



John Gorrie

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JOHN GORRIE, PHYSICIAN, SCIENTIST, inventor, and humanitarian, is considered the father of refrigeration and air-conditioning. He was born on the Island of Nevis on October 3, 1802, and received his medical education in New York. Pursuing the study of tropical diseases, Gorrie moved to Apalachicola, Florida, a large cotton market on the Gulf coast. With remarkable foresight and without knowledge of microbiology, he urged draining the swamps and sleeping under mosquito netting to prevent disease. He also advocated the cooling of sickrooms to reduce fever and to make the patient more comfortable. For this he cooled rooms with ice in a basin suspended from the ceiling. Cool air, being heavier, flowed down across the patient and through an opening near the floor. Since ice had to be brought by boat from the northern lakes, Gorrie experimented with making artificial ice.

As well as being resident physician at two hospitals, Gorrie was active in the community, but he resigned his positions after 1839. After 1845, he gave up his medical practice to pursue refrigeration projects. On May 6, 1851, Gorrie was granted Patent No. 8080 for a machine to make ice. The original model of this machine and the scientific articles he wrote are at the Smithsonian Institution. Impoverished, Gorrie sought to raise money to manufacture his machine, but the venture failed when his partner died. Humiliated by criticism, financially ruined, and his health broken, Gorrie died in seclusion on June 29, 1855.

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Marble by C. A. Pillars
Given in 1914; located in National Statuary Hall.