Welcome to the NEW Thomas Edison National Historical Park, the result of several renovation initiatives at both Glenmont and the Laboratory Complex.

No longer confined to a brief ranger-led tour of the first floor of Building 5, visitors now have access to all three floors. Ranger-led tours can be arranged by appointment. New exhibit panels and video kiosks are on display throughout the building. For an additional fee, you can take along one of our new audio tours.

The Precision Machine Shop on the second floor features the birthplace of the first motion picture camera. Elsewhere on the second floor are Room 12, Edison’s private experimental room, and the Drafting Room, where mechanical engineers turned ideas into blueprints and drawings.

The third floor includes an extraordinary collection of phonographs that tell the sound recording story. The newly refurbished Music Room was the world’s first recording studio and later the place where Edison auditioned music and musicians. The Photography Department, with an original enlarging camera, lights, backdrop, and two dark rooms, was the center of Edison advertising and publicity. The open storage area displays thousands of collection gems: Ediphones, talking dolls, battery components, mining tools, Edicraft appliances, Edison’s own camping equipment, and much, much more. A new staircase tower and an elevator ensure easy access to all floors.

The NEW Visitor Center and Museum Store are located in a completely renovated Building 1, the former physics lab. Visitors will pick up the brand new Park brochure, their audio tours, and tickets for Glenmont and special events. Please stop and shop in the expanded museum store and watch an introductory video.

Other buildings underwent restoration, including Buildings 2 and 4. With painstaking attention to professional standards, NPS regional staff cleaned the balance room of the Building 2 Chemistry lab, painted interior walls, and repaired the floor. Building 4 now houses administrative offices and an enlarged archives research area.

For more on the new archives, see page 2.) All of this work not only preserved the laboratory’s cultural resources but almost tripled the space that the public can now enjoy.

The National Park Service did not do all this alone; we had the help of several partners. Throughout the National Park system, partnerships are essential for the continued protection and enhancement of parks and historic sites and have been instrumental in establishing educational programs, living history demonstrations, fundraising campaigns, habitat restorations, and a host of other activities. They supplement the federal government’s limited resources to help the parks fulfill their stewardship responsibilities.

Our partners include the Edison Innovation Foundation, the Friends of Thomas Edison National Historical Park, Inc., Charles Edison Fund, Rutgers University/ The Thomas A. Edison Papers Project, Edison Memorial Tower Corporation, and the Garden Club of the Oranges.

The Edison Innovation Foundation and the Charles Edison Fund secured over $13 million for major construction from their own resources, plus contributions from, among others, Save America’s Treasures, General Electric, SONY, and federal funds for NPS construction. Other projects made our archival collection more accessible, conserved phonographs, and restored the home and greenhouse at Glenmont. Some contributions are modest and some are extraordinary. They have all been essential in achieving our mission. The leadership of our partners and former Superintendents sparked the campaign to restore, renovate, and enhance the significant resources of the Laboratory Complex and saw the project to its completion. We are extremely grateful.

We want to celebrate our achievements and build on them to create a bright NEW future for the Park. We are looking forward to new visitor orientation and educational spaces, a theater for seminars, screening rooms for films, new retail operations, state-of-the-art open storage for the vast Edison collection, and additional renovations for the Glenmont outbuildings. We are confident that the continued growth of resources will not only enhance our stewardship of the Park collection and facilities, but also increase opportunities for our visitors, researchers, and new audiences still to be identified. But there is so much to be appreciated at this stage in the Park’s renaissance, let’s take time now to enjoy our Grand Opening.
Edison Archives Grand Opening

The new audio tour will guide visitors throughout Building 5 and around the courtyard. The tour is available in English, Spanish, German, and Japanese.

The Thomas Edison NHP Archives opens to researchers this fall with a newly expanded reading room. Located in Building 4 at the Laboratory Complex, the new room offers on-site researchers a clean, comfortable space in which to study the park’s extensive collection of Edison documents and photographs. The reading room features a refined wood floor, new library furniture, and a large flat-panel video screen to view historic Edison films on DVD. The room also includes equipment to examine microfilmed material, a collection of books and articles about Edison, and computer work stations, which will give researchers and staff access to finding aids, databases and other electronic reference tools.

