

St. Michael's Cemetery Holds Granville T. Woods Tribute

The following story is an extract from "Granville T. Woods, Tribute To A Black Pioneer", a story by John Stickney that the Gazette ran on March 30, before the event at St. Michael's Cemetery.

Granville T. Woods, a contemporary of Thomas Edison, was called "the Black Edison" for his inventions in electricity. Woods helped develop the third rail that powers our subways; the electrification of the Figure 8, a Coney Island roller coaster; and a wireless communications system that prevented train accidents. But Woods' race sentenced him to a life of struggle and, ultimately, to a pauper's

grave at St. Michael's Cemetery (72-02 Astoria Boulevard, East Elmhurst) not far from where another contemporary is buried – Scott Joplin, the Black composer of "The Entertainer". (Woods' grave has since been acknowledged with a proper headstone.)

On Saturday, April 23, St. Michael's Cemetery honored one of its own in a special commemoration. April 23 happens to be Woods' birthday, and in effect the inventor came back to life in the person of David L. Head, author of "Granville T. Woods: African-American Communications and Transportation Pioneer." (Available at dlhfoundation51@gmail.com.)

Historian David L. Head helped St. Michael's commemorate Granville T. Woods' birthday with a multimedia, all-ages presentation on April 23.

David L. Head was joined by Assembly Member Jeffrion Aubrey at the celebration of Granville T. Woods' life and work at St. Michael's Cemetery.

Photos Tony Barsamian



A Few Words To Thank Those Involved In Woods' Tribute

Queens Gazette publisher and master of ceremonies Tony Barsamian thanked Saint Michael's Cemetery for their direct involvement in the betterment of the community. He specifically thanked General Manager Dennis Werner, who was involved in all aspects of the Granville T. Woods Tribute. Barsamian noted that representing St. Michael's Cemetery at the event was Reverend Kate Flexer, CFO Jeff Miller, Director of Operations Katie LaBella, and Director of Administration Rita Gambino. He also thanked the entire staff and crew for what they do day by day, and at every special event that St Michael's is involved with in the community. He also thanked Assemblyman Jeffrion Aubry who represents the 35th Assembly District and is Speaker Pro Tempore, for attending the special lecture on Woods.

Most notably Barsamian profusely thanked David Head, the special guest lecturer and author, speaker, historian, advocate, and most noted expert in the work of Woods. Barsamian also thanked John Stickney, who contributed by writing the pre-event story and provided all the pre-event information. After the exhibition, guests had the opportunity to walk over and pay respects at the gravesite of Granville T. Woods.

The next event scheduled at St. Michaels is the Scott Joplin tribute on May 14th at 2 pm.

Head, a retired New York City bus driver (formerly of South Ozone Park, now residing in Southfield, Michigan) appeared in period costume and "channeled" Woods' spirit in a lively multimedia presentation designed for all ages. At one point, Head assumed Woods' voice to tell a rags-to-not-quite-riches story of inventive genius and thwarted promise.

Woods' first U.S. patent, in 1883, was for a steam boiler furnace (with which he was deeply familiar from his railroad days). But Woods prophetically envisioned that electricity was the future, and he went on to win 44

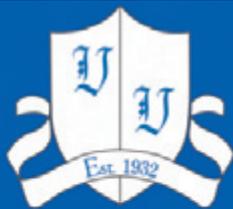
more patents, including for an "electric railway system," "chicken incubator," "amusement park apparatus," and "automatic air brake."

In 1891 Woods moved to New York City and found a niche for himself as an inventor, partly through connections with General Electric. But he was often embroiled in court over the rights to his patents.

"For Woods, patents did not produce economic rewards; they only represented unfulfilled dreams," writes Rayvon Fouché, a Black professor of American Studies at Purdue Uni-

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