



The Lab Notebook

Historic View of Edison Lab Restored on Main Street

A new project to restore the historic view along Main Street in front of the Edison Laboratory began the last week of May and will continue through early fall. New sidewalks and granite pavers recreate the historic cobblestone and bluestone walkways along Main Street and down Lakeside Avenue. The cleared landscape in front of the laboratory highlights the carefully designed architectural features of the buildings and recreates the streetscape of the early 1900s. Across Main Street from the historic laboratory buildings, new curbs and sidewalks, decorative lighting and fencing, and a new landscaped visitor parking lot will welcome visitors. Marked pedestrian crosswalks at each corner will lead visitors to the new Main Street entrance to the Site. The Edison Innovation Foundation



of Newark, New Jersey, oversees this project.

Not far away from the Llewellyn Park estate that Thomas Edison purchased in 1886 was an open meadow on the corner of Valley Road (Main Street) and Lakeside Avenue. There he built his last and greatest laboratory. "I will have the best equipped & largest laboratory extant and the facilities superior to

any other for rapid and cheap development of an invention," wrote Thomas Edison to financier J. Hood Wright in 1886. Edison envisioned a complex with a main laboratory, power house and four satellite buildings surrounding a central courtyard. The buildings would be constructed of the "best hard burnt New Jersey brick" with the front wall of the building that faced Valley Road to be of "Hackensack front brick." Building 1, which runs along Main Street was the second to be completed in 1887. One of the best equipped electrical laboratories in the United States, Building 1 was the centerpiece of the Edison Laboratories.

Based on an analysis of the historic landscape using maps and historic photographs in the site's archives, this project will reclaim the streetscape presented to visitors, motorists and pedestrians as it was in the early part of the century, when Building 1 and Building 5, joined by the main entry gate arch, presented a unified, dramatic appearance along Main Street.

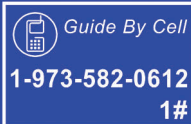


Historic view of Main Street, Edison Laboratories, 1939. The Black Maria, visible in the modern view above, now sits where the test circles are located in the left foreground.

Site News

We're happy to report a great deal of new activity over the past few months!

Visitor services were expanded at Thomas Edison's home this summer. Beginning August 1, we piloted a new cell phone tour of the 13.5 acre grounds of the Glenmont estate. You can listen to the tour by dialing 973-582-0612. The twenty-one tour stops include information about Thomas Edison, the house, and the landscape, as well as family stories. Signs are located throughout the grounds at the Potting Shed, the Graves, around the house, by the Garage and Barn, and end at the Greenhouse. Excerpts from oral histories by Thomas Edison's children Madeleine Sloane and Theodore Edison will be included in future editions of the cell phone tour.



As described on the first page, we are restoring the historic view along Main Street. We received a generous grant from the New Jersey State Department of Transportation for these improvements. We thank the Edison Innovation Foundation for partnering with us on this worthwhile project.

Christmas is right around the corner. Visit Glenmont November 23 through January 6, 2008 to see the holiday decorations displayed for this special time of year. And the Garden Shop provides a great alternative for your holiday shopping!



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Edison National Historic Site was established to preserve and protect Thomas Alva Edison's West Orange Laboratory, home, and collections for the education and inspiration of people worldwide.

Edison National Historic Site
Main Street and Lakeside Avenue
West Orange, NJ 07052
Web site: www.nps.gov/edis
Email: edis_superintendent@nps.gov

Visitor Information
973-324-9973
Fax: 973-736-8496

The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

Ellen Biddle Shipman Landscapes at Glenmont

Ellen Biddle Shipman is one of the most recognized female landscape architects in American history. In 1933 *House and Garden* magazine referred to her as "the dean of American women landscape architects." Influenced by an informal apprenticeship with architect Charles Platt, Shipman's own work led her to create romantic, secluded spaces of Colonial Revival influence. A strong advocate for women in her field, Shipman managed her own landscape architectural firm in New York City, an office which consisted of an all female staff. Shipman operated this office for 35 years.

Preliminary research indicates several Shipman ties to Mina Miller Edison. Shipman executed a garden for Mina Edison at the Edison family's winter home in Fort Myers, Florida. Shipman titled it "Moonlight Garden." Ellen also had several other clients in immediate proximity to Glenmont including three other estates in Llewellyn Park and two in Montclair. Shipman also did work for Henry and Clara Ford in Dearborn, Michigan in 1927. The Fords were close personal friends of the Edisons and spent time regularly at Glenmont. Additionally, one of Shipman's larger landscape installments was for Stan Hywet Hall in Akron, Ohio. Akron is where Mina was raised in the Miller family home, Oakplace. Lastly, Mina was a member of the Garden Club of America in the 1920s, an organization that included several clients of Ellen



Ellen Biddle in Boston, ca 1890. Photo Marshall. Nancy Angell Streeter Collection.

