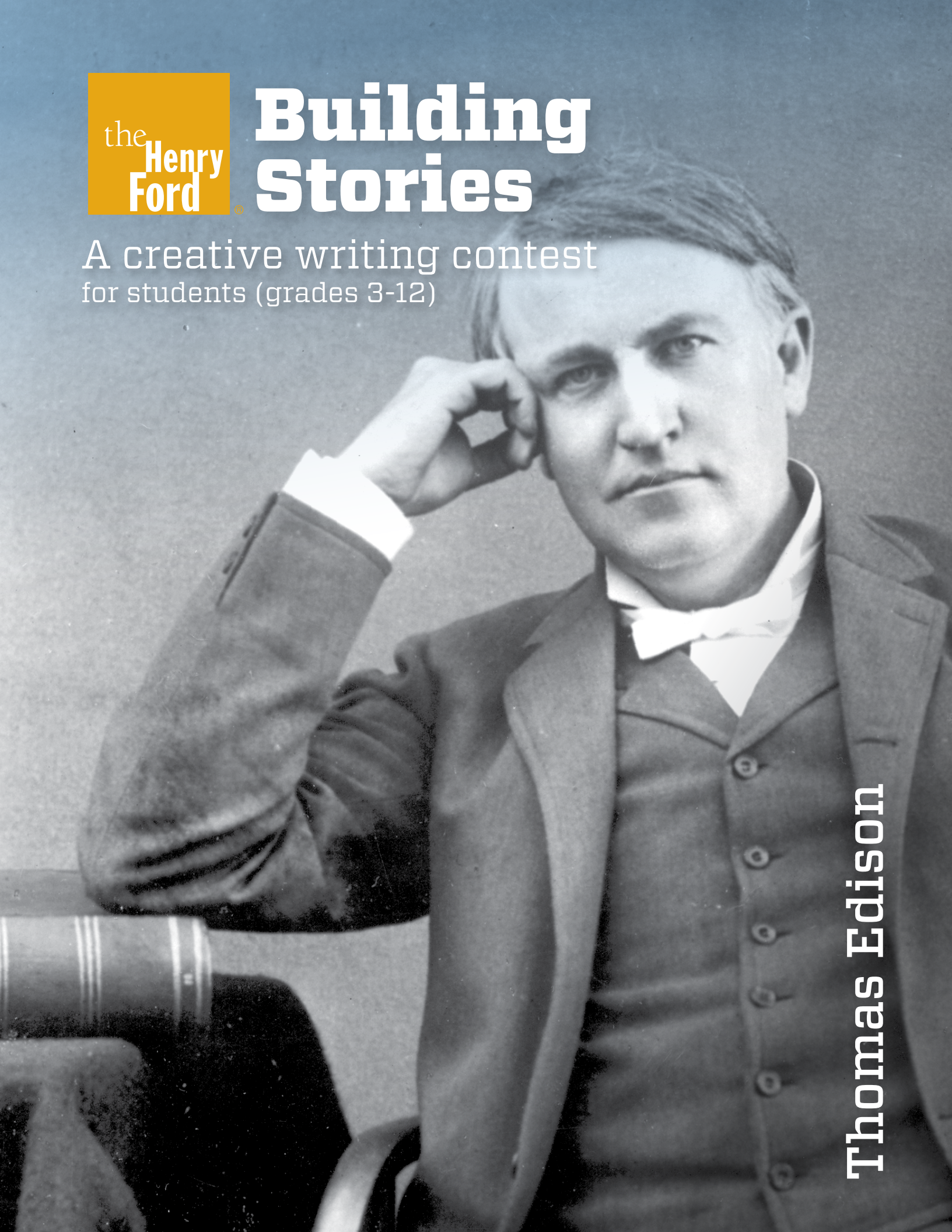
the Henry Ford®

Building Stories

A creative writing contest

for students (grades 3-12)



Thomas Edison

Building Stories

A creative writing contest

Foundational Materials

As you create your story for The Henry Ford's Building Stories: A Creative Writing Contest, use these foundational materials as a starting point. You can and should conduct additional independent research. Be sure to cite your sources in your bibliography.

Table of Contents

All sources in this document are from the collections of The Henry Ford®.
For more information on Building Stories: A Creative Writing Contest, please visit:
www.thehenryford.org/BuildingStories

Section 1
Edison's Youth

Source 1

Daguerreotype of Thomas Edison as a Child, 1851

Thomas Edison was born on February 11, 1847, to former schoolteacher Nancy Elliot Edison and Samuel Edison, Jr. who ran a shingle mill and grain business in Milan, Ohio. Thomas was the couple's seventh and last child (three older siblings died in early childhood). This daguerreotype, which was an early photograph printed on a silver surface, was taken around age 4 and is the first known portrait of the future inventor.

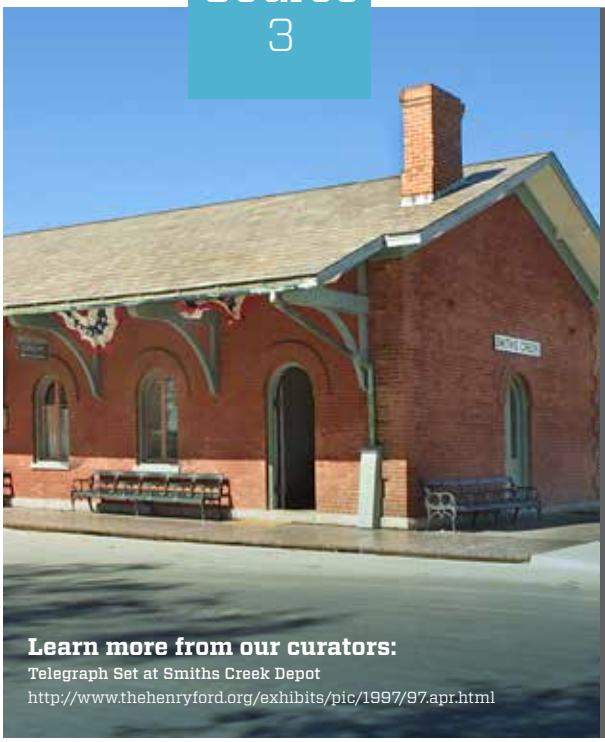
Source 2

Portrait of Thomas Edison as a Teenager, circa 1865

A ruddy Thomas Edison sat for this portrait around age 14, while he was working on the Grand Trunk Western Railway. Edison sold popular newspapers and magazines, cigars, vegetables and candy to passengers traveling between his hometown of Port Huron and Detroit, Michigan. As a young teenager, he employed other kids to help with these tasks, revealing his ability to organize and lead his peers. Edison also printed and sold his own newspaper, displaying the creative, entrepreneurial spirit that would characterize his life.

