



History 101

Thomas Edison

Thomas Alva Edison (February 11, 1847 – October 18, 1931) was an American inventor and businessman. He developed many devices that greatly influenced life around the world, including the phonograph, the motion picture camera, and the long-lasting, practical electric light bulb. Dubbed "The Wizard of Menlo Park", he was one of the first inventors to apply the principles of mass production and large-scale teamwork to the process of invention, and because of that, he is often credited with the creation of the first industrial research laboratory.

Edison was a prolific inventor, holding 1,093 US patents in his name, as well as many patents in the United Kingdom, France, and Germany. More significant than the number of Edison's patents was the widespread impact of his inventions: electric light and power utilities, sound recording, and motion pictures all established major new industries world-wide. Edison's inventions contributed to mass communication and, in particular, telecommunications. These included a stock ticker, a mechanical vote recorder, a battery for an electric car, electrical power, recorded music and motion pictures.

His advanced work in these fields was an outgrowth of his early career as a telegraph operator. Edison developed a system of electric-power generation and distribution to homes, businesses, and factories – a crucial development in the modern industrialized world. His first power station was on Pearl Street in Manhattan, New York.

Edison began his career as an inventor in Newark, New Jersey, with the automatic repeater and his other improved telegraphic devices, but the invention that first gained him notice was the phonograph in 1877. This accomplishment was so unexpected by the public at large as to appear almost magical.

His first phonograph recorded on tinfoil around a grooved cylinder. Despite its limited sound quality and that the recordings could be played only a few times, the phonograph made Edison a celebrity. Joseph Henry, president of the National Academy of Sciences and one of the most renowned electrical scientists in the US, described Edison as "the most ingenious inventor in this country... or in any other". In April 1878, Edison travelled to Washington to demonstrate the phonograph before the National Academy of Sciences, Congressmen, Senators and US President Hayes. The Washington Post described Edison as a "genius" and his presentation as "a scene... that will live in history". Although Edison obtained a patent for the phonograph in 1878, he did little to develop it until Alexander Graham Bell, Chichester Bell, and Charles Tainter produced a phonograph-like device in the 1880s. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Edison]

