**Thomas Edison**

**An Inventive Career**

**1847**

Inventor of the phonograph and many other devices and technologies. Edison earned 1,093 U.S. patents in his lifetime, most for inventions that came from here. Edison was also a shrewd entrepreneur who established dozens of companies during his career. “I always intended to obtain money to go on inventing,” he said. The business side of his operation centered on the phonograph. His factories in West Orange produced a variety of cylinder and disc phonographs and recordings, plus a business phonograph for office dictation. He introduced motion pictures, and manufactured cameras, projectors, and films. In the Black Maria, the world’s first motion studio, his staff filmed everything from ballet to boxing. The phonograph and film businesses capitalized on consumer demand for new forms of entertainment.

Well into old age Edison was trying new things: a technique for poured concrete buildings, a fluoroscope to view x-ray images, methods for manufacturing large quantities of chemicals, huge machines for extracting iron from ore and for manufacturing cement. His final search was for a domestic source of rubber. Thomas Edison died in 1931. The West Orange labs too soon closed, but reopened as a museum in 1948. Edison National Historical Site was established in 1962; in 2009 it became Thomas Edison National Historical Park. The park is a memorial to the man and a place where you can discover the roots of American inspiration and innovation.

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**1847**

Thomás Alva Edison is born in Milan, Ohio, February 11. Educated mostly at home by his mother.

**1854-63**

Family moves to Port Huron, Mich. Thomas works as a newsboy on Grand Trunk Railroad. Suffers permanent hearing loss.

**1865-69**

Itinerant telegrapher in Indianapolis, Cincinnati, Memphis, and Louisville. Works for Western Union in Boston, invents improved telegraph equipment.

**1869**

Awarded his first patent for legislative vote recorder. Decides to become full-time inventor.

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**Electric Servants**

In the 1920s, the Electric Craft division of Thomas A. Edison, Inc., began making coffee makers (above), waffle irons, sandwich grills, and toasters. These “electric servants” — a popular term for kitchen gadgets dropped during the Great Depression. Electric craft ceased production in 1934.

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**Thomas Edison National Historical Park**

New Jersey

U.S. Department of the Interior

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