Source 3

Smiths Creek Depot



Learn more from our curators:
Telegraph Set at Smiths Creek Depot
http://www.thehenryford.org/exhibits/pic/1997/97.apr.html

Smiths Creek Depot stood on the Grand Trunk Western Railway, about 10 miles southwest of Port Huron, Michigan. The railroad station was the center of 19th-century small-town life. More than a place to catch a train, the depot was where customers sent and received packages and telegrams, caught up on the latest news, and shared gossip. Thomas Edison worked the Detroit to Port Huron route, which included Smiths Creek Depot, as a newsboy selling newspapers and candy. He also learned railroad telegraphy from the father of a youngster he rescued from rolling boxcars.

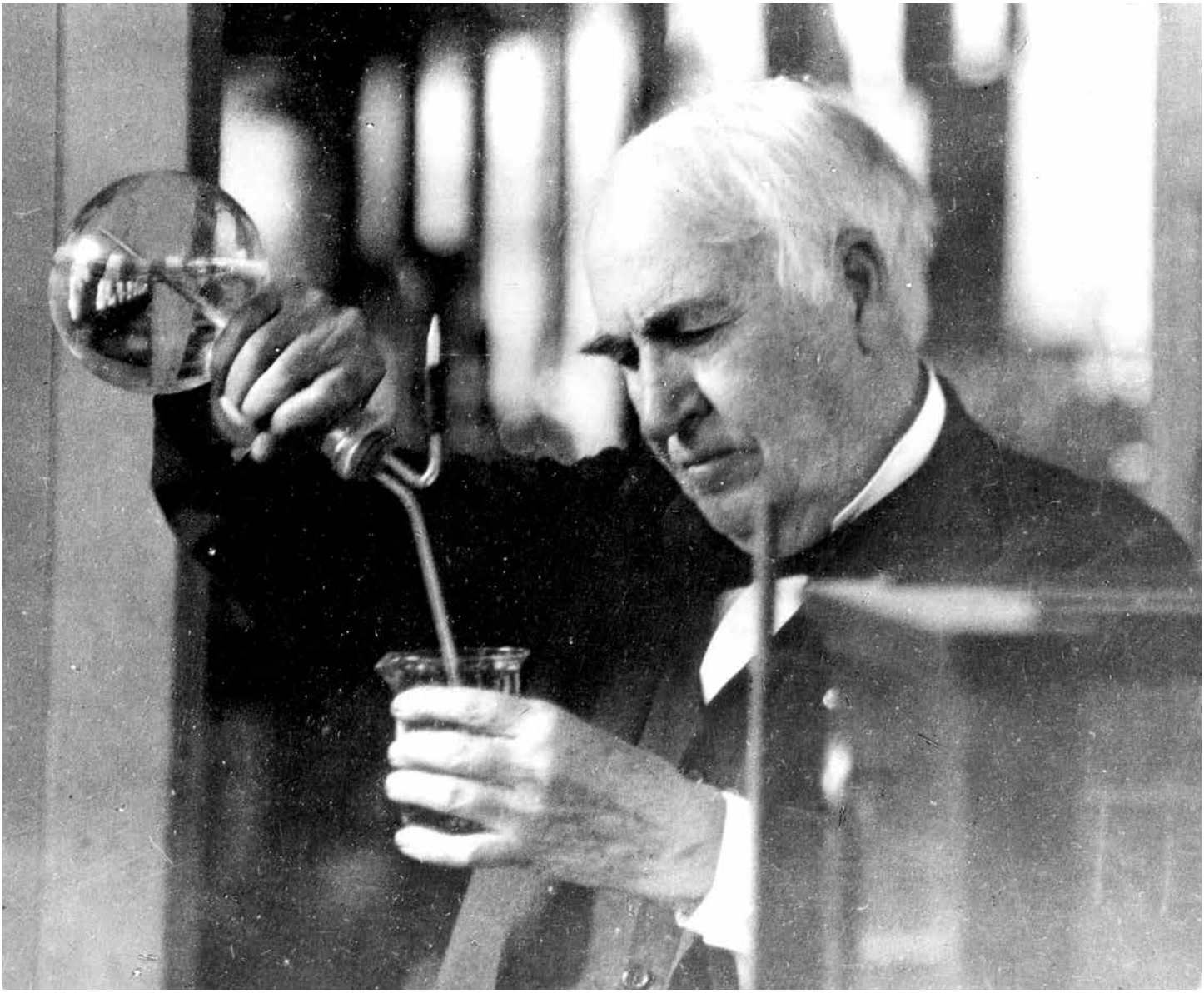
Learning to be a telegrapher was important for Edison because it was a rare skill that allowed him to work in many different places. Working in these different places exposed him to all kinds of machinery. He then became interested in helping people solve problems with their machinery.

Source 4

"Local Intelligence" section, Detroit Free Press, April 11, 1862

This article from the Detroit Free Press explains how a young, 15-year-old Thomas Edison was able to sell newspapers for a large profit. This story shows how Edison was a good businessman, even at a young age..

A NEWSBOY ENTERPRISE – A bright-eyed lad who sells The Free Press on the Grand Trunk trains and at Port Huron, got up a little enterprise of his own, on Wednesday afternoon, which would have done credit to many older heads. He took our telegraph headings of the great battle in Tennessee, and, at his own expense, had them telegraph to Port Huron and the various places along the route. On the receipt of such news, everybody was stirred up and eager to get the full particulars. As the evening train arrived at the various stations he found crowds anxiously awaiting him, and everybody calling for The Free Press. Before reaching Port Huron he found his stock of papers getting low, and he was often obliged to refuse as high as ten cents for a single paper. At Port Huron a meeting was in progress at the church, and the choir was singing as the whistle sounded the approach of the train. The meeting at once broke up, the congregation dispersed to read the news, and in a few moments every paper had been disposed of. The little fellow realized what would be considered among newsboys an enormous sum, as the result of his enterprise. No fears but what that boy will get along in the world.



Section 2

The Wizard of Menlo Park

Source 1

Menlo Park Laboratory

Learn more from our curators:

Thomas Edison's Menlo Park Laboratory
http://www.thehenryford.org/exhibits/pic/2012/12_march.asp

Electricity?—I'll take a pound...
http://www.thehenryford.org/exhibits/pic/2005/december.asp

Menlo Park is generally recognized as the first research and development lab. Edison built a team of determined scientific researchers, machinists, bookkeepers, glassblowers and apprentices to help him with many important projects. One of those projects was the tin foil phonograph, which was able to record the human voice and play it back for the first time. The success of the phonograph brought investors to Edison, enabling him to further develop other projects like the electric lighting system and also earned him a new nickname: the Wizard of Menlo Park.

