



Foundation Document Overview

Thomas Edison National Historical Park

New Jersey



Contact Information

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Purpose



THOMAS EDISON NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK explores the global impact of the life and achievements of the prolific American inventor and his colleagues through the preservation and interpretation of his West Orange, New Jersey, research and development complex, the family's estate, Glenmont, and their vast collections, and serves as a center for the study and exchange of ideas about innovation in history and culture.



Significance

Significance statements express why Thomas Edison National Historical Park resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- The Edison Laboratory Complex at West Orange embodies the scientific and industrial genius of Thomas Alva Edison, America's leading inventor in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The complex made the idea of organized team research in a well-equipped laboratory a model for all research and development laboratories.
- The park's vast collections are a comprehensive record of Edison's career as inventor, businessman, manufacturer, celebrity, and private citizen. The buildings are not simply empty shells of the past; the archives and artifacts provide extensive evidence of how the buildings were used and what took place in them. The archives include more than 5 million pages of experimental and business records, 4,000 laboratory notebooks, 60,000 photographic images, and 48,000 sound recordings. The artifacts, numbering more than 400,000, include inventions, prototypes, laboratory and domestic furnishings, and personal possessions.
- The Glenmont estate, less than a mile from the Laboratory Complex, was home to Thomas and Mina Edison and their family. This home, part of a working estate that served both family and business interests, is an outstanding example of Queen Anne architecture and is located in the picturesque planned community of Llewellyn Park. The estate was close to extensive available land where Edison built his laboratory and factories, and near cities that would attract both workers and Wall Street investors, while at the same time buffered from unwanted press and public attention.
- The technological achievements at West Orange, which include the development of sound recordings, motion pictures, and the electric light and power industries, changed modern life. The social, cultural, and economic impact of these innovations helped create the modern world.

Fundamental Resources and Values



Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Laboratory Complex**
- **Glenmont Estate**
- **Collections**
- **Value of Innovation**
- **Factory and Manufacturing Site**

Thomas Edison National Historical Park contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **West Orange Community**



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- **Thomas Edison: Inventor.** Thomas Edison was one of history's most prolific and influential inventors. Active from the early 1870s through the 1920s, Edison's inventions were the foundation of the electric light and power, sound recording, and motion picture industries. Edison pioneered modern, team-based industrial research and development at his Menlo Park and West Orange laboratories, and created dozens of companies to manufacture and market his inventions.
- **Influences and Relationships.** Thomas Edison's approach to inventions, motivations, and values were shaped by his personal and business relationships, including family, friends, employees, competitors, and the public. Edison's work as an inventor was influenced by his perceptions of society's technological needs and his relationship to a community of inventors, scientists, engineers, and business leaders that operated in a rapidly changing social, economic, cultural, and political environment during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.
- **Impact and Relevancy.** Edison's inventions changed the way people lived and his team-based approach to invention in organized research laboratories changed the way society develops new technologies. Edison's experience as an inventor is relevant to understanding technological innovation and creativity, and his status as celebrity and cultural figure is relevant to changing social perceptions of technological progress, success, failure, and the social status of inventors.

The cultural resources, which include the original buildings and structures, landscapes, and one of the largest museum collections in the National Park Service, provide a sense of place and are integral to telling the stories of Edison.

Description

Thomas Edison National Historical Park is in West Orange, New Jersey, and comprises Edison's Laboratory Complex on Main Street and Glenmont, his family home in nearby Llewellyn Park, a private residential community. The park celebrates the illustrious career, scientific achievements, and personal life of the internationally known inventor, his family, and muckers/colleagues.

At the Laboratory Complex, Edison pioneered the modern industrial laboratory devoted to the development of new inventions and their manufacture as commercial products. About half of the 1,093 U.S. patents earned by Thomas Edison were for innovations born in West Orange. The 14 laboratory structures clustered around a central courtyard and their contents remain as they were when Edison died in 1931.

Glenmont is the 29-room Victorian mansion that was home to the Edison family for more than half of his lifetime. Glenmont was an extension of business activities at the Laboratory Complex as well as the family home. The architect, Henry Hudson Holly, is considered the father of the Queen Anne style architectural movement in the United States, and Glenmont is one of his crowning achievements. Glenmont was a working estate that also includes six outbuildings, among them a barn, a greenhouse, and two structures built of Edison poured concrete: a garage and a potting shed. The Glenmont estate, with its furnishings, artifacts, and gardens, offers us valuable information about Edison's private life and his status as a public figure.

