How They Spent Their Summer: Edison Welcomes Seton Hall Prep Interns

Summer brought a new group of interns from Seton Hall Preparatory School, and they proved to be a great help in all Park divisions. They undertook plenty of gardening and yard work with the Maintenance Division, and they helped Curatorial staff build and disassemble storage racks. The students also spent much of their time with the Interpretive Division, working with rangers and visitors.

At the end of the summer they shared their reflections, writing: “...There was always something during the day that would make us laugh.” Some preferred working with the public. “It allowed us to improve our presentation and social skills. We learned how to interact better with visitors by educating them on certain things they might not otherwise know.” Independent research was another assignment. “We learned that [Edison] was involved in several endeavours besides science, one of which included his great impact on the music industry.”

Any dislikes? Handing out visitor surveys was “not the most exciting.” The interns summed up: “We believe our work was appreciated and valued.” (Everyone on the staff can confirm the truth of that.) A final point: “The pay check was one of the biggest ‘perks’ of the job.” Our thanks to all.

Our thanks to the Edison Innovation Foundation/Charles Edison Fund for ongoing support for this worthwhile internship program.
Message from the Superintendent

We don’t know where the time went, but summer has gone as quickly as it arrived. The end of the summer is always a time of change at the park as we say goodbye to our interns and seasonal staff and wish them well as they resume their studies.

As they return to their schools and colleges, we are reminded that not all education has to take place in a formal setting. The National Park Service has been called "America’s greatest university without walls." And, as it heads towards its 100-year anniversary, the NPS has put Education at the core of “A Call to Action,” the strategy that will guide the Service as it enters its second century of existence.

Here at Thomas Edison NHP, education of our visitors has always been at the heart of everything we do. Many of the thousands of visitors that we welcome to the park each year associate Edison with the incandescent lamp but may have limited knowledge of the extensive range and breadth of technologies that he is actually responsible for. As they walk where Edison and his muckers walked, we hope that they will have an enjoyable and fun visit and gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for the park and the role of the NPS in its preservation. It is through education that the visitors of today become the stewards of our parks for future generations.

—Jill Hawk

My Summer “Vacation” as a Teacher-Ranger-Teacher

Janet Armstrong, our Teacher-Ranger-Teacher from the Parsippany-Troy Hills school district, spent a second summer at Edison. She reports: “What an interesting summer I have enjoyed...collaborating with the knowledgeable and professional rangers who warmly welcomed me back and helped me in a myriad of ways.”

She began the summer working on Camp Edison, the four-day program at the end of June when young campers learned about Glenmont, sound and musical creations, and Edison’s last major experimental project, rubber.

Janet Armstrong at this summer’s Camp Edison.

Janet worked on several additional projects over the summer. Her first assignment was to develop a lesson based on the book *The Story of Thomas Alva Edison* by Margaret Cousins. Posted on the Park’s website, the lesson is formatted as a Jeopardy-style game to help students recall factual information about Mr. Edison and his work. Another project was the development of a virtual learning tool for children that features Edison family members. Janet also created an interactive workshop for teachers in Newark with the express purpose of encouraging them to bring their students on field trips to the park this school year.

Janet Armstrong at this summer’s Camp Edison.

Front-Page News

Museum Curator Jerry Fabris was featured in *The Star-Ledger* on July 25. The article details the wax cylinder recording sessions he has held at the Park over the years. Among the musicians who have made the pilgrimage to West Orange are Wynton Marsalis, Les Paul, Suzanne Vega, Bucky Pizzarelli, and They Might Be Giants.
Exterior Work at Glenmont

As anyone who owns an old house knows, true craftsmen must be found if the goal is to maintain the house’s original appearance. Queen-Anne style Victorian homes are no exception. Carpenters working on the outside of Glenmont have been busily recreating decorative trims, spindles, shingles, and molding to replace rotted wood before winter comes.

Making sure all of those new pieces are historically accurate and an exact match to the existing wood elements is no small feat. The work has been complemented by the installation of a new copper gutter system, which also mirrors what the Edisons would have had on the house. All of this work has been funded by Recovery Act dollars, which also funded the exterior painting of the house in its historic 1920s salmon color.

An NPS team has also been stabilizing the two porches that flank the entrance to Glenmont. The carpenters will replace rotted tongue and groove boards and corresponding framing that have been affected by long-term exposure to the elements. A canvas covering will then be installed over the porches where the Edisons often relaxed in their wicker chairs, chatting with guests or looking over the grounds. Projects such as these will ensure that Glenmont will still look the same as it did when it was built in 1880, remaining the showplace that it was during its heyday.

