

2009 Edison Awards

Ceremony Set for April

The 2009 Edison Awards will take place April 1, 2009. The Edison Awards recognize the persistence and excellence Thomas A. Edison personified, which in turn have allowed the United States to remain in the forefront of innovation, creativity, and ingenuity in the global economy.

Two separate awards are given, one honoring innovators, the other, innovations. The Edison Achievement Award, which the Edison Papers sponsors, is given to a business leader who has displayed the persistence, collaboration, and creativity needed to achieve successful innovation in his or her organization. This year's winners are David Kelley of IDEO and Dr. Susan Desmond-Hellmann of Genentech.

The Edison Best New Product Award honors new products or services that excel in marketplace innovation. Categories include consumer packaged goods, lifestyle/wellness, technology, media/visual communications, science/medical, energy/sustainability, transportation, industrial electronics/computers, and industrial design/living environments. The winning products are chosen by a panel of more than 2,000 senior marketing and business executives.

Visit our website for more details!

The Edisonian

Notes from the Director

Welcome to the 5th volume of *The Edisonian*. As you read through this newsletter you will see we have some very exciting events coming up. We hope you can join us!

We are very pleased to have been invited to sponsor the Edison Achievement Award as part of the larger Edison Awards. The 2009 Edison Achievement Award winners are Dr. Susan Desmond-Hellman of Genentech and David Kelley of IDEO.

I want to especially thank those who have used our link to Amazon.com to make purchases through our site. The link is still

active on our website—please continue to use it and help sponsor our work.

At the core of our work is our current editing of documents that focus on the losses and loyalties of the Edison Empire in 1883-1884. Many insights have been made into the life of Mary Stillwell Edison and her death, as well as the building of Edison's Empire as electricity exploded around the world.

We know times are hard but we welcome your continued support of our work.

Edison at War

Part V of Microfilm Edition Guide Looks at Edison's Wartime Work

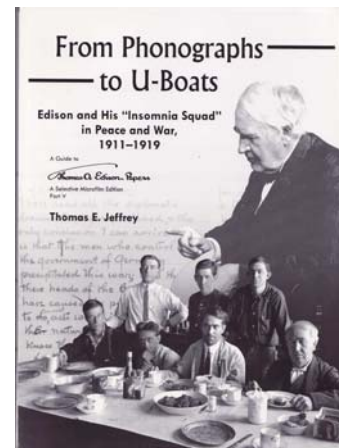
Part V of the guide to the microfilm edition of the Edison Papers, under the title *From Phonographs to U-Boats: Edison and His "Insomnia Squad" in Peace and War, 1911-1919*, by Thomas E. Jeffrey is now available from Lexis Nexis in a paperback edition. "This is one of the few substantive works of scholarship on Edison in this period," says Jeffrey, senior editor at the Edison Papers.

"Edison scholarship," he notes, "is heavily weighted toward the nineteenth century or the twentieth century before the war when he was developing the phonograph, movies,

and the incandescent light."

But though Edison's major inventions and patents came before World War I, his work during the war reveals a great deal about his personality and methods. The general assumption has been that Edison played little part in the war effort, but the documents show his deep personal involvement. "Clearly, we have dozens of notebooks in his own hand," says Jeffrey, "that show that he was very involved in working on technologies to detect submarines."

Part V includes two extended essays on how the war affected Edison's experimental work, business enterprises, and family. The



first, "The 'Insomnia Squad': Thomas A. Edison's Laboratory and Wartime Research Staff," looks at the inventor's very direct role in trying to develop new technologies for the U.S. Navy.

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New Books

The Florida Life of Thomas Edison

Because he has long been familiar as the “Wizard of Menlo Park,” Edison’s long association with Florida is largely unknown to the public. Edison, though, built a house in Fort Myers, where he spent most winters from 1885 until his death in 1931. Michele Wehrwein Albion’s new book sheds light on this little-known, but important aspect of Edison’s life.

Edison Papers Director Paul Israel notes that Albion, the first professional curator of the Edison and Ford Winter Estates in Fort Myers, “fills a significant gap in the inventor’s career by using local sources as well as the extensive collection of the Edison Papers to tell the story of his work, recreation, and influence in the city where he built his winter home.”

The Florida Life of Thomas Edison is available from the University Press of Florida.

