

This Day in History... February 11, 1847

Birth of Thomas Edison

Thomas Alva Edison was born on February 11, 1847, in Milan, Ohio. Known later as the "Wizard of Menlo Park," he earned more than 1,000 patents and helped transform how people lived, worked, and communicated.

The youngest of seven children, Edison was the son of an exiled political activist from Canada. His mother, a schoolteacher, was a major influence on his life. Suffering from scarlet fever and ear infections as a child, Edison had poor hearing and was nearly deaf by adulthood.

Edison's family moved to Port Huron, Michigan, in 1854, where he attended public school for 12 weeks. He was full of energy and had trouble paying attention, so his mother removed him from school and taught him at home. He developed a thirst for knowledge by age 11 and read books on a wide variety of subjects, becoming largely self-taught.

At just 12 years old, Edison took his first job, selling newspapers along the Grand Trunk Railroad line. He established his own newspaper, the *Grand Trunk Herald*, which included up-to-date articles that were a hit with commuters. Edison also used his time on the train to conduct chemical experiments in a baggage car. However, when an experiment caused a chemical fire, he was kicked off the train and forced to sell his paper at the stations instead.

During this time, Edison saved a three-year-old from being run over by a train. The child's father rewarded Edison by teaching him how to use a telegraph. He was then able to take a job as a telegraph operator. He spent five years traveling through the Midwest filling in as a telegrapher for those who had left to fight in the Civil War. It was during this time that he began experimenting with telegraph technology and taught himself electrical science.

After the war, Edison briefly worked for the Associated Press, and then traveled to Boston to work for Western Union. There, he designed and patented an electronic voting recorder to help add up votes in the legislature. But the lawmakers didn't want it because they preferred the votes be added slower to change people's minds.

Edison moved to New York City in 1869 and created his first successful invention – the Universal Stock Printer – which synchronized multiple stock tickers' transactions. He sold the rights for \$40,000, quit his telegraphing job to become a full-time inventor, and set up his first small lab in Newark, New Jersey. There, he made improvements to the design of the typewriter in 1874. Before Edison's improvements, people had been able to write faster by hand than by typing.

From 1876 to 1887, Edison invented in a workshop in Menlo Park, New Jersey. It was there, on October 19, 1879, that Edison created the first practical electric light. People all over the world quickly learned of this astounding accomplishment and the "Wizard of Menlo Park." Edison also invented the phonograph – a precursor to the record player – which he considered his favorite invention, at Menlo Park.

In 1887, Edison moved to a more modern laboratory in West Orange, New Jersey. There, he perfected many of his inventions from the 1870s and organized companies to sell his work. He also made improvements to the motion picture camera and created "talking pictures" by linking the phonograph and the motion picture camera. Edison's later inventions include the storage battery, a cement mixer, the Dictaphone, and a duplicating machine. Also during this time Edison built a winter home in Fort Myers, Florida. There Edison worked with Henry Ford and Harvey Firestone in founding the Edison Botanical Research Corporation. His main goal was to find a local source for natural rubber. In the weeks before his death he claimed he was close to finding one.

During his lifetime, Edison filed and was granted 1,093 patents. He died on October 18, 1931, as one of the most well-known and respected men in the world at that time.



Issued for Edison's 100th birthday.



Commemorated the 50th anniversary of the first incandescent electric light.



The "Edison's First Light" stamp was issued in three formats – this is the rotary press printing.



This is a coil printing of the stamp above.

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