Biddle Shipman.

Two of Shipman's plans can be found in the Edison NHS archives collection. Current research indicates that one plan is of the skating pond, in part executed in 1926 on the grounds of Glenmont. The other plan is a garden plan dated 1929. The question is – was this plan ever implemented on the grounds of Glenmont? Do bills exist to verify this? Are there photographs of the garden? Stay tuned as the mystery unravels.



Summer 2007 interns from Seton Hall Prep (left) Akshay Mampilly, Mehari Ghebremicael, Adrian Wirstiuk, Frantz Lucein, and Kadeer Dove; and from West Orange High School (below) Theresa Polixa and Sharod Coleman.



Meet Jerry Fabris

Curator of Sound Recordings at Edison NHS



Jerry Fabris holds an Edison cylinder in the audio transfer studio.

Jerry's long-time interest in history, sound recordings, and music is a great match to his position as Curator of Sound Recordings at Edison National Historic Site. Since volunteering here in 1989, he has progressed from archives technician, to museum technician, to his current position. His work with phonographs and sound recordings started early on. His first paid job with us was to organize the phonograph works blueprint series in the Edison NHS archives. Since 1993, Jerry has been project supervisor of the

cataloging and organizing of the 48,000 sound recordings in our collection. A few years ago, he was instrumental in acquiring a grant to set up a transfer recording studio in order to digitize historic recordings for preservation and to improve access.

In addition, Jerry has been a permanent fixture at WFMU-FM 91.1, a local non-profit radio station. Since 2003, he has been DJ on the program *Thomas Edison's Attic*. He thought this was an easy, low cost method to provide more public exposure to the recordings. Jerry made a point not to repeat any recordings and has played an astonishing 1,300 different songs on the program over the past four years. On the WFMU website (www.wfmuplaylists/te), you can hear all of his shows since 2003. Unfortunately, all good things must come to an end and his last show will be aired October 3. In the future, he looks forward to pursuing further education in digital archives management. As for the sound recording collection, Jerry looks forward to working towards creating an online digital library to make the recordings more accessible to the public.



Thomas Edison, his wife Mina, rubber magnate Harvey Firestone (in front), and others enjoy a speedboat ride off the Florida coast, c. 1928. Edison and his family spent most winters in Fort Myers, where he maintained a small laboratory near his home. The Edisons' next door neighbors were the Henry Fords.

Edison Day 2007



Ranger Shemaine McKelvin assists children during a Junior Ranger activity.



Co-Creator and Puppeteer Randy Rossilli with Thomas Edison puppet during a preview presentation of *The Adventures of Young Thomas Edison*.



Acting Superintendent Randy Turner greets visitors at the Laboratory Complex.

Outdoors with the Edisons October 14, 1:30pm

Enjoy a guided walk around the estate grounds of Thomas Edison's home Glenmont. Find out where the kids skated in the winter and went swimming in the summer. Explore the 13.5 acre estate that the Edison's called home. Fun for everyone!



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Edison National Historic Site
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West Orange, NJ 07052



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Editor
Michelle Ortwein

Contributors
Leonard DeGraaf
Gerald Fabris
Theresa Jung
Beth Miller
Michelle Ortwein
Karen Sloat-Olsen
Edward Wirth

Comments? Write to:
Randy Turner, Acting Superintendent
Edison National Historic Site
Main Street and Lakeside Avenue
West Orange, NJ 07052

George W. Johnson: First African-American Recording Star

In July, Edison National Historic Site welcomed noted historian Tim Brooks who gave a presentation on the amazing life of George W. Johnson. Born a slave on a Virginia farm in 1846, Johnson may have been the first African-American ever to make a sound recording. He was the most popular black recording artist during the first decade of the industry. Discovered singing for tips at the Hudson River ferryboat terminal in New York City, Johnson's two specialty songs, a whistling song and a laughing song,



became the best-selling records of the 1890s. One of Johnson's earliest recording sessions took place at Thomas Edison's West Orange Laboratory on June 1, 1891.

Tim Brooks is a television executive and a researcher of early recording artists and phonograph history. Brooks authored the

ground-breaking book *Lost Sounds: Blacks and the Birth of the Recording Industry, 1890-1919*, and compiled the companion audio compact disc *Lost Sounds*, which won the 2007 Grammy award for Best Historical Release.