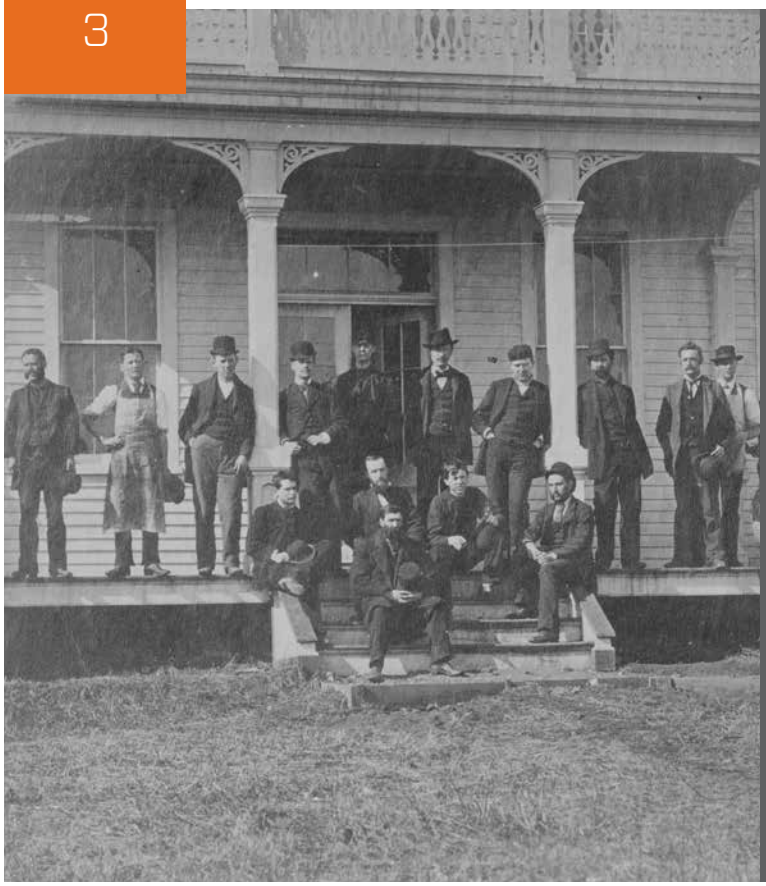
Interior of Thomas Edison's Menlo Park Laboratory in Greenfield Village, circa 1988

Source 2

Edison moved to Menlo Park, New Jersey, in the spring of 1876. The laboratory building contained his entire operation, which included a handful of collaborators, an office, a library, a machine shop, and of course, an experimental laboratory. As projects grew larger, more buildings were added, but this place remained the most important because Edison and his team shared different ideas, skills and methods here.

Source 3

Thomas Edison and Employees outside Menlo Park Laboratory in New Jersey, 1880



Edison had the ability to lead a large team of people with many different skills. At Menlo Park Laboratory, many workers undertook the research that made Edison's vision a reality. People who wanted to work for Edison showed up from all over the world looking for a job, but not all were given a job or opportunity. Edison hired people who could provide skills he did not have. For example, he hired a man named Francis Upton, who was good at mathematics. He also hired a young, talented engineer named Nikola Tesla, who later became a famous inventor.

Source 4

Note from Edison to Employees Regarding Visitors

Menlo Park. Feb'y 19th, 1880

Employees will treat visitors courteously but under no circumstances will they leave their work or give information to any kind of visitors. No information will be furnished except by myself or Messrs. Batchelor, Upton, Krusie and Garman. You will regard this as a positive order.

Thomas A. Edison

ACC #1630
Edison papers Manuscript/TAE, Box 1, Folder 30

Source 5

Pipe Organ in Menlo Park Laboratory, Greenfield Village

This is a 1929 reproduction of an organ presented to Edison in 1878 by the Roosevelt Organ Company of New York. The original 1878 organ was used by Edison and his workers for entertainment during breaks from long hours of work. The organ was also used to conduct sound experiments with carbon telephone transmitters. The original pipe organ was lost in the December 1914 fire in the Thomas A. Edison Inc. buildings at West Orange, New Jersey.

Thomas Edison, Henry Ford and Francis Jehl at Menlo Park Laboratory in Greenfield Village During Light's Golden Jubilee, 1929

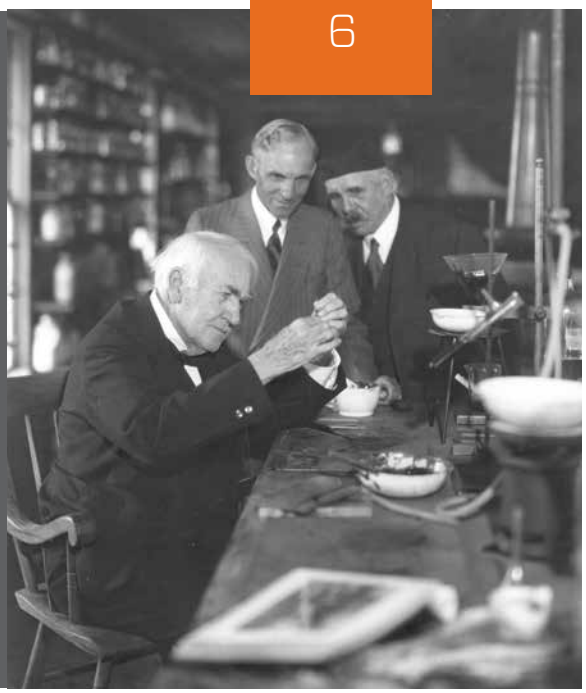
Source 6

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the incandescent electric lamp, Henry Ford hosted the Light's Golden Jubilee in Dearborn, Michigan. Ford chose the occasion to dedicate the newly created Greenfield Village and museum to his friend Thomas Edison. During the festivities, Edison and former assistant Francis Jehl re-enacted the first successful light bulb test (1879) in Greenfield Village's detailed reproduction of Edison's Menlo Park Laboratory.

