

# The Family Heritage Series

A weekly discussion of Americanist truths and traditions for those "heirs of all the ages" who will have to preserve that most important inheritance of all — freedom. Produced by the Movement To Restore Decency.



Volume II

Lesson Seventy-Nine

## Samuel Morse

### LESSON IDEA

To describe the invention and development of the telegraph, and to show the disappointments, delays, and tragedies its inventor had to overcome to achieve success.

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“I FIND myself without sympathy or help from anyone,” Samuel Morse told a friend in 1842. “For nearly two years past, I have given all my time and scanty means, denying myself all pleasure and even necessary food. I am crushed. Unless I have the means from some source, I shall be compelled to give up the matter. Nothing but the knowledge that I have an invention which is to contribute to the happiness of millions has sustained me.”

Morse had good reason to be downhearted. For several years he had been trying to persuade the Congress of the United States to appropriate \$30,000 for construction of an experimental model of his invention. Do you know what it was? Yes, it was the telegraph.

In March of 1843 — at long last — Congress scheduled the Telegraph Bill for a vote, although it was placed at the bottom of a list of 140 others. Morse sat alone in the gallery listening all day to debates and waiting for the one that would decide his future. When a reporter asked him how he felt about the upcoming vote, Morse replied: “I have spent seven years in perfecting this invention, and all that I had; if it succeeds, I am a made man; if it fails, I am ruined.” It was that simple.

This predicament, however, was not unusual for Morse. Throughout his fifty-two years, he had known only occasional success; more often than not, he lived barely above poverty.

In his youth, however, Morse was considered “a man with a future.” As a student at Yale, he had distinguished himself in his academic studies and developed an artistic talent for portrait painting that made him both popular and financially solvent. In fact, Morse’s talents with brush and canvas were so remarkable that he received praise from Washington Allston and Gilbert Stuart, two of America’s most famous artists of the time.

This praise was enough to convince his parents that they should further his development by sending him to Europe to study under Allston. While pursuing his studies in London, an idealistic Morse wrote home: “My passion for my art is so firmly rooted, that I am confident no human power could destroy it. The more I study, the greater I think is its claim to the appellation of *divine* . . . .”

After nearly three years in Europe, Morse returned to the United States, confident that he would be “one of those who shall revive the splendor of the Fifteenth Century” with his paintings.

He promptly established an art gallery in Boston and then anxiously awaited the thousands of customers he imagined would rush to buy his works. But few Bostonians walked through his gallery and fewer purchased any paintings. He finally closed its doors after a year and decided to become an

