



Thomas Alva Edison

1847-1931

The greatest American inventor and perhaps the greatest inventor in history was Thomas Alva Edison, who changed the lives of people everywhere with such inventions as the electric light and the phonograph. He patented over 1100 inventions of his own and improved many other persons' inventions, such as the telephone, the typewriter, the electric generator, and the motion picture. Perhaps most importantly of all, he was one of the first to organize research, at one time employing some 3000 helpers.

Edison was born in Milan, Ohio, the youngest of seven children. He had only 3 months of formal education because his mother took him out of school and taught him herself. He asked too many questions to get along with the schoolmaster. He was exempt from military service because of deafness, and during the Civil War he roamed from city to city as a telegraph operator. During this time he patented improvements on the stock ticker and sold the patents for the then astounding price of \$40,000. In 1876 he moved to Menlo Park, New Jersey, and from there his steady stream of inventions made him world famous. The electric light was his greatest invention, but to supply it to the world he also designed the first electric power station. His discovery of the Edison effect, the movement of electrons in the vacuum of his light bulb, also marked the beginning of the age of electronics.

(Source: D. Johnson, J. Johnson and J. Hilborn, *Electric Circuit Analysis*, Prentice-Hall, 1989)