The new audio tour will guide visitors throughout Building 5 and around the courtyard. The tour is available in English, Spanish, German, and Japanese.

Researchers now have more space to examine archival material from the Edison Archives.

Volunteers Still Needed

The past several issues of The Lab Notebook have featured the contributions of our volunteers to the Park’s restoration. We couldn’t have done it without them.

With the reopening of the Laboratory Complex, our need for volunteers remains as great as ever. If you ever pictured yourself leading a tour, preparing an exhibit, unpacking artifacts, or helping with landscaping, we might have what you’re looking for. To find out more about volunteering, please contact Michelle Ortewin, our Volunteer Coordinator at 973-736-0550, x31 or via e-mail at michelle_ortewin@nps.gov.

The New Museum Store

The expanded Museum Store, operated by Eastern National, a National Park Service Partner, offers a variety of books and gifts including Edison biographies, books on motion pictures and sound recordings, postcards, DVD’s, collections of photographs from the archives, postcards, and even replica light bulbs.

This advertisement, one of thousands in the archives, promotes Edison’s chicken grit, a by-product of Portland cement manufacturing. Poultry farmers fed it to their chickens to help them digest their feed.

Superintendent’s Message

October 9, 2009, is a special day for many people and a special day for Thomas Edison National Historical Park. It was a special day for the Washington Monument that opened on this day in 1888. It was a special day for John Lennon because it was his birthday.

What makes today special for us is that it is a time of celebration—the grand opening of the Laboratory Complex. This special day is not about the renovations, not the elevator or the stairs or the many new heating and fire systems. It is special because of our visitors. After today, our visitors can enjoy and experience the wonders of the Edison Archives—newly refurbished rooms, an improved archival research center, and 20,000 square feet of new exhibit space are all awaiting our visitors.

The special day has given us an opportunity not only to enhance our visitors’ experience but also to focus on our partners’ help in getting us to where we are today. We celebrate a new Thomas Edison National Historical Park with its Laboratory Complex that engages our visitors and encourages us to create a new vision for our bright future.

While we are looking to the future I want to share two reflections from our Park staff.

“As an interpreter at Thomas Edison National Historical Park I have spoken with many of our visitors during the closure and restoration project. During my four years here, not one visitor has failed to ask about the restoration project. In recent years there has been much public discussion that Americans no longer care about history. After talking with many of our visitors and handling numerous requests for off-site collections, I would caution against that generalization. The patrons of our Park maintain not only their interest in America’s heritage but also enthusiasm for their own roles as stewards. At this Grand Opening of Edison’s Laboratory Complex I look forward to seeing visitors enjoying the new Thomas Edison National Historical Park.”

—Brigid Jennings, Park Ranger

“The new Laboratory Complex is opening after being closed for six years. As the Grand Opening day arrives I can’t help but remember the day it closed and the events that led up to that day. I remember reading that Edison National Historic Site had been named among the top ten of ‘Most Endangered Historic Sites.’ It was in disrepair and artifacts were not being preserved properly due to lack of resources and necessary upgrades. After Hillary Clinton visited the site during her Save America’s Treasures tour, restoration was inevitable. Construction began; we spent countless hours in cold dark spaces guarding contractors, feeling of emptiness flooded me after the buildings had been stripped and their fragile artifacts packed away, nothing was left but the ghosts of visitors. Co-workers left to take new positions, tentative opening dates came and went too many times.

“As the construction ended, the countless artifacts were brought back to their places and new staff started to arrive. The pulse of this place started beating once more. The new Superintendent arrived and the Park’s name changed. Around my desk are three things: the National Park Service’s Core Values, my family pictures, and a poem by Lewis Latimer titled “Hope.” Today as I reflect on the Grand Opening, I put aside fear of the unknown and remember that sometimes it’s best just to keep in mind the purpose of a National Park Ranger. With that, the opening day brings me excitement and pride for the new Thomas Edison National Historical Park.”