Learn more from our curators:

Light's Golden Jubilee Honors Thomas Edison and Dedicates a Museum
http://www.thehenryford.org/exhibits/pic/2004/october.asp

Light's Golden Jubilee: The Movie
http://www.thehenryford.org/exhibits/pic/2009/09_oct.asp



Source 7

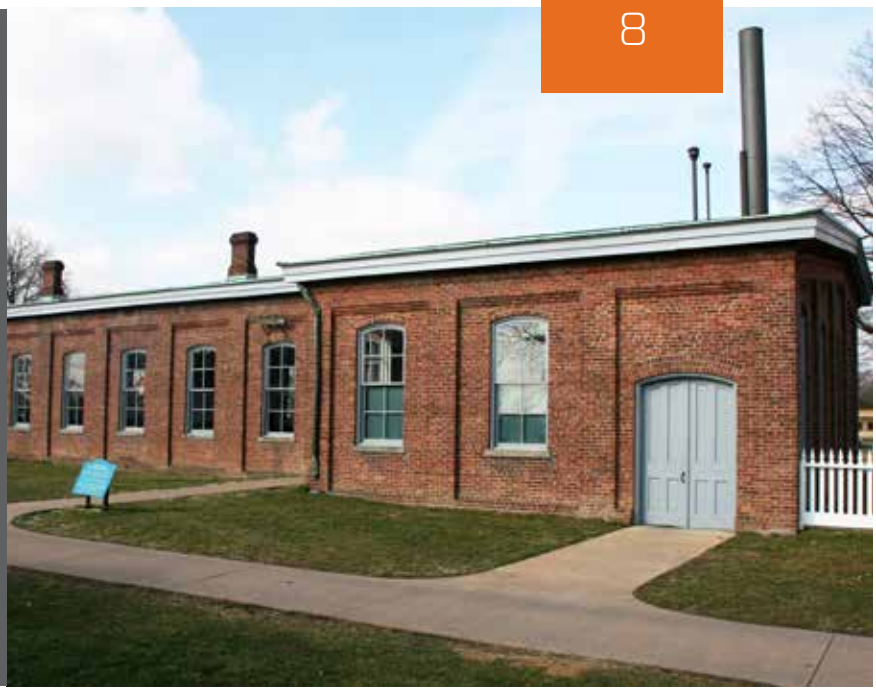
Interior View of Menlo Park Library, Greenfield Village, circa 1970

This building was built in late 1878 as Edison's work on electric lighting expanded. The first floor provided office space for accounting, bookkeeping and patent applications; upstairs was a technical library. The building also played another key role: as a reception area for journalists and other visitors, it provided a good first impression of Edison's success and ambition.

Source 8

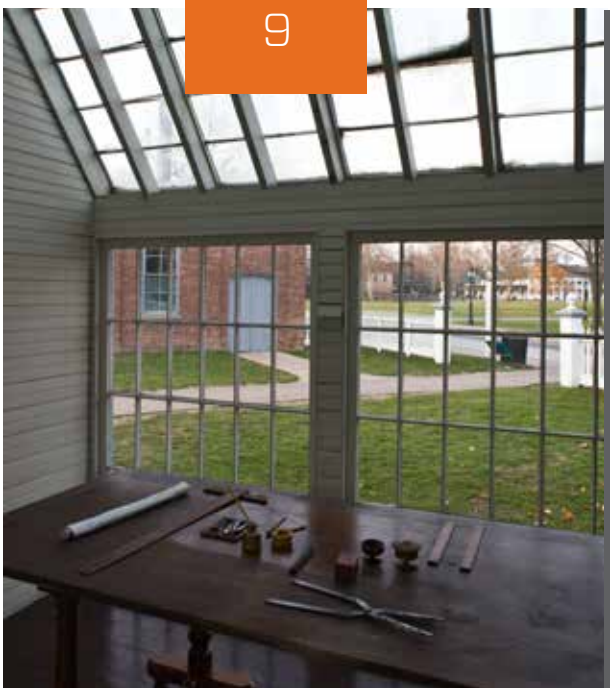
Menlo Park Machine Shop

The machine shop was important to the success of Menlo Park. Built to replace the small machine shop originally installed in the laboratory building, this well-equipped shop allowed Edison and his team to rapidly prototype experimental projects. It was also used to manufacture finished products that could be sold to make money for larger and new projects.

