The Amazing Mind of Granville Woods

Written by
Maggie Felsch

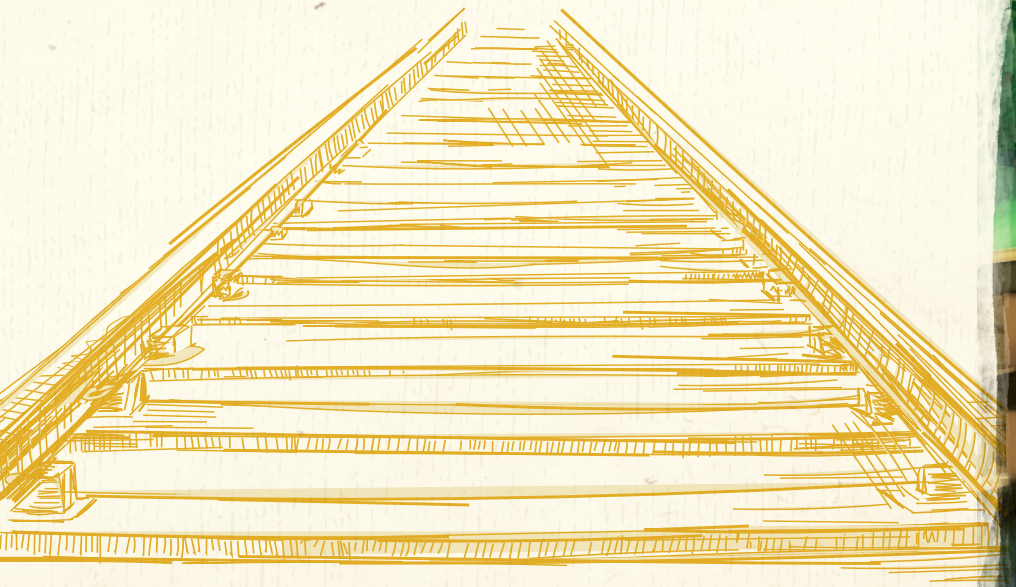
Illustrated by
Kessler Garrity

THE GOOD AND THE BEAUTIFUL LIBRARY

Have you ever walked along a railroad track and noticed the two rails running side by side for miles and miles?

When railroad tracks were first laid on the ground in the 1800s—mile after mile of parallel iron rails—there was no engine connected to the rail cars; the cars had to be pulled by something else. Can you guess what pulled them down the railroad track?

Horses did!



35

Unfortunately, new technology sometimes comes with new dangers. The train engineers conducting the high-speed steam locomotives had no way of knowing if there was another train on the track. Of course, the engineers always looked ahead, and train stations carefully scheduled which trains were allowed on the tracks at which time to avoid any accidents. Sadly, because there was no way to communicate between trains, collisions still happened far too often.