—Shane McKelvin, Park Ranger

I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to my Division Chiefs, Assistant Superintendent, and the entire Park staff and volunteers. Also, a special thanks to former Superintendent Maryanne Gerbudac for her leadership in crafting and implementing an effective plan to bring both Glenmont and the Laboratory to “workable” status. We also appreciated Superintendent Randy Turner’s stewardship and guidance for the time he spent here at the Park.

On this special day we all give thanks to John Keegan, the President and Chairman of the Edison Innovation Foundation and the Charles Edison Fund. Webster’s Dictionary defined help me provide with an appropriate array of superlatives to express our appreciation to John and his staff for everything they have done to make this a special day.

—Greg Marshall
We express our gratitude to the many friends who have made the renovation of the Laboratory Complex possible.

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The Lab Notebook

3
Building 4, Edison’s metallurgical lab, was leased to the U.S. Navy during World War II and later housed the Edison family cars. In September 1969, the cars made their last trip as the building was adapted to store more archival and photographic material.

The rear of Building 4 was a catch-all. The wooden crates are filled with journals in fields such as mining, rubber research, and film and phonograph production. Elsewhere are rolled archival documents and hundreds of glass plate negatives. Today this area contains offices for the Superintendent and administrative staff. (September 1970.)

A huge group of campers poses for a snapshot in the Library in the mid-1960s.

A ranger talks about Edison’s early motion picture work outside the replica of the Black Maria. (July 1966.)

Charles Edison paid a visit to the Park in 1967 and posed in the courtyard with his great niece Madeleine Edison Sloane, who was a park ranger.

The new visitor parking lot, new in March 1963, that is. The Dodge/Saab dealership at the right has been replaced by a lawn in front of the Park’s maintenance garage. The Edison Administration building and other factory buildings (demolished in the early 1970s) are visible in the distance at left.

A tour group pauses for a photograph before entering Building 4 sometime in the 1960s. The Edison Industries Administration building is in the background.

This isn’t part of the recent restoration work. These workers were repairing a Library window in March 1963.

Taking a break in the courtyard, visitors enjoy the newly-purchased benches, August 1966. Try out our brand-new courtyard benches on your visit.

The Lab Notebook

Over the past fifty years, since becoming part of the National Park Service, the site has experienced many changes. Here are some visual memories.
This counter in the Heavy Machine Shop now boasts a set of workers’ toolboxes, visible in the photo below. These boxes were vital to a craftsman’s livelihood and moved with him from job to job. Thus we had none in the collection, and these were purchased to complete the Machine Shop display.

The Library was carefully packed up in preparation for restoration (left). With new interpretive panels and video kiosks, the Library is prepared to receive visitors (below).

The Heavy Machine Shop now features a railing that guides visitors through the room and serves as a security barrier.

The Library was carefully packed up in preparation for restoration (left). With new interpretive panels and video kiosks, the Library is prepared to receive visitors (below).

The Drafting Room, on the second floor, served for most of the past thirty years as office space for the staff of The Thomas A. Edison Papers. Now the room has been returned to its original purpose, complete with drafting tables and filing cabinets. Incidentally, in the picture at the far left, the man dictating into an Ediphone, as well as his desk, was pasted in later, probably for an Ediphone advertisement.

The Musical Room, on the third floor, was storage space for some of the phonographs that were donated to the Park over the decades. The current furnishings reflect the room’s use in the mid-1910s.

The Precision Machine Shop, on the second floor, became cluttered over the years. Today, spruced up and emptied of all but the machines and furnishings that were there in the mid-1910s, it presents a cleaner, more efficient look.
Building 6, the power house in Edison’s day, was refitted as the Visitor Center in the 1970s. The artifacts on display provided an overview of the inventor’s career. Today Building 6 is once again the power house, the home of modern heating and cooling systems.

In the Chemistry Lab thousands of small artifacts, such as delicate glass bottles and test tubes, were wrapped, boxed, and stored. Larger objects were protected in place on worktables, which were then enclosed in plywood. The Building 2 project concluded with a cleaning and repainting of the walls, and repair of the floor.

