

EIP



Alice H. Parker, Black History Month 2023

As we move through October and temperatures begin to drop, many of us will be wrapping up, adding extra layers and switching on the heaters. Here's a woman that inspired many of the modern heating mechanisms we have today.... Alice H. Parker.

Alice was born in 1895, in Morristown, New Jersey, USA. She graduated with Honours from Howard University in 1910, a university historically known for its admittance of Black students.

Alice was inspired by the cold, harsh New Jersey winters to invent a heating system, feeling that coal and wood burning were not effectively heating her home. The indoor heating system she designed was comprised of mini furnaces, connected to a common air exchange. The system used hot air created from the combustion of natural gas. This contained air ducts for an even distribution around the home, and even allowed for the moderation of temperature in different areas.

Alice's invention is remarkable in many ways; it eliminated the need for a furnace and reduced the risk of house fires - a threat posed by the burning of wood and coal through a cold night. She was awarded a patent (number US 1,325,905) in December of 1919. Although her invention was never commercialised, it inspired the thermostat, forced air furnaces, and the modern zone heating we have today!

Alice's legacy lives on through the Alice H. Parker Women Leaders in Innovation Award, created by the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce. This award acknowledges the creation and innovation of Women in New Jersey.

Alice's patent was granted before the Women's Liberation Movement and the Civil Rights Movement – an incredible achievement, given the systemic barriers Black women faced at that time.

Much information about Alice's life is not widely known so I wanted to shine a spotlight on her as we recognise the contributions and achievements of those with African or Caribbean heritage this Black History Month.

You can find out a bit more about Alice here:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alice_H._Parker

Written by Regina Johnson