Rhinoceros

Congratulations are in order for Kelly Enright, a recent member of the Edison Papers Editorial Staff, on the publication of *Rhinoceros* (London: Reaktion Press, 2008). Enright provides a history of the Rhinoceros in popular imagination, sifting fact from fiction and exploring the ways people in different cultural milieus have understood the “strangeness” of this enigmatic animal.

Edison at War

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As Jeffrey notes, Edison was exclusively involved in war work from February 1917 until after the end of the war. During this period, several members of Edison’s “Insomnia Squad,” which had been working night and day to bring a new phonograph to market, as well as other experimental staff, were pulled off phonograph work to help Edison develop acoustic technology for submarine detection.

“Obviously,” says Jeffrey, “there is a connection between work on sound recordings and submarine detection.”

Having immersed himself in war work, Edison turned over control of his many business concerns to his son Charles, who instituted a more enlightened policy toward Edison’s workers. During these years, Charles, as chairman of the board of Thomas A. Edison, Inc., and Mark Mandeville Jones, manager of the personnel service department, transformed Edison’s enterprises “from that of the last place at which men desired to work to that of the first place.”

At war’s end, though, Thomas Edison reasserted control, chiefly in response to the economic downturn of 1920-21. As Charles Edison recalled later, “he virtually relieved



Charles Edison attended MIT before he went to work for his father in 1913. He was elected New Jersey governor in 1940 and served for one term.

me of the responsibility and took over for himself.” His father also ordered drastic cuts, which, said Charles, “almost broke my heart.” In just six months, the elder Edison had fired 90 percent of the workforce and laid off a great many of the top-level managers his son had brought in. This story is told in Jeffrey’s second essay, “Thomas Edison’s Management Team.”

Part V also includes the most authoritative genealogy to date of Edison’s family; biographical sketches of 350 employees, managers, and family members; and an annotated list of Edison’s many companies.

The Series Notes section contains descriptions of each archival series and sub-series in the microfilm edition with a listing of the individual volumes and folders along with their reel and frame numbers.

Lisa Gitelman Joins Editorial Board

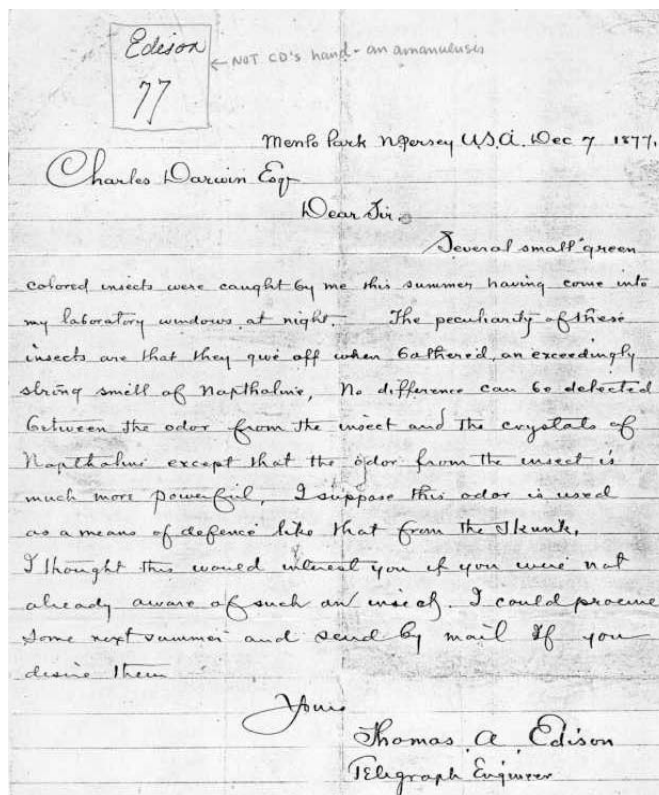
Dr. Lisa Gitelman, professor of media studies at the Catholic University of America, has been named to the editorial board of the Edison Papers. From 1992-99, Dr. Gitelman served as an assistant editor at the Edison Papers. She is the author of a number of books, including *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines: Representing Technology in the Edison Era* (Stanford University Press, 1999). Her latest book is *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture* (MIT Press, 2006). She is also the co-author of a classroom edition of documents, *Thomas Edison and Modern America* (Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2002).