The space served as a phonograph demonstration area into the 1990s. Today the new Visitor Center and its Museum Shop are located here.

In the Chemistry Lab thousands of small artifacts, such as delicate glass bottles and test tubes, were wrapped, boxed, and stored. Larger objects were protected in place on worktables, which were then enclosed in plywood. The Building 2 project concluded with a cleaning and repainting of the walls, and repair of the floor.

This area on the third floor—half the length of Building 5—housed the overflow of the endless phonograph collection, plus thousands of other artifacts that made their way upstairs. It truly was Edison’s attic. Today most of the artifacts are still there, although now fully cataloged and stored in a more systematic manner. Visitors can stroll through this area and view artifacts on racks in open storage plus exhibit cases that display some examples of Edison’s lesser known products.

The Photograph Department on the third floor of Building 5 created much of Edison’s advertising. The enlarging camera and other equipment from those days has been returned to the room for the new display.

The central room of the Visitor Center in Building 1 was an exhibition area in April 1957. This school group appears to divide its attention between the photographer and a model of Edison’s Pearl Street station. Today the space is a theater presenting an orientation film.

This area on the third floor—half the length of Building 5—housed the overflow of the endless phonograph collection, plus thousands of other artifacts that made their way upstairs. It truly was Edison’s attic. Today most of the artifacts are still there, although now fully cataloged and stored in a more systematic manner. Visitors can stroll through this area and view artifacts on racks in open storage plus exhibit cases that display some examples of Edison’s lesser known products.
Friends of Edison Celebrate Silver Anniversary

Visitors gather for a Taste of West Orange in the mid-1990s, one of several fund-raising community events co-sponsored by The Friends of Edison to benefit the Park.

The Friends of Thomas Edison National Historical Park is a non-profit membership organization dedicated to the preservation of the Edison Laboratory and Glenmont, and to the appreciation of Thomas Alva Edison, the man, and the promotion of the Edison legacy now and for the future. In this the twenty-fifth anniversary of supporting the National Park Service’s stewardship of his home and laboratory the Friends reaffirms its commitment to this mission as an NPS Partner. During this quarter century of service the Friends has raised more than $1,000,000 to preserve, interpret and promote Edison’s home and laboratory to keep the legacy of Edison’s genius vitally present for future generations.

The Friends commits the donated funds, materials and/or goods and services to assist in the protection of the cultural resources and strives to enhance their interpretation and understanding. Activities include donating library materials, materials for public programming, and materials or donated services to fund operations of the Thomas Edison NHP. New accessions to fill in gaps in the historic Edison collection have also been funded by the Friends of Thomas Edison NHP.

Information about joining the Friends or making contributions to benefit Thomas Edison NHP may be found on their website, foedisson.org. The Friends may also be contacted via e-mail at foel00@verizon.net.

Facts and Figures for the “Preserve Historic Buildings and Collections” Partnership Project

The complex project was necessary to preserve the historic buildings and the artifact and archival collections at the Laboratory Complex and the Glenmont Estate. The original historic furnishings and documents had been deteriorating for decades due to the absence of adequate heating and cooling systems. They were at risk of loss or damage from fire because of the alarm and sprinkler systems. Finally, the vast majority of the artifact collection was inaccessible to visitors and researchers while stored on the upper floors of the historic main laboratory. Below is a summary of facts and figures.

Glenmont Estate
Project Management: NPS, Denver Service Center, Denver, CO
Architect: Beyer, Blinder, Belle Architects & Planners, LLP, New York, NY
Contractor: Integrated Construction Enterprises, Belleville, NJ
NPS Superintendant: Maryanne Gerbauckas
NPS Partner: Edison Innovation Foundation, Newark, NJ
Renovations Began: January 2003
Contract completed: January 2004
Cost: $1,000,000

Laboratory Complex
Project Management: NPS, Denver Service Center, Denver, CO
Architect: Beyer, Blinder, Belle Architects & Planners, LLP, New York, NY
Exhibit Design: Ralph Applebaum Associates Inc., New York, NY
Exhibit Fabrication: Art Guild, Inc., Thorofare, NJ
Audio Tour: Antenna Audio, Inc., New York, NY
General Contractor: Troop Construction and Electric, Inc., Perth Amboy, NJ
Randy Turner (2007)
NPS Partner: Edison Innovation Foundation, Newark, NJ
Renovations Began: January 2004
Contract completed: October 2009
Cost: $13,000,000

Other Highlights of the Preservation Project

The major changes in the Park are described elsewhere in this issue and have been featured in The Lab Notebook over the past few years. Here, though, is a summary of some of the lesser-known but essential improvements made during the project.