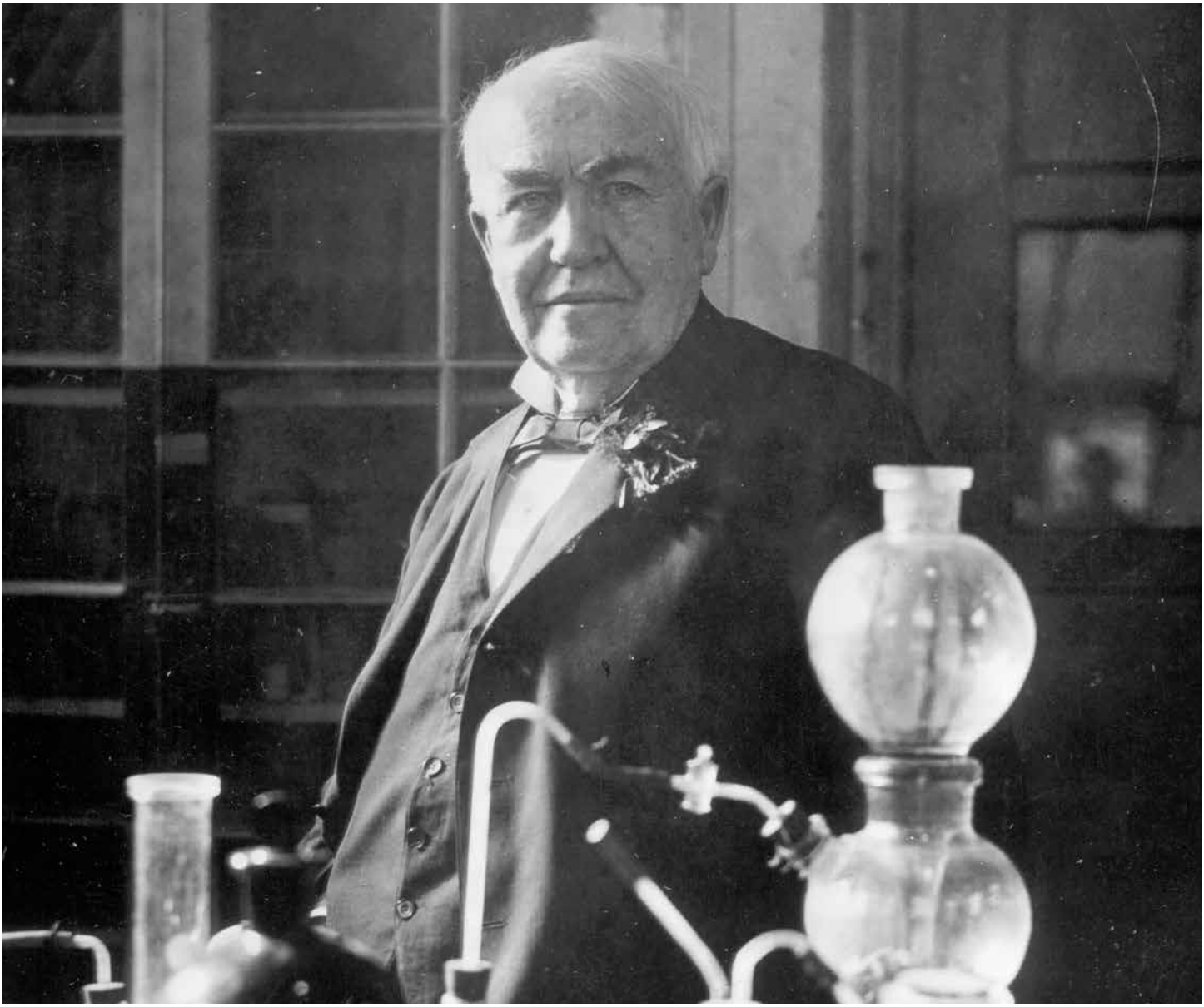


Source 9

Menlo Park Glass Shop



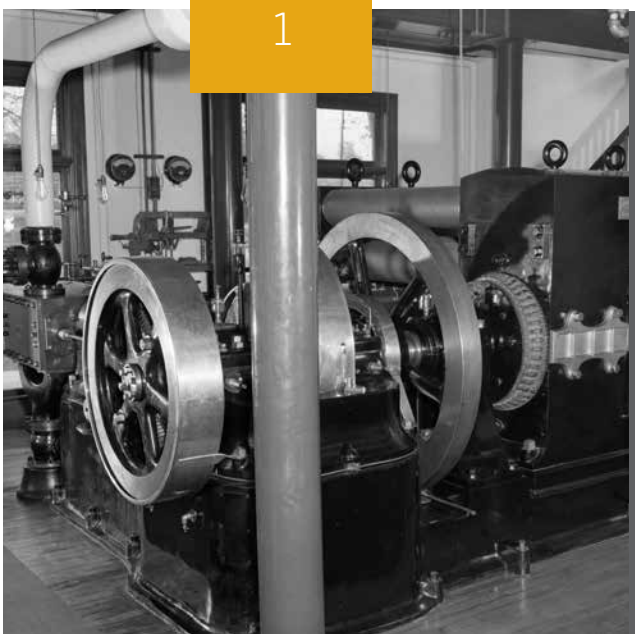
Originally built as a photographic studio and drafting room, the glassblowing shop was important to Edison's successes. With the large amount of lighting experiments happening in the laboratory, there was a great need for glass bulbs and other glass devices, like vacuum pumps. Ludwig Boehm, the laboratory's first master glassblower, worked here and lived in the attic space.



Section 3
Beyond Menlo Park

Source 1

Armington & Sims Steam Engine Used with Edison Jumbo Dynamo, 1882

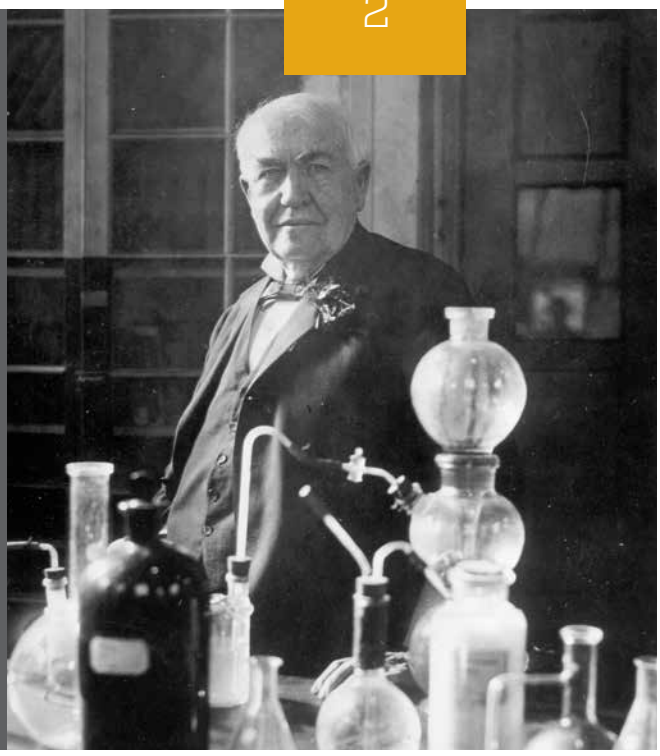


Edison's successful lighting experiments at Menlo Park Laboratory in 1879 later led to the practical electric lighting system he put into operation in New York City. This is the sole surviving engine-generator from that installation at the Pearl Street power station, and it was the first to go on line, providing power to customers on September 4, 1882.

Source 2

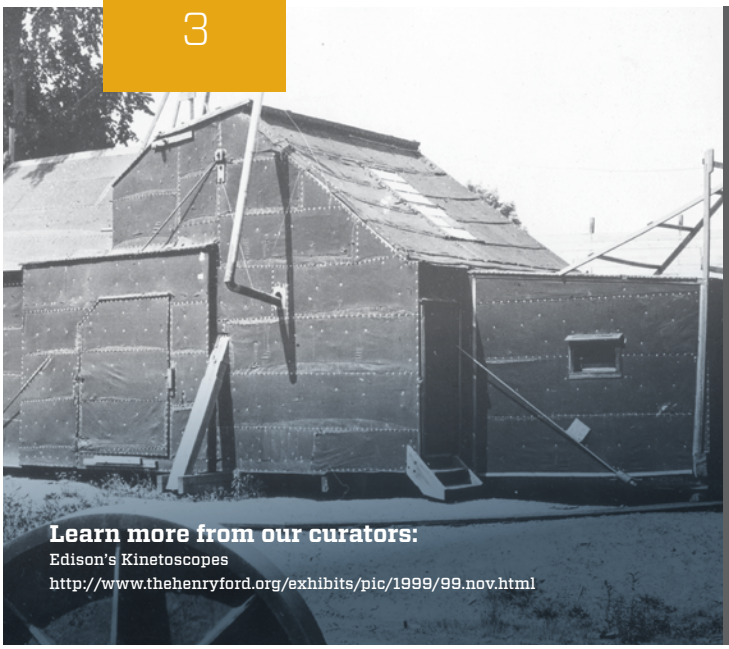
Thomas Edison in West Orange Laboratory, 1925

Edison took the money he made from the success of his electric lighting system and put it back into his research. He built a larger laboratory in West Orange, New Jersey, where he led teams of research assistants from 1887 until his death in 1931. More than half of Edison's 1,093 patents resulted from the collaborative work done at his West Orange Laboratory, which became a model for modern research and development laboratories.



Source 3

Thomas Edison's Black Maria Movie Studio, West Orange, New Jersey, circa 1894



Learn more from our curators:
Edison's Kinetoscopes
http://www.thehenryford.org/exhibits/pic/1999/99.nov.html

In the 1880s, as Edison lost control over his electric company and its patents, his curiosity drove him to resume work on the phonograph and eventually motion pictures.

