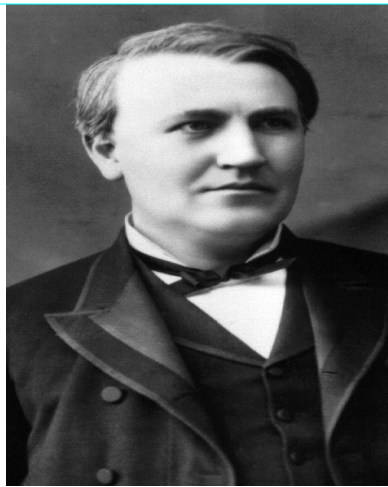


## NEWS AND VIEWS

# The Most Prolific Inventors In History

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*“Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration”*

Thomas Alva

Edison

Thomas Alva Edison was born to Sam and Nancy on February 11, 1847, in Milan, Ohio. Known as “Al” in his youth, Edison was the youngest of seven children, four of whom survived to adulthood. Edison tended to be in poor health when young.

Edison was a poor student. When a schoolmaster called Edison “addled,” his furious mother took him out of the school and proceeded to teach him at home. Edison said many years later, “My mother was the making of me. She was so true, so sure of me, and I felt I had some one to live for, some one I must not disappoint.” At an early age, he showed a fascination for mechanical things and for chemical experiments.

In 1859, Edison took a job selling newspapers and candy on the Grand Trunk Railroad to Detroit. In the baggage car,

he set up a laboratory for his chemistry experiments and a printing press, where he started the *Grand Trunk Herald*, the first newspaper published on a train. An accidental fire forced him to stop his experiments on board.

Around the age of twelve, Edison lost almost all his hearing. There are several theories as to what caused his hearing loss. Some attribute it to the aftereffects of scarlet fever which he had as a child. Others blame it on a conductor boxing his ears after Edison caused a fire in the baggage car, an incident which Edison claimed never happened. Edison himself blamed it on an incident in which he was grabbed by his ears and lifted to a train. He did not let his disability discourage him, however, and often treated it as an asset, since it made it easier for him to concentrate on his experiments and research. Undoubtedly, though, his deafness made him more solitary and shy in dealings with others.

In 1862, Edison rescued a three-year-old from a track where a boxcar was about to roll into him. The grateful father, J.U. MacKenzie, taught Edison railroad telegraphy as a reward. That winter, he took a job as a telegraph operator in Port Huron. In the meantime, he continued his scientific experiments on the side. Between 1863 and 1867, Edison migrated from city to city in the United States taking available telegraph jobs.

In 1868 Edison moved to Boston where he worked in the Western Union office and worked even more on his inventions. In January 1869 Edison resigned his job, intending to devote himself full-time to inventing things. His first invention to receive a patent was the electric vote recorder, in June 1869.

Edison moved to New York City in the middle of 1869. A friend, Franklin L. Pope, allowed Edison to sleep in a room at Samuel Laws’ Gold Indicator Company where he was employed. When Edison managed to fix a broken machine there, he was hired to manage and improve the printer machines.

During the next period of his life, Edison became involved in multiple projects and partnerships dealing with the telegraph.

His personal life during this period also brought much change. Edison's mother died in 1871, and later that year, he married a former employee, Mary Stilwell, on Christmas Day. While Edison clearly loved his wife, their relationship was fraught with difficulties, primarily his preoccupation with work and her constant illnesses. Edison would often sleep in the lab and spent much of his time with his male colleagues. Nevertheless, their first child, Marion, was born in February 1873, followed by a son, Thomas, Jr., born on January 1876. Edison nicknamed the two "Dot" and "Dash," referring to telegraphic terms. A third child, William Leslie was born in October 1878.

In 1877, Edison worked on a telephone transmitter that greatly improved on Alexander Graham Bell's work with the telephone. His transmitter made it possible for voices to be transmitted at higher volume and with greater clarity over standard telephone lines.

Edison's experiments with the telephone and the telegraph led to his invention of the phonograph in 1877. It occurred to him that sound could be recorded as indentations on a rapidly-moving piece of paper.

Edison focused on the electric light system in 1878, setting aside the phonograph for almost a decade. With the backing of financiers, The Edison Electric Light Co. was formed on November 15 to carry out experiments with electric lights and to control any patents resulting from them. In return for handing over his patents to the company, Edison received a large share of stock. Work continued into 1879, as the lab attempted not only to devise an incandescent bulb, but an entire electrical lighting system that could be supported in a city. A filament of carbonized thread proved to be the key to a long-lasting light bulb.

He was one of the first inventors to apply the principles of mass production to the process of invention, and therefore is often credited with the creation of the first industrial research laboratory.

Some of his inventions were not completely original but amounted to improvements of earlier inventions. Also, many of the inventions attributed to him were actually created by one or more of the numerous employees working under his direction. Nevertheless, Edison is considered one of the most prolific inventors in history, holding 1,093 U.S. patents in his name, as well as many patents in the United Kingdom, France and Germany.

In the 1920s, Edison's health became worse, and he began to spend more time at home with his wife. His relationship with his children was distant, although Charles was president of Thomas A. Edison, Inc. While Edison continued to experiment at home, he could not perform some experiments that he wanted to at his West Orange laboratory because the board would not approve them. One project that held his fascination during this period was the search for an alternative to rubber.

Henry Ford, an admirer and friend of Edison's, reconstructed Edison's invention factory as a museum at Greenfield Village, Michigan, which opened during the 50th anniversary of Edison's electric light in 1929. The main celebration for Light's Golden Jubilee, co-hosted by Ford and General Electric, took place in Dearborn along with a dinner in Edison's honor attended by notables such as President Hoover, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., George Eastman, Marie Curie, and Orville Wright. Edison's health, however, had declined to the point that he could not stay for the entire ceremony.

For his last two years, a series of ailments caused his health to decline even more until he lapsed into a coma on October 14, 1931. He died on October 18, 1931, at his estate, Glenmont, in West Orange, New Jersey.

### CONCLUSION

*The doctor of the future will give no medicine,  
But will interest his patients  
In the care of the human frame, in diet,  
And in the cause and prevention of disease*

Thomas Alva Edison

Probably he was frustrated by his poor health and chronic illnesses, when got this insight into future medicine; Amazingly, it seems somehow he had envisioned NAET®.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We acknowledge our sincere thanks to the Internet sites, "Edison home Page," and Thomas Edison Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia for making the information available on-line.

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