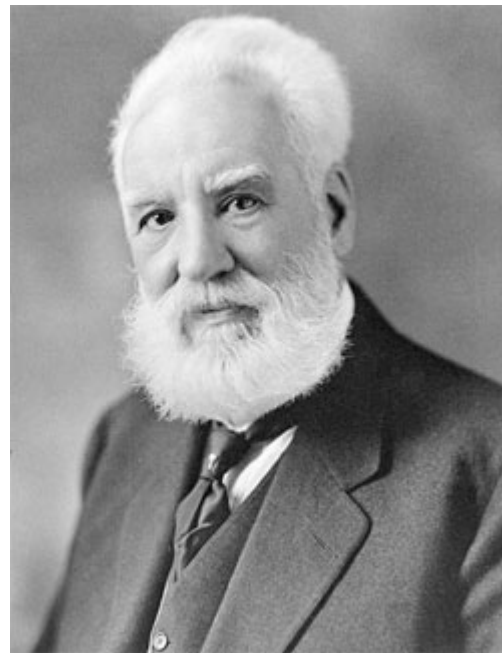


## [Bell, Gray both apply for telephone patents, February 14, 1876](#)

[Suzanne Deffree](#) - February 14, 2017

Both Alexander Graham Bell and Elisha Gray applied for patents for telephone designs on February 14, 1876. Unfortunately for [Gray](#), an electrical engineer who co-founded the Western Electric Manufacturing Company, history records that Bell's lawyer got his paperwork filed first. Bell's application was recorded as the fifth received by the patent office that day; Gray's was the 39th. The days leading up to Monday, February 14, 1876, are controversial ones. Gray had not told anyone about his new invention for transmitting voice sounds until Friday, February 11, 1876.



Rumor has it that when Bell heard of Gray's work that Friday, he hurried to prepare his documentation for a similar design he had been working on. While Bell had been working on his designs for some time, he had not submitted such an application in the US as he had already filed an application in Britain, which, at the time, would only allow patents on devices that were not patented elsewhere.

Knowing some of the details of Gray's design, it is said Bell's application was altered so that the patent office would find the two applications similar. As such, whoever would be granted the patent would be given all rights. It has further been suggested that Bell's paperwork arrived after Gray's at the patent office and, therefore, should have been seen after Gray's.

Adding to the controversy was a lesser known inventor, Italian immigrant [Antonio Meucci](#). Meucci began developing the design of a "telegrafo parlante" or talking telegraph in 1849. But, facing

financial hardship due to his wife's health and lacking enough English to navigate the business community, Meucci could not move forward in the patent process. As has also been pointed out, Bell conducted experiments in the same laboratory as Meucci did. Diminishing Meucci's "first to design" argument, Meucci's materials were lost by the lab. This occurred shortly after Bell's team began using neighboring space, with some saying the materials were not lost but stolen.

Bell was awarded US Patent Number 174,465, [Improvement on Telegraphy](#), on March 7, 1876. Despite slews of lawsuits challenging Bell's rights and the US [Congress naming Meucci the true inventor of the telephone](#) in 2002, Bell is known by most as the inventor of the telephone.

**Also see:**

- [Communication pioneer Elisha Gray is born, August 2, 1835](#)
- [Alexander Graham Bell is born, March 3, 1847](#)
- [Meucci acknowledged as telephone inventor, June 11, 2002](#)
- [Alexander Graham Bell: Patent troll?](#)
- [1st transcontinental phone call made, January 25, 1915](#)
- [Who invented something depends on your definition of 'something'](#)
- [Can barnacles fly? And who really invented the telephone?](#)

---

*For more moments in tech history, see this [blog](#). EDN strives to be historically accurate with these postings. Should you see an error, please [notify us](#).*

**Editor's note:** *This article was originally posted on February 14, 2013 and edited on February 14, 2017.*