He constructed the world's first film production studio behind his West Orange, New Jersey, laboratory in 1893. The Black Maria, a slang term for the prisoner transport vans the building resembled, was covered with tar paper, had a removable roof and rotated on a track to capture sunlight. Here, lab assistants filmed short movies for Edison's Kinetoscope motion picture viewer.

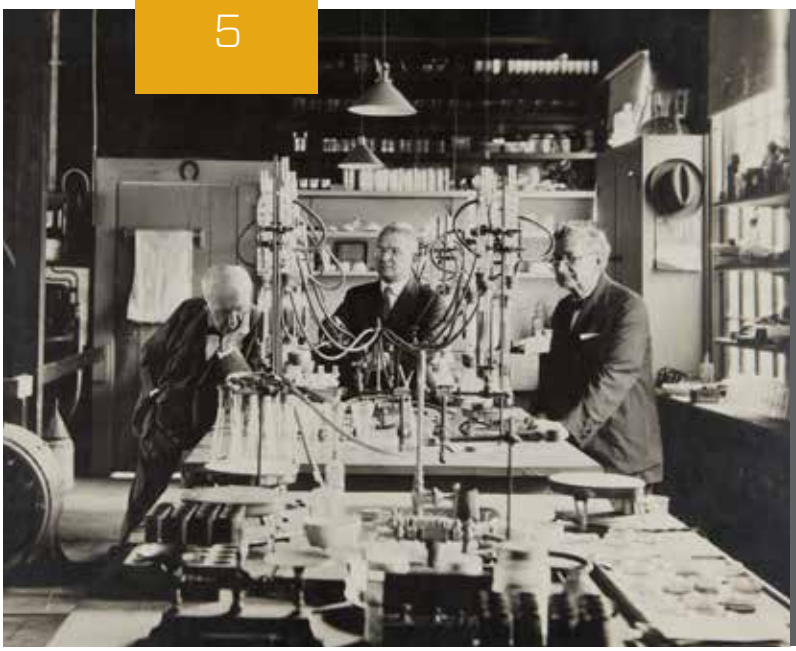
Source 4

Thomas Edison's Fort Myers Laboratory

This well-equipped laboratory enabled Edison to carry on his investigations even as he seemed to seek a break from business and other matters. The first building to be completed in Greenfield Village, it had a second experimental life, offering privacy to a select group of Ford Motor Company engineers who developed the Ford V-8 engine in the early 1930s.

Source 5

Thomas Edison's Fort Myers Laboratory, Original Site, Fort Myers, Florida, 1912



This image shows Thomas Edison and two other men standing inside the Fort Myers Laboratory at its original site in Fort Myers, Florida, in 1912. The men are identified as, from left to right, Thomas A. Edison, Mr. Schumurice and Mr. Ott.

Henry Ford and Thomas Edison with Fort Myers Laboratory at Its Original Site, Fort Myers, Florida, circa 1925

Source 6

Thomas Edison and Henry Ford owned vacation homes near one another in Fort Myers, Florida. This photograph shows the good friends and neighbors in front of Edison's Fort Myers Laboratory.

Section 4
Edison's Family and Friends

Source 1

Edison's Homestead

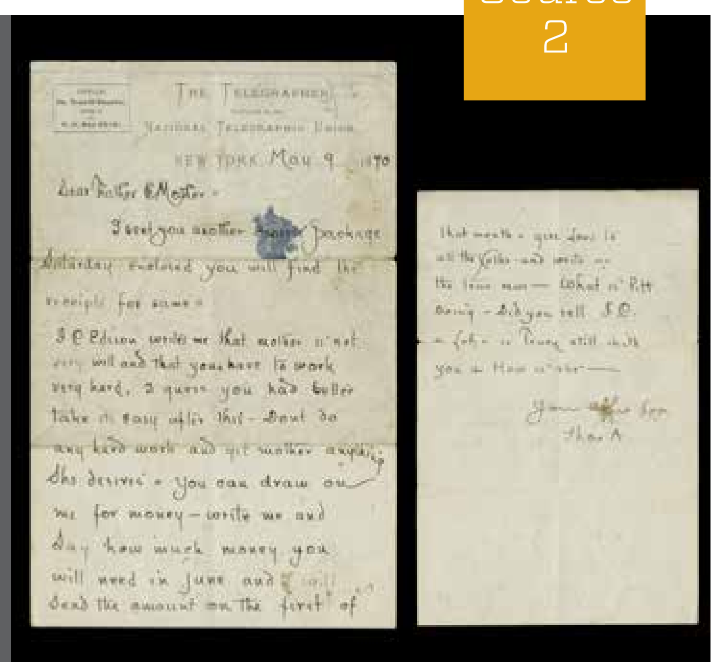
Thomas Edison's great-grandparents fled to Canada after the American Revolution because they had sided with the British. Edison's grandparents started a farm and built this home there. As a boy, Edison enjoyed visiting the farm, where he played in the barn, went swimming and fished in a nearby river.

Letter from Thomas Edison to His Parents, May 9, 1870

Source 2

This letter was written by Thomas Edison to his parents after receiving word that his mother was not well. He encouraged his father to "take it easy" and "don't do any hard work." He also advised his father to "get mother anything she deserves," adding "you can draw on me for money."

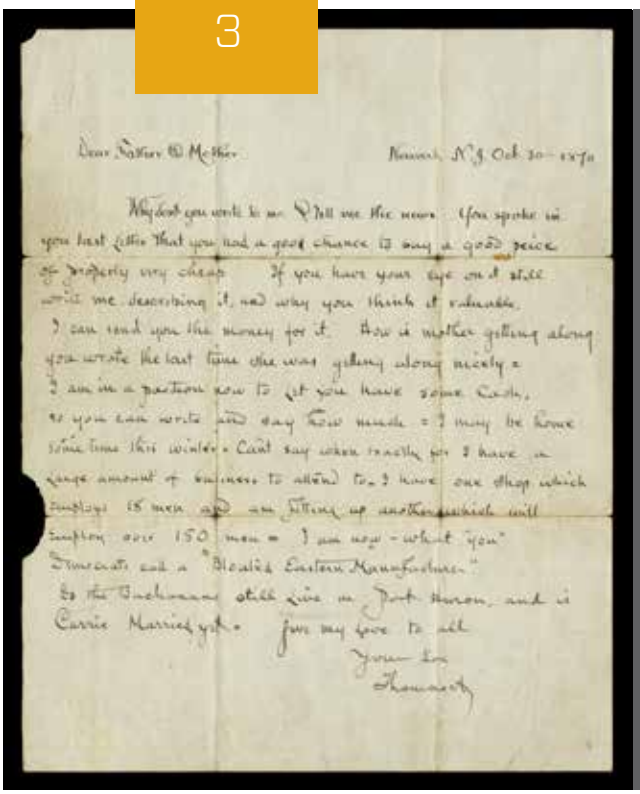
This letter shows Edison's concern over the well-being of his parents, who strongly influenced him as a child. Edison's parents held learning in high regard, and he grew up in a home with many books. He had very little schooling, which was not unusual for the time, but his mother was a schoolteacher, so she educated him outside of school.