Laboratory Complex
Staff relocated their offices from Building 5 in order to open all floors for visitors.

The Pattern Shop in Building 3 has been furnished to its 1917 appearance.

The Black Maria replica along Main Street has been rehabilitated with new siding and electrical upgrades. The building can now be used for exhibits and programs.

The halon fire suppression system that protected many buildings since the late 1970s has been replaced with an environmentally friendly water sprinkler system.

Masonry repairs and repointing were completed on many of the buildings along with replacement of deteriorated bluestone coping and window sills. Broken window frames were replaced and metal window frames have been repaired. The original terracotta storm drains were replaced with an integrated drainage system to alleviate the surface and subsurface drainage problems that have worsened over the years. The surface of the courtyard was re-graded and accessible entry ramps have been installed into the buildings. Most heating and cooling systems were relocated to Building 6, the original power house.

Building 11 has been returned from The Henry Ford Museum in Michigan to its original location in the laboratory courtyard. Built about 1898, it was adapted to a variety of uses by Edison and his experimenters who worked on numerous research projects at any one time. The original building was dismantled in 1940 and donated to The Henry Ford museum. It will be used for a variety of educational and interpretive programs.

The historic view along Main Street in front of the Laboratory Complex was restored to its early 1900s appearance. Five large evergreen trees were removed along Main Street; the cleared landscape reveals the carefully designed architectural features of the buildings. New sidewalks and granite pavers recreate the historic cobblestone and bluestone walkways along Main Street and down Lakeside Avenue.

Across Main Street from the historic laboratory buildings, new curbs and sidewalks, decorative lighting and fencing, and a new landscaped visitor parking lot welcome visitors. Marked pedestrian crosswalks at each corner lead visitors to the new Main Street entrance. The exterior of Building 15, the park maintenance building across Main Street was re-sided, and heating and cooling systems were upgraded. A new addressable fire detection system was installed and the fire sprinkler system was upgraded.

Glenmont

The new geothermal heating and cooling system for the house features underground piping that connects twelve 300-foot deep wells installed in the lawn to the west of visitor parking lot to the heat pumps in the mansion. All the piping of the new fire detection and suppression system was concealed within wall and door cavities to retain the historic appearance of the furnished rooms.

Electrical service was upgraded throughout the building and drainage repairs were made around the exterior of the house.

The historic Greenhouse was completely rehabilitated. All historic glass was removed, numbered, cleaned, and reinstalled. Cypress rails and their steel frames were repaired or replaced. Broken glass and glazing was replaced. Ridge vents were repaired and made operational, and cracks in the concrete foundation were repaired. A partnership with the Garden Club of the Oranges has returned the Greenhouse to full operation.

The exterior concrete and stucco of the Potting Shed were repaired; interior and exterior walls were re-painted; and drainage repairs were completed around the building foundations. A Garden Shop and visitor information center are now open in the Potting Shed.

The deteriorated wood siding of the 1908 Barn was restored. The slate roof was repaired, and exterior walls were painted. Roof drains, gutters, windows and doors were repaired.
From the Photo Collection. This 1917 photograph unites the successive periods of Edison’s career: the early Menlo Park days, of which the railway carriage is a trophy; Building 5, the 1887 jewel of his new West Orange complex; and to the right, the Edison Storage Battery factory (1913). The battery factory was literally a concrete example of the manufacturing empire Edison’s research allowed him to build. Edison’s pride in displaying the carriage is evident in both his expression and his stance. We are equally proud to welcome you to the NEW Laboratory Complex for this Grand Opening.