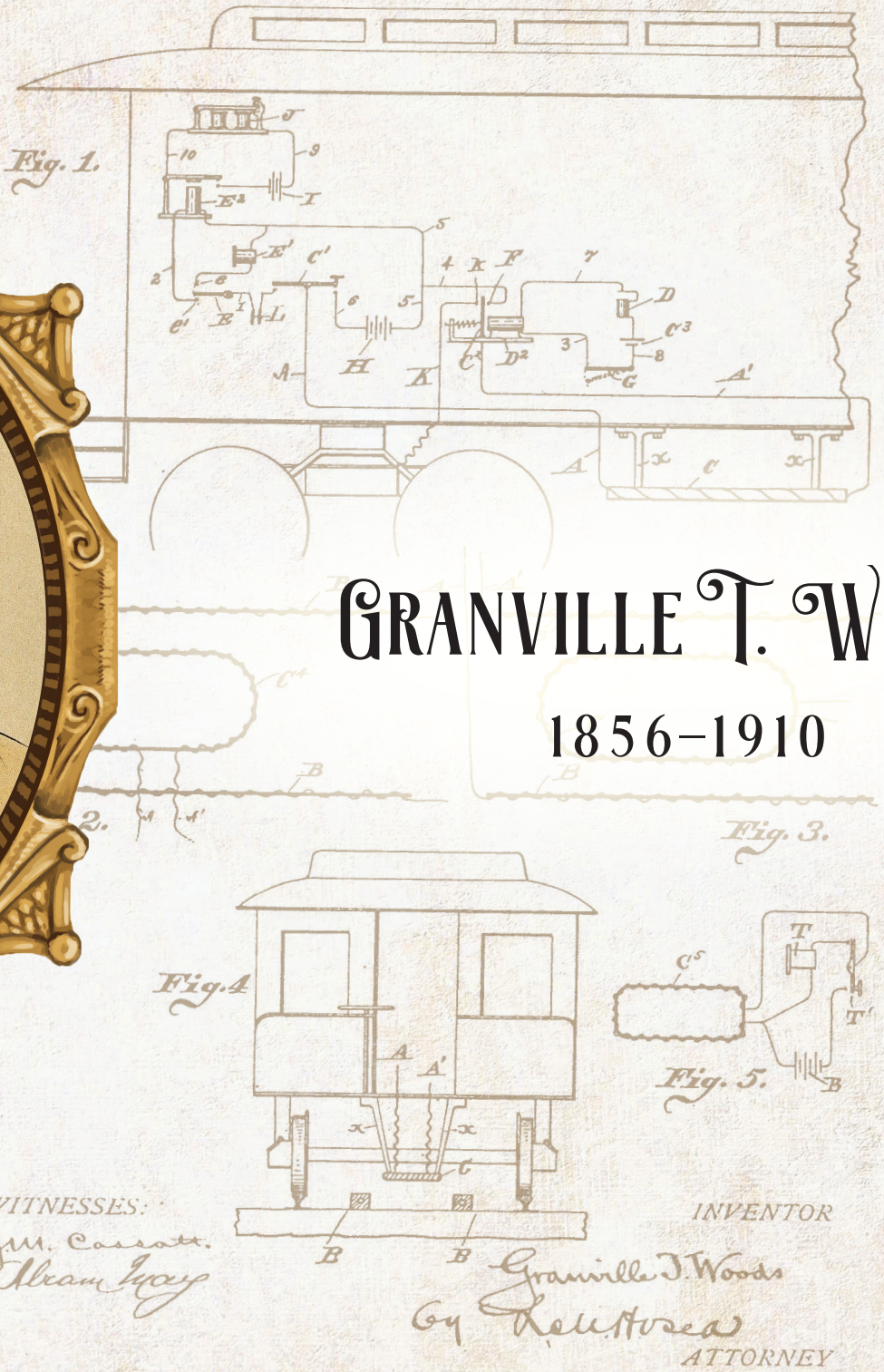
The Great Train Wreck of 1856 happened in Pennsylvania. One train, pulling ten boxcars, got started late. The engineer decided to go extra fast to make up time. Another train, headed in the opposite direction, started right on schedule. The trains were on the same track headed right toward each other! When both trains came around a curve at Camp Hill, they collided, causing the deadliest railroad tragedy in the world up to that time.

When sad things happen, there are always beautiful miracles to be noticed if we just look. The same year of the tragic train wreck, 1856, a beautiful baby boy was born in Columbus, Ohio, who would grow up to make trains one of the safest forms of transportation in the world!

This precious baby was named Granville T. Woods.

He invented something called the *synchronous multiplex railway telegraph*. That's a huge term, but, simply put, Granville Woods invented a way for trains and train stations to communicate with each other through telegraph lines. That meant no more wondering if two trains were headed straight for each other on the same track! The railway telegraph made train transportation an incredibly safe way to travel.

Granville also invented much-improved electric train brakes, increasing the safety of railway travel even more.



Granville T. Woods

1856–1910