The Telegrapher
National Telegraphic Union
New York May 9 1870
Dear Father & Mother -
I sent you another [illegible] package Saturday enclosed you will find the receipt for same -
S O Edison writes me that mother is not very well and that you have to work very hard. I guess you had better take it easy after this - Dont do any hard work and get mother anything she desires - you can draw on me for money - write me and say how much money you will need in June and I will send the amount on the first of that month - give love to all the folks - and write me the [illegible] - What is Pitt doing - Did you tell S O [illegible] still [illegible] you - How is [illegible] -
Your [illegible] Son
Thos A

Source 3

Letter from Thomas Edison to His Parents, October 30, 1870



Dear Father and Mother,

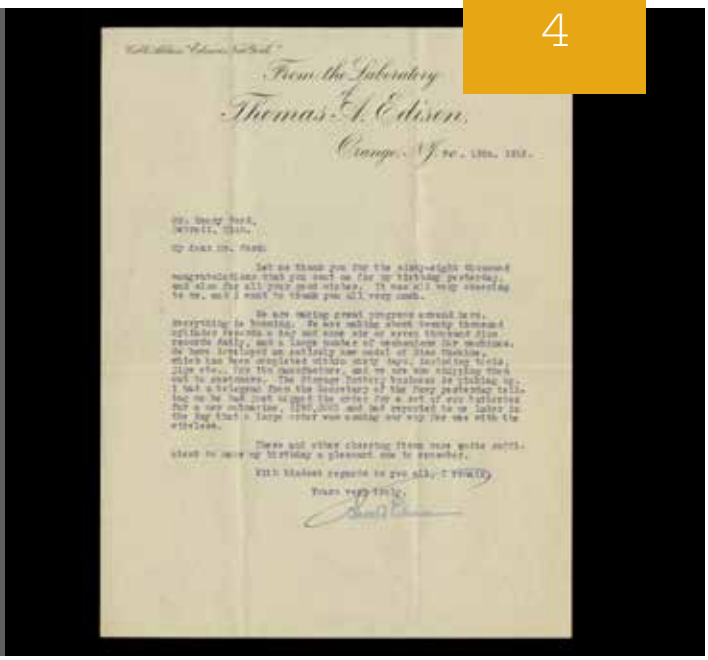
Why dont you write to me and tell me the news. You spoke in you [sic] last letter that you had a good chance to buy a good piece [sic] of property very cheap. If you have your eye on it still write me describing it, and why you think it [sic] valuable. I can send you the money for it. How is mother getting along you wrote the last time she was getting along nicely — I am in a position now to let you have some cash, so you can write and say how much — I may be home some time this winter — Can't say when exactly for I have a large amount of business to attend to. I have one shop which Employs 18 men and am fitting up another which will Employ over 150 men — I am now — what "you" Democrats call a "Bloated Eastern Manufacturer" Do the Buchanans still live in Port Huron, and is Carrie Married yet — Give my love to all

Your son,
Thomas A

Source 4

Letter from Thomas Edison to Henry Ford, February 13, 1915

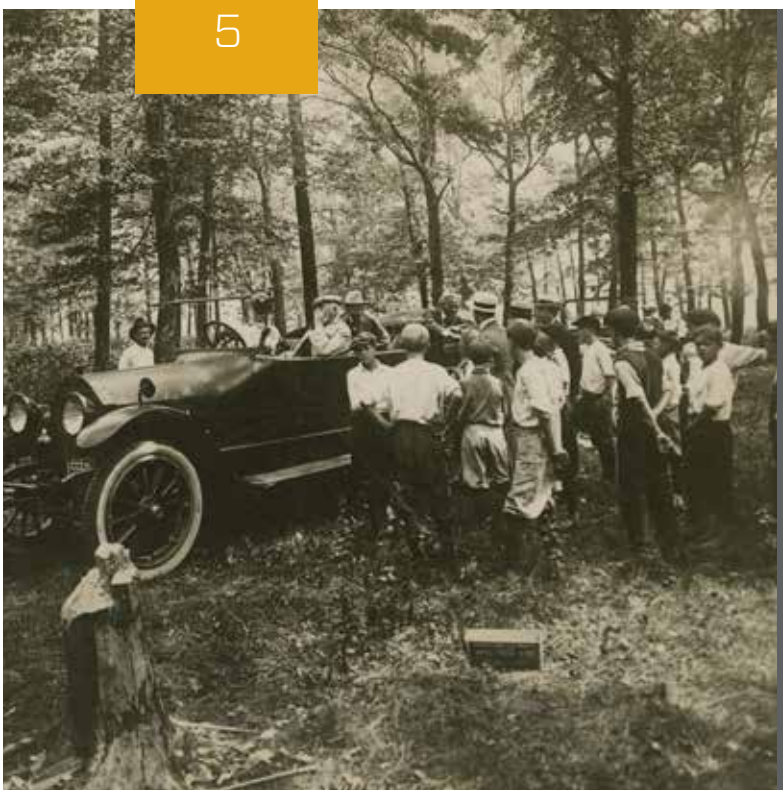
While attending a conference in 1896, Thomas Edison ended up sitting at a table with Henry Ford, who was the chief steam engineer at Detroit's Edison Illuminating Company at the time. Edison learned about a vehicle Ford was working on, and he encouraged Ford to pursue his idea. Later on, when Ford started having success with the Model T, he contacted Edison and the two became friends. They often communicated with letters on many different topics and occasions.



From the Laboratory of
Thomas A. Edison,
Orange, N.J.

Source 5

Vagabonds Camping Party Leaving in a Simplex Car, Green Island, New York, August 5, 1919



Between 1916 and 1924, Henry Ford, Thomas Edison, Harvey Firestone and naturalist John Burroughs embarked on a series of camping trips. These vagabonds enjoyed retreating from the fast-paced world to explore nature and the countryside.

