks symbolized the words of a message. Morse soon devised a code whereby letters and numbers were represented by combinations of dot and dash symbols, which corresponded to signals of short and long duration.</p>
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You can translate words into the Morse code using this [Shockwave Flash animated page](#).

	<p><b><i>Morse Telegraph Key, 1844-45, with improvements by Alfred Vail (1807-59) to the original invented by Samuel F.B. Morse.</i></b></p> <p>The telegraph key Samuel Morse used on his first line in 1844 was very simple--a strip of spring steel that could be pressed against a metal contact. Alfred Vail, Morse's partner, designed this key, in which the gap was more easily adjustable because of changes in its spring tension. It was used on the expanding telegraph system, perhaps as early as the fall of 1844 and certainly by 1845.</p>
	<p><b><i>Morse/Vail telegraph register, 1844.</i></b></p> <p>With the aid of Alfred Vail, the original receiver was greatly improved and adapted to print the Morse code.</p>

	<p><b><i>Morse recorder/register ca. 1846</i></b> Early production model telegraph device. Required two people to operate, one to read the tape, the other to write the message.</p>
	<p><b><i>Morse reading sounder ca. 1880</i></b> This device was one of the early non-tape, "sounding" devices.</p>
	<p><b><i>Morse's another recording register with key.</i></b></p>

There were yet many difficulties to be overcome, and with renewed energy he began to work. His intention was to place the wires in leaden pipes, buried in the earth. This proved impracticable, and other methods were devised. Ezra Cornell then became associated with him, and was charged with the laying of the wires, and after various accidents it was ultimately decided to suspend the wires, insulated, on poles in the air. These difficulties had not been considered, as it was supposed that the method of burying the wires, which had been adopted abroad, would prove successful. Nearly a year had been exhausted in making experiments, and the congressional appropriation was nearly consumed before the system of poles was resorted to. The construction of the line between Baltimore and Washington, a distance of about forty miles, was quickly accomplished, and on 11 May, 1844, Mr. Morse wrote to his assistant, Alfred Vail, in Baltimore, "Everything worked well." Among the earliest messages, while the line was still in an experimental condition, was one from Baltimore announcing the nomination of Henry Clay to the presidency by the Whig convention in that city. The news was conveyed on the railroad to the nearest point that had been reached by the telegraph, and then instantly transmitted over the wires to Washington. An hour later passengers arriving at Washington were surprised to find that the news had preceded them. By the end of the month communication between the two cities was complete, and practically perfect.

The day that was chosen for the public exhibition was 24 May, 1844, when Mr. Morse invited his friends to assemble in the chamber of the U.S. Supreme Court, in the capitol, at Washington, while his assistant, Mr. Vail, was in Baltimore, at the Mount Claire depot. Miss Annie G. Ellsworth, daughter of Henry L. Ellsworth, then commissioner of patents, chose the words of the message. As she had been the first to announce to Mr. Morse the passage of the bill granting the appropriation to build the line, he had promised her this distinction. She selected the words "What hath God wrought," taken from the Bible (Numbers xxiii., 23). They were received at once by Mr. Vail, and sent back again in an instant. The strip of paper on which the telegraphic characters were printed was claimed by Gov. Thomas H. Seymour, of Connecticut, on the ground that Miss Ellsworth was a native of Hartford, and is now preserved in the archives by the Hartford athenaeum. Two days later the national Democratic convention met in Baltimore and nominated James K.

Polk for the presidency. Silas Wright, of New York, was then chosen for the vice-presidency, and the information was immediately conveyed by telegraph to Morse, and by him communicated to Mr. Wright, then in the senate chamber. A few minutes later the convention was astonished by receiving a telegram from Mr. Wright declining the nomination. The despatch was at once read before the convention, but the members were so incredulous that there was an adjournment to await the report of a committee that was sent to Washington to get reliable information on the subject.

Morse offered his telegraph to the U. S. government for \$100,000, but, while \$8,000 was voted for maintenance of the initial line, any further expenditure in that direction was declined. The patent then passed into private hands, and the Morse system became the property of a joint-stock company called the Magnetic telegraph company. Step by step, sometimes with rapid strides, but persistently, the telegraph spread over the United States, although not without accompanying difficulties. Morse's patents were violated, his honor disputed, and even his integrity was assailed, and rival companies devoured for a time all the profits of the business, but after a series of vexatious lawsuits his rights were affirmed by the U.S. supreme court. In 1846 he was granted an extension of his patent, and ultimately the Morse system was adopted in France, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Russia, and Australia. The following statement, made in 1869 by the Western Union telegraph company, the largest corporation of its kind in the world, is still true: "Nearly all the machinery employed by the company belongs to the Morse system. This telegraph is now used almost exclusively everywhere, and the time will probably never come when it will cease to be the leading system of the world. Of more than a hundred devices that have been made to supersede it, not one has succeeded in accomplishing its purpose, and it is used at the present time upon more than ninety-five per cent of all the telegraph-lines in existence."



The establishment of the submarine telegraph is likewise due to Morse. In October, 1842, he made experiments with a cable between Castle Garden and Governor's island. The results were sufficient to show the practicability of such an undertaking. Later he held the office of electrician to the New York, Newfoundland, and London telegraph company, organized for the purpose of laying a cable across the Atlantic ocean.

*Photograph of Morse, ca. 1845, with his hand on a telegraph*

On August 10, 1848, Morse married for a second time. There had been a number of rumours of romantic associations, although nothing came of them until at a family wedding he met a second cousin named Sarah E. Griswold (b. 25 Dec 1822, Sault Ste Marie, MI, USA - d. 14 Nov 1901, Berlin, Germany). He was particularly struck by the way she responded to one of his son's who had learning difficulties. Sarah, herself was born with poor hearing and had a speech defect. The relationship grew quickly and they were soon married. There was some family disapproval of the marriage. Sarah was less than half his age and some thought she might have married Morse for his wealth. Sarah strongly denied this saying that if Morse lost all his wealth she would support him herself. As proof of the strength of their relationship, this period proved to be the happiest in his life.



***Morse's house  
"Locust Grove"***

Samuel Morse and his new wife, Sarah E. Griswold, lived in the house that Morse purchased in 1847 on the east bank of the Hudson, near Poughkeepsie, which they called "Locust Grove". They dispensed a generous hospitality, entertaining eminent artists and other notable persons. Soon afterward Morse bought a city residence on Twenty-second street, where he spent the winters, and on whose front since his death a marble tablet has been inserted, bearing the inscription, "In this house S.F.B. Morse lived for many years and died."

Morse was a ready writer, and, in addition to several controversial pamphlets concerning the telegraph, he published poems and articles in the "North American Review." He edited the "Remains of Lucretia Maria Davidson" (New York, 1829), to which he added a personal memoir, and also published "Foreign Conspiracy against the Liberties of the United States" (1835) ; "Eminent Dangers to the Free institutions of the United States through Foreign Immigration, and the Present State of the Naturalization Laws, by an American," originally contributed to the "Journal of Commerce" in 1835, and published anonymously in 1854; "Confessions of a French Catholic Priest, to which are added Warnings to the People of the United States, by the same Author" (edited and published with an introduction, 1837); and "Our Liberties defended, the Question discussed, Is the Protestant or Papal System most Favorable to Civil and Religious Liberty?" (1841). Samuel Morse also edited and wrote geography textbooks. [Some Morse's papers are available in the Internet.](#)



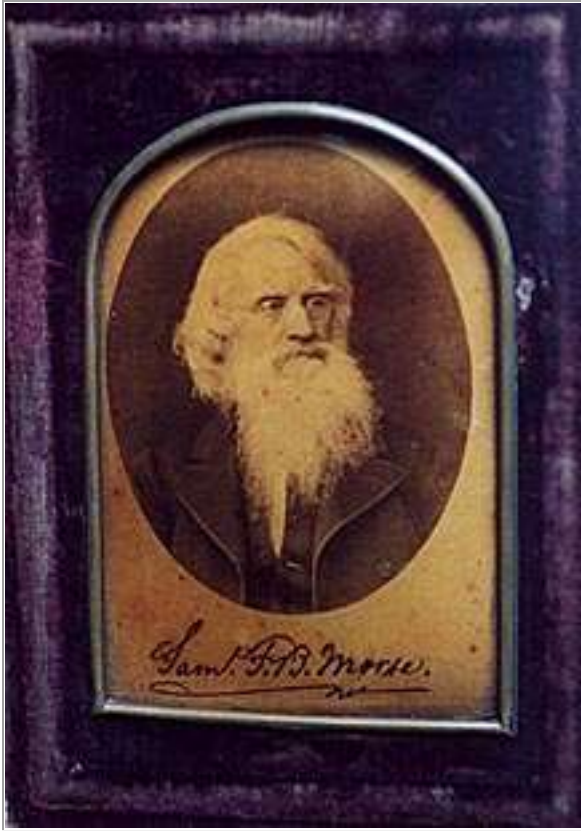
He had many honors. Yale gave him the degree of LL. D. in 1846, and in 1842 the American Institute gave him its gold medal for his experiments. In 1830 he was elected a corresponding member of the Historical Institute of France, in 1837 a member of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Belgium, in 1841 corresponding member of the National institution for the promotion of science in Washington, in 1845 corresponding member of the Archaeological Society of Belgium, in 1848 a member of the American Philosophical Society, and in 1849 a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. The sultan of Turkey presented him in 1848 with the decoration of Nishan Htichar, or order of glory, set in diamonds. A golden snuff-box, containing the Prussian golden medal for scientific merit, was sent him in 1851; the great gold medal of arts and sciences was awarded him by Whrtemberg in 1852, and in 1855 the emperor of Austria sent him the great gold medal of science and art. France made him a chevalier of the Legion of honor in 1856, Denmark conferred on him the cross of the order of the Dannebrog in 1856, Spain gave him the honor of knighthood and made him commander of the royal order of Isabella the Catholic in 1859, Portugal made him a knight of the tower and sword in 1860, and Italy conferred on him the insignia of chevalier of the royal order of Saints Lazaro Mauritio in 1864.

In his later years, Morse, a patriarchal figure, attained recognition at home and abroad which is seldom accorded a living hero of the arts of peace. As a wealthy man, he was generous in giving funds to colleges, including Yale and Vassar, benevolent societies and to poor artists.

In 1856 the telegraph companies of Great Britain gave him a banquet in London. At the instance of Napoleon III., emperor of the French, representatives of France, Austria, Sweden, Russia, Sardinia, the Netherlands, Turkey, Holland, the Papal States, and Tuscany, met in Paris during August, 1858, to decide upon a collective testimonial to Morse, and the result, of their deliberations was a vote of 400,000 francs. During the same year the American colony of France entertained him at a dinner given in Paris, over which John S. Preston presided. On the occasion of his later visits to Europe he was

received with great distinction.

*Daguerreotypes of Samuel Morse in the old age*



***Morse statue in the  
Central Park***

As he was returning from abroad in 1868 he received an invitation from his fellow-citizens, who united in saying "Many of your fellow countrymen and numerous personal friends desire to give a definite expression of the fact that this country is in full accord with European nations in acknowledging your title to the position of the father of the modern telegraph, and at the same time in a fitting manner to welcome you to your home." The day selected was 30 Dec., 1868, and Salmon P. Chase, chief justice of the U.S. supreme court, presided at the banquet in New York. On 10 June, 1871, he was further honored by the erection of a bronze statue in the Central Park, NY. Voluntary contributions had been gathered for two years from those who in various ways were connected with the electric telegraph. The statue is of heroic size, modeled by Byron M. Pickett, and represents Morse as holding the first message that was sent over the wires. In the evening of the same

day a reception was held in the Academy of Music, at which many eminent men of the nation were present. At the hour of nine the chairman announced that the telegraphic instrument before him, the original register employed in actual service, was connected with all the wires of the United States, and that the touch of the finger on the key would soon vibrate throughout the continent.

The following message was then sent: "Greeting and thanks to the telegraph fraternity throughout the land. Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will to men." At the last click of the instrument, Morse struck the sounder with his own name, amid the most extravagant applause. When the excitement had subsided, the chairman said: "Thus the father of the telegraph bids farewell to his children."



*Samuel F.B. Morse, c. 1871*

This 4.25"x6.5" albumin print of Samuel Finley Breese Morse with his first Daguerreotype camera was found "tipped-in" to a page of a book. A Daguerreotype plate holder is leaning against the front of the camera and on the far right of the photograph is his mercury development box. The camera is turned on the side (the bottom of the camera is towards Morse.) This camera is now in the possession of the United States National Museum.



*Samuel Morse's Daguerreotype Camera*



*Burial: Green-Wood Cemetery,  
Brooklyn, New York, USA*

The last public service that he performed was the unveiling of the statue of Benjamin Franklin in Printing house square, on 17 Jan., 1872, in the presence of a vast number of citizens, he had cheerfully acceded to the request that he would perform this act, remarking that it would be his last. It was eminently appropriate that he should do this, for, as was said : "The one conducted the lightning safely from the sky; the other conducts it beneath the ocean, from continent to continent. The one tamed the lightning, the other makes it minister to human wants and human progress." Shortly after his return to his home he was seized with neuralgia in his head, and after a few months of suffering he died of pneumonia on 2 April, 1872, in New York City, at the age of 81. He died peacefully in a home he and Sarah maintained in New York as their winter house. Memorial sessions of congress and of various state legislatures were held in his honor. He was buried in Brooklyn's Greenwood Cemetery.

Before his death Morse's invention of the telegraph had eclipsed his early renown as a painter, and it was only after the retrospective exhibition of his work held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1932 that interest in his art revived.

**Morse's paintings are available in the Internet ( [1](#), [2](#) )**

**Samuel F. B. Morse is also memorized in medals, stamps, books:**



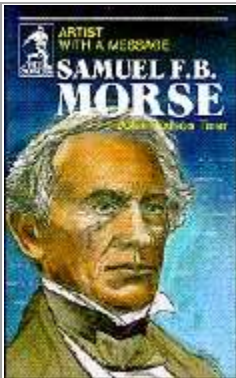
**Large Medallion**  
issued by the Monnaie de Paris in 1973 in memory of Samuel Finlay Breeze Morse - inventor of Morse code.

**Obverse:** Bust of Morse with Morse code around edges.

**Reverse:** Diagram of the first electronic telegraph invented by Morse. As struck, this fine medallion comes in an official issue Blue card box together with a plastic "Monnaie de Paris" stand.



A US postal stamp memorizing Samuel Morse was released on October 7, 1940.



A book about Morse written by John H. Tiner and illustrated by Shirley Young is recommended for reading: "***Samuel F. B. Morse: Artist with a Message***"

*This text has been compiled from the biographies of Morse available in the Internet:*

( [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), [6](#), [7](#), [8](#), [9](#), [10](#), [11](#), [12](#), [13](#), [14](#), [15](#), [16](#), [17](#), [18](#), [19](#), [20](#), [21](#), [22](#), [23](#), [24](#), [25](#), [26](#) ).

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