Chinese Mantel Clock

Visitors to Glenmont probably did not notice the elegant Chinese mantel clock in the Reception Room. Surface corrosion and dark brown, greasy dirt rendered its images of landscapes and flowers virtually unidentifiable. Additionally, the clock face, attached to the body of the clock by unstable hanging chains, had been removed. With the help of NPS funds, we sent the clock out for conservation during the winter; a total of five clocks received conservation.

Careful cleaning removed the dirt and grime and revealed a cream enameled surface with brightly colored images. Conservators reattached the alabaster clock face, revealing its bright gold trim and two lounging serpents. This lighter look is more in keeping with Mina Edison’s original intention for the room when she hired Proctor and Company to redecorate it in the early 1910s. Following the teachings of noted decorator Elsie de Wolfe, Mina chose a less cluttered style that emphasized lighter colors and an overall softer and airier feel, a firm reaction to overstated Victorian bric-a-brac.

Edison Lamp

During the installation of the Glenmont geothermal system in 2003, we found a unique artifact in the attic: a bronze lamp featuring a bust of Thomas Edison. Created with a classical theme, one might mistake Edison for a Greek or Roman ruler. The lamp also has a traditional wreath and laurel at its base and a series of lightning bolts emerging from its center to honor the great inventor’s accomplishments. Covered with grime and soot, the lamp was definitely a candidate for conservation.

Conservator Margaret Breuker of the NPS Collections Conservation Branch cleaned the lamp, which was then rewired by Appleton Lighting in Brookline, Massachusetts. A 1903 photograph of the Glenmont Den shows Mr. Edison seated next to the lamp. A rare find, this type of artifact not only reveals more about how the Edisons used this historic room but also serves as proof of Edison’s celebrity and fame, a status which made him as much an icon as a successful inventor.
Friends Kick Off Membership Campaign With Special Offer; Reception Celebrates Edison in Paris

More than 40 guests attended the first of a series of special events sponsored by the Friends of Thomas Edison National Historical Park on July 12. The program that evening commemorated Edison’s triumphant visit to the Paris Exposition of 1889. Edison products occupied more than a third of the space allocated to all U.S. companies at the exposition and introduced the public to mass-market versions of his phonograph. Park Collection Manager Joan Harris-Rico, who has taken a special interest in the Paris Exposition, previewed a multimedia presentation she offered to park visitors the following day. The Friends’ reception featuring French cheeses and crêpes followed the preview; Highlawn Pavilion of West Orange provided French wines.

The talk and reception launched the Friends’ “Spirit of Invention” Series celebrating Edison’s innovation and invention in the arts, science, and technology.

Upcoming programs—diverse in content but connected in spirit—will complement the rich, historical offerings available throughout the Park. Each program, whether a concert, exhibit, lecture, or interactive experience, will incorporate a time for participants to exchange ideas and make connections with others in the community.

“In addition to adding another dimension to our community’s experience of the Edison legacy,” said Friends’ Chair Hap Bojsza, “we hope to encourage people to become members of the Friends of Thomas Edison National Historical Park. Beyond preserving and interpreting Edison’s work, we think the Park can play a greater role in the life and economy of West Orange and surrounding towns. Frankly, we need more hands at the wheel to make that happen.”

The Friends also announced a special membership offer: A one-year membership for $40 (normally $50). This fee will remain the same for as long as an individual renews his or her membership.

New members will receive:
1. 2 free tickets for entry to the Thomas Edison National Historical Park (a $14 value).
2. Edison lapel pin and Friends of Edison membership card.
3. Invitations to free, members-only programs and receptions.
4. This year only: Entry in a drawing for a 2004 Thomas Edison Silver Dollar Commemorative Coin. (Drawing February 11, 2013).

The Friends of Thomas Edison NHP is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to supporting the Park in the preservation, restoration, and promotion of Thomas A. Edison’s laboratory and home through advocacy, volunteer service, and fundraising. The Friends also strive to foster an appreciation of Thomas A. Edison and his achievements through assisting in the planning of special events and providing programs that satisfy the needs and interests of its members and the local community.

You can call 973-736-2916 or email foe00@verizon.net for more details. In addition to FOE Chair Bojsza, the event committee includes Nina Barszcz, Keri Knowles, Kip Rowan, and John O’Reilly.