



Thomas Edison discovered the Edison effect - February 13, 1880

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General Note



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Thomas Alva Edison was born on February 11, 1847, in Milan, Ohio. Thomas Edison received little formal education, and left school in 1859 to being working on the railroad between Detroit and Port Huron, Michigan. Edison learned the emerging technology of telegraphy, and traveled around the country working as a telegrapher. He had developed serious hearing problems, which were variously attributed to scarlet fever, mastoiditis or a blow to the head. With the development of auditory signals for the telegraph, Edison was at a disadvantage, and he began to work on inventing devices that would help make things possible for him despite his deafness. In 1877, Edison developed the carbon transmitter, a device that improved the audibility of the telephone by making it possible to transmit voices at higher volume and with more clarity. In 1878, Edison focused on inventing a safe, inexpensive electric light to replace the gaslight—a challenge that scientists had been grappling with for the last 50 years. He made a breakthrough in October 1879 with a bulb that used a platinum filament, and in the summer of 1880 hit on carbonized bamboo as a viable alternative for the filament, which proved to be the key to a long-lasting and affordable light bulb. In 1881, he set up an electric light company in Newark, and the following year moved his family to New York.

Working with William K.L. Dickson, Edison succeeded in constructing a working motion picture camera, the Kinetograph, and a viewing instrument, the Kinetoscope, which he patented in 1891. Inventor Thomas Edison created such great innovations as the electric light bulb and the phonograph. The word phonograph was the trade name for Edison's device, which played cylinders rather than discs. The machine had two needles: one for recording and one for playback. When you spoke into the mouthpiece, the sound vibrations of your voice would be indented onto the cylinder by the recording needle. This cylinder phonograph was the first machine that could record and reproduce sound created a sensation and brought Edison international fame. A savvy businessman, he held more than a 1,000 patents for his inventions.

Thomas Edison died of complications of diabetes on October 18, 1931, in his home, "Glenmont," in West Orange, New Jersey. He was 84 years old. Many communities and corporations throughout the world dimmed their lights or briefly turned off their electrical power to commemorate his passing.