

This Day in History... October 6, 1889

Thomas Edison Tests his First Motion Picture

Adding to his long list of inventions, Thomas Edison tested his first motion picture film on October 6, 1889.

Edison had toyed with the idea of moving pictures for a while. He believed that if a camera took quick, successive images, they could be projected to appear as if they were moving. With George Eastman's invention of celluloid film, Edison's idea became a reality.

Edison described the idea to his assistant, W.K.L. Dickson, in 1888. Though it was Edison's idea, Dickson largely developed the project, which became known as the kinetophone. He used the European Zoetrope, which used images on glass plates, as the starting point. But he used film instead of glass and hooked it up to Edison's phonograph.

So in addition to showing moving pictures, the device also incorporated sound, creating a multi-sensory experience.



One of the world's most prolific inventors, Edison held 2,332 patents worldwide a record number that was not surpassed until 2003.



Dickson worked with the Eastman company on celluloid film for the Kinetoscope.

Edison and Dickson first tested this new machine on October 6, 1889 in their laboratory, giving birth to the "talkie" film industry. The men tinkered with the invention for a couple years before Edison received the patent for it in 1891. Edison then held his first commercial motion picture presentation on April 14, 1894 with the launch of his "peephole" kinetoscope parlor in New York City. With this device, one person at a time looked through a peephole viewer at the top while the film played below.

Edison and Dickson continued to improve on the idea for several years. And they weren't the only ones – several other inventors made their own moving picture devices. In fact, Edison got the rights to one built by Thomas Armat and improved on it. The invention, which he called the Vitascope,



Stamp honoring the 50th anniversary of Edison's first commercial motion picture display. It pictures troops watching a film during WWII.



This stamp was issued in 1977 for the 50th anniversary of the first film to successfully feature sound, The Jazz Singer.

made the first commercial projection of a motion picture in April 1896. He added sound to this device and presented it commercially in 1913 as the kinetophone. Though Edison initially believed that the future of motion pictures laid in the individual viewer shows, he quickly learned that large-scale projection, where entire audiences could watch a film together, was truly the way to go.

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