Hippolyte Pixii Biography

Hippolyte Pixii

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Biography

Pixii was born in France and followed in his father's footsteps, becoming a builder of scientific instruments. He had a short life, dying at the age of 27 in 1835. Pixii's claim to fame came as a result of English physicist Michael Faraday's discovery of electromagnetic induction. In 1831 Faraday, experimenting with his discovery, had taken a copper disk and spun it between the poles of a permanent magnet. This created an electric current which could be drawn off the disk with a wire and put to work.

Faraday announced his discovery to the Royal Society of England and included a description of a simple dynamo, a machine that produces electricity. Pixii, guided by Faraday's description, proceeded to build his own generator, more efficient than Faraday's. His machine was hand-driven and had stationary coils around which revolved a field magnet. Pixii's generator produced alternating current (AC) which was of little interest at the time. Following a suggestion by French physicist André Ampère (1775-1836), Pixii installed a commutator which converted the AC into direct current (DC). Alternating current would not be utilized until 160 years later, thanks largely to the efforts of Nikola Tesla.

The device that Pixii built was essentially a working model, but it was the first practical generator built on the principle Faraday had discovered. Later, Zénobe Gramme established a very profitable business building electric generators.