Andrew J. Beard Biography

Andrew J. Beard

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Biography

Born in Alabama, Andrew J. Beard was set free from slavery at the age of 15. He remained in Alabama, taking up farming for several years. In addition to farming, Beard experimented with mechanical devices, and had soon built his own flour mill. During the years he operated the mill, he began to channel his profits into other inventions. His first success was a plow he patented and sold for four thousand dollars. Other inventions such as a second type of plow and a rotary steam engine followed with similar results.

In the 1890s, Beard took a job at a railroad yard in Eastlake, Alabama that led to his best-known invention. He observed the danger of serious injury or death workers faced when coupling train cars by securing the cars with a metal pin as they came together. The accidents he saw and stories he heard motivated him to create a device, called the Jenny coupler, which automatically locked the two cars together when they were forced against each other. In 1897, he sold his patent rights to the device for fifty thousand dollars, a considerable sum at the time.