Elisha Graves Otis Encyclopedia Article

Elisha Graves Otis

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Elisha Graves Otis

1811-1861

Designer of the safety hoist elevators. Born in Halifax, Vermont, in 1811, Elisha Graves Otis was a hard-working New Englander with exceptional talents in improving old machines and inventing new ones. Working as a master mechanic in 1852 for a company in Bergen, New Jersey, he was sent to Yonkers, New York, to operate a new factory and install its machinery. It was there that he designed and installed a safety hoist, the first elevator with backup devices to keep it from falling in case the lifting chains or ropes failed to support the weight of the hoist. On March 23, 1857, the first passenger elevator in history was installed in a New York store. Otis died in 1861 but the company he founded is still in business.