FEATURED DOCUMENT: A Darwin-Edison Connection

In light of the upcoming bicentenary of the birth of Charles Darwin, Thomas Edison's Dec. 7, 1877, letter to the naturalist takes on renewed interest. The last quarter of 1877 was a busy time for Edison, who was perfecting his commercial telephone and turning his sound recorder into a working phonograph. Nonetheless, he took the time to write Darwin about some peculiar green insects that came into the Menlo Park laboratory windows at night. Edison noted that the insects gave off a "strong smell of naphthalene," much more powerful than naphthalene crystals.

"I suppose this odor is used as a means of defence [sic] like that from a skunk," Edison surmised—a good supposition since naphthalene is a natural insect repellent. "I thought this would interest you if you were not already aware of such an insect," he noted. "I could procure some next summer and send them by mail if [sic] you desire."

Darwin's son Francis replied on Jan. 5, 1878, to decline Edison's offer. "My father begs me to thank you for communicating to him the curious case of the insects.



The fact is an interesting one, but as he is at work on different subjects he will not take advantage of yr kind offer of sending specimens."

The year 2009 marks not only the bicentenary of Darwin's birth on Feb. 12, but also the 150th anniversary of the publication of *On the Origin of Species* on Nov. 24.

Edison's letter to Darwin appears in volume 3 of the print edition of *The Papers of Thomas A. Edison*. In the online edition, his letter can be found by clicking on "single document or folder" under the search feature and plugging in the ID number Z002AA. The ID for Francis Darwin's response is D7802G.

Edison Papers hosts "Invent Like Edison"

The Edison Papers, along with the Princeton MIT Alumnae Association, hosted an "Invent Like Edison" program, May 15, 2008, to encourage high school students to consider careers in science and technology. Edison Papers Director Paul Israel and Sarah Miller Caldicott, Edison's great-grand-niece, were featured speakers at the event, which was held on Busch Campus, Rutgers University.

One of the lessons students might draw from Edison's approach, says Caldicott, is to move beyond the textbook. "Rarely did he take facts he read in textbooks as 'given.' Instead, he wanted to explore on his own to see if the 'facts' he read were true." Ms. Caldicott is co-author of *Innovate Like Edison* (Dutton, 2007), which explores Edison's methods of innovation.

New Books

Historic Photos of

Thomas Edison

Turner Publishing in Nashville offers a handsome new pictorial history of Edison's life—from his early days in Milan, Ohio, to his final years as the world's most famous inventor. The book, edited by Leonard De Graaf, an archivist at the Edison National Historic Site and former Edison Papers staffer, features some 200 photos from the collection at the West Orange historic site.

Thomas Edison in West Orange

Edward Wirth's new book provides a pictorial history of the inventor's life and work from 1886 until his death in 1931. *Thomas Edison in West Orange*, part of Arcadia Publishing's Images of America Series, includes more than 200 photographs, chiefly drawn from the archives of the Edison National Historic Site in West Orange. Many of the photos are previously unpublished.

Innovate Like Edison

Innovate Like Edison: The Five-Step System for Breakthrough Business Success by Sarah Miller Caldicott and Michael J. Gelb is now available in paperback from Penguin.

The book draws insights from Edison's methods to provide "tools and strategies" for success in business and in everyday life.

News from the Thomas A. Edison Papers

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SAVE THE DATE

Look for the Edison Papers at these upcoming events:

February 11

Heldrich Hotel, New Brunswick, N.J., Exhibit installation
Edison & the Art of Invention

April 1

Edison Awards
Santa Clara, Calif.

April 25

Rutgers Day
New Brunswick, N.J.

May 2

NJ State History Fair
Washington Crossing State Park, Titusville, N.J.

Original Yankee Stadium Made with Edison Cement

The closing of Yankee Stadium at the end of the 2008 baseball season also brought to a close a chapter in Edison history. The Edison Portland Cement Co. provided the concrete for the original 1923 stadium, a concrete so “hard and durable,” says sportswriter Tom Verducci in a recent *Sports Illustrated* piece, that New York City decided “not to touch it” during the 1973-74 renovation.

Edison’s technical innovations in the cement industry are a little-known aspect of his career. They were an outgrowth of the waste sand his ore-milling business produced. