



Samuel F. B. Morse

1791-1872

The first practical application of electricity is said by many to be the telegraph, developed by Samuel F. B. Morse, an American portrait painter and inventor. Morse built on the ideas of the famous American physicist Joseph Henry, using the opening and closing of relays to produce the dots and dashes (or Morse code) that represent letters and numbers.

Morse was born in Charlestown, Massachusetts, the son of a minister and author. He studied to be an artist at Yale and the Royal Academy of Arts in London, and by 1815 he was considered to be moderately successful. In 1826 he helped found and became the first president of the National Academy of Design. But the previous year his wife had died, in 1826 his father died, and in 1828 his mother died. The following year the distressed Morse went to Europe to recover and study further. In 1832, while returning home on board the passenger ship *Sully*, he met an eccentric inventor and became intrigued with developing a telegraph, the principle of which had already been considered by Henry. By 1836 Morse had a working model, and in 1837 he acquired a partner, Alfred Vail, who financed the project. Their efforts were rewarded with a patent and the financing by Congress of a telegraph in 1844, over which Morse – on May 24, 1844 – sent his now-famous message, "What hath God wrought!"

(Source: D. Johnson, J. Johnson and J. Hilborn, *Electric Circuit Analysis*, Prentice-Hall, 1989)