With his move from Menlo Park, New Jersey, to New York City at the end of March 1881, Edison shifted his focus from research and development to the commercialization of his electric lighting system. This volume of The Papers of Thomas A. Edison chronicles Edison's central role in the enormous effort to manufacture, market, and install electric lighting systems in the United States and abroad.

Standard studies of this period emphasize the inauguration of the commercial electric utility industry at the Pearl Street central station. Edison and his associates, however, audaciously operated on a global scale, not just focusing on the major cities of North America and Europe but reaching simultaneously from Appleton, Wisconsin, to Australia, through the Indian subcontinent and East Asia, to Central and South America.

Paul B. Israel is director and editor of the Thomas A. Edison Papers Project at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. Louis Carlat and David Hochfelder are, respectively, managing editor and assistant editor for the project. Theresa M. Collins is the Edison Papers Project's associate director for outreach and development and has served as an editor since 1991. Brian C. Shipley served as an editor on the project from 2001 until 2006. He currently works for the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.