

# Living in the Past

*Historical perspective*



## Samuel Morse

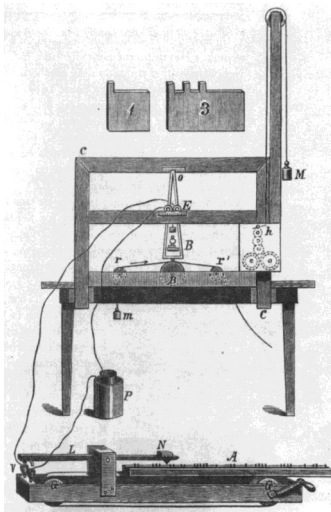
Most of us know him as the person after whom "the code" was named, but his history is more multi-dimensional than many realize. [Samuel Morse](#) loved art so much that, contrary to his parents' wishes, he became not only a painter, but an art professor at New York University. In fact, he painted some of the [most famous portraits](#) of the early American era.

In 1832, while sailing home from Europe, he became intrigued by discussions with a fellow passenger who had been following the electromagnetic work of Michael Faraday. Samuel was so captivated by the concept, that when he arrived home, he set aside the working of his [current painting](#) to learn more about this phenomenon. He began to think of ways to use such an electrical solution for communication, unaware that others had already devised competing ideas.

Samuel was not the first to invent the telegraph, but credit for its invention was awarded to him because his was the first made from a single-wire circuit, making it more efficient and less expensive. Morse's telegraph was one of the first put to widespread commercial use.

Alfred Vail, one of two partners who joined Samuel in his project development, devised the series of dots and dashes that encoded each character sent. Although the actual dot-dash combinations that represent individual characters have changed since the first days, [Morse code](#) remains the primary language of telegraphy worldwide.

In 1838, Samuel sought for government funding of his telegraph projects, which was at first rejected. Later, a Maine congressman provided Samuel Morse the financial backing he needed, to pursue the research, possibly the first recorded instance of government aid to a private researcher.



[Telegraph patent](#)

Samuel and his partners first demonstrated the telegraph in private on 06 January 1838 in Morristown, New Jersey, then again five days later in public at the same location, sending the phrase, *A PATIENT WAITER IS NO LOSER*. Later, in May 1844, after he built the first telegraph line, Samuel sent the first telegram, which read, *WHAT HATH GOD WROUGHT* from the Supreme Court chamber to the B&O Station in Baltimore.

In 1853, Samuel Morse invented the [telegraph repeater](#), which solved the problem of telegraphing at long distances in spite of wired signal degradation, and applied for a patent. But after a lengthy investigation, the US Supreme Court decided that, while Samuel's apparatus was patent-able, the signals were not. This ruling set the precedence for future US patent laws governing the eligibility of today's computer-related patents.

