

Black History Month Highlights of Black American Scientists

Bessie Virginia Blount (1914-2009) was born Nov. 24, 1914 in Hickory, Virginia. She made significant breakthroughs in assistive technologies and forensic science, working as a physical therapist, inventor, and forensic documents specialist.

“She became a practicing physical therapist, and, after World War II ended, many soldiers returned from the frontlines as amputees. As part of her physical therapy work, Blount taught veterans who did not have use of their hands and feet new ways to perform basic tasks. Blount came up with a device that consisted of a tube that delivered individual bites of food to the patient at his or her own pace. Later, while living in Newark, New Jersey, practicing physical therapy and teaching at Bronx Hospital in New York, she also created a simpler device that employed a neck brace with built-in support for a food receptacle such as a bowl, cup, or dish.

A second career was in store for Blount in 1969, when she began working in law enforcement, conducting forensic science research for police departments in New Jersey and Virginia. She moved up quickly and, in 1977 was sent to train and work at Scotland Yard in England. She was the first African American woman to be honored with such an opportunity.”

Lemelson-MIT Program. Historical Inventors. (n.d.). <https://lemelson.mit.edu/resources/bessie-blount>. Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Web.

“She used much of her forensic training to examine and research the authenticity of African-American slave “papers” and pre-Civil War documents. Blount has worked with material from Native-American treaties made with the United States. She also serves as a consultant in “special investigations” for many law enforcement agencies while being a member of the South Jersey Chapter.”

Savior of the handicapped, Bessie Blount. (Nov. 24, 1914). <https://aaregistry.org/story/savior-of-the-handicapped-bessie-blount/>. African American Registry. Web.