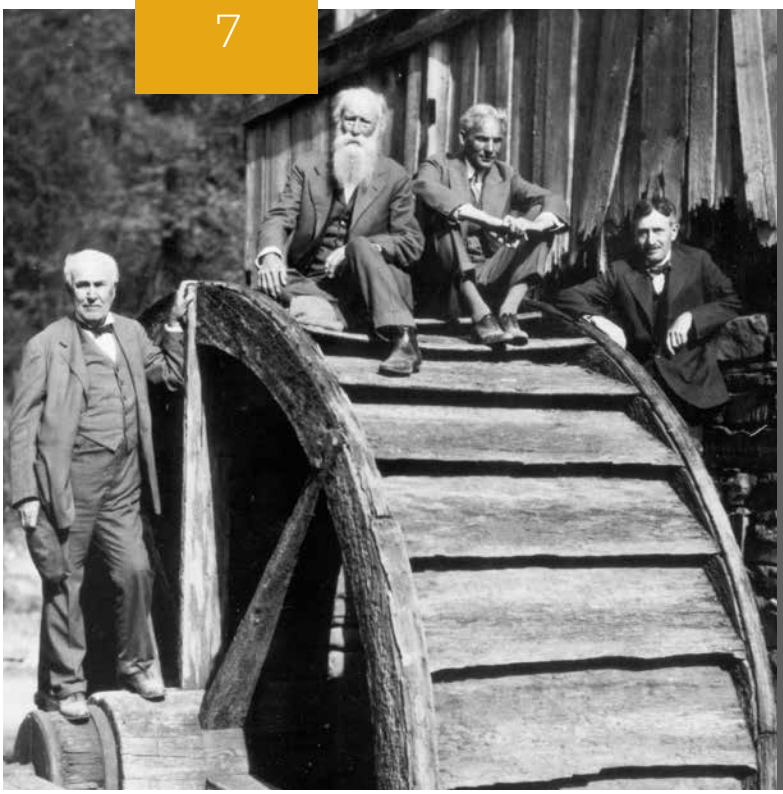
Source 6

John Burroughs with the Edisons, Fords, Firestones and Clara Barrus During a "Vagabonds" Camping Trip, 1920

Henry Ford, Thomas Edison, Harvey Firestone and John Burroughs made yearly camping trips between 1916 and 1924. They called themselves the Vagabonds. In 1920, they traveled to New York's Catskill Mountains. This was the first outing to include wives. The trips became decidedly more formal and less adventurous when wives came along. And Edison himself confessed that the fun was gone.

Source 7

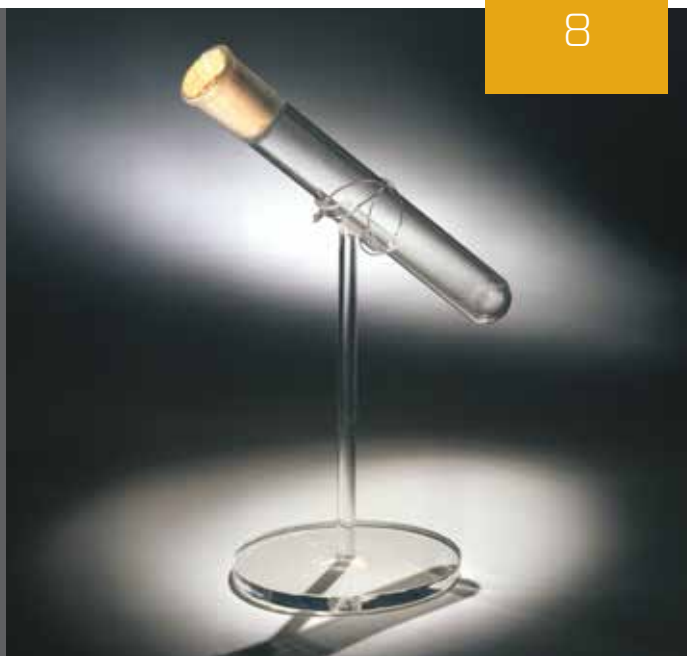
Thomas Edison, John Burroughs, Henry Ford and Harvey Firestone on a Vagabonds Camping Trip, 1918



Thomas Edison, John Burroughs, Henry Ford and Harvey Firestone pose on a waterwheel at old Evans Mill near Lead Mine, West Virginia. On these trips, they communed with nature, explored their personal interests and acted like boys again.

Source 8

Edison's Last Breath



This test tube was one of several that Charles Edison, one of Thomas Edison's sons, noticed standing open in a rack in the bedroom in which his father had just died in 1931. The doctor was asked to seal the tubes, one of which Charles later sent on to Henry Ford, who kept it with other Edison keepsakes at his home.

Learn more from our curators:
Edison's Last Breath?
http://www.thehenryford.org/exhibits/pic/2004/july.asp

Online Resources

Foundational Materials Expert Set

http://collections.thehenryford.org/Collection.aspx?collectionID=10670

A set of artifacts from The Henry Ford's online collections website related to Thomas Edison.

OnInnovation: Thomas Edison

http://www.oninnovation.com/innovators/detail.aspx?innovator=Edison

Information and oral history interview with The Henry Ford's Chief Curator Marc Greuther.

Thomas Edison Online Exhibit

http://www.thehenryford.org/exhibits/edison/

This online exhibit features sections on Thomas Edison's childhood, the Menlo Park Laboratory and the lab coming to Greenfield Village, along with a list of inventions and patents, a chronology of Edison's life and a bibliography to find more information.

Thomas Edison on History.com

http://www.history.com/topics/inventions/thomas-edison

This website features information on Thomas Edison using articles, videos, and speeches.

Edison Innovation Foundation

http://www.thomasedison.org/

This foundation encourages students to embrace careers in science, technology, and engineering while using Edison and his Invention Factory as the foundation. Their website features articles, images, and resources for students and teachers.

The Thomas Edison Papers

http://edison.rutgers.edu/

This website features a biography, bibliography, chronologies, companies, inventions, patents and other learning resources to help make Edison accessible and comprehensible to young and lifetime learners.

Online Resources *(continued)*

Inventing Entertainment: The Early Motion Pictures and Sound Recordings of the Edison Companies

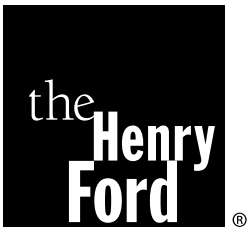
http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/edhtml/edbio.html

This site features 341 motion pictures, 81 disc sound recordings and other related materials, such as photographs and original magazine articles. In addition, histories are given of Edison's involvement with motion pictures and sound recordings, as well as a special page focusing on the life of the great inventor.

Thomas Edison, Chemist — National Historic Chemical Landmark

http://www.acs.org/content/acs/en/education/whatischemistry/landmarks/thomas-edison.html

This website features information on Thomas Edison, including sections on his early life, his laboratories, his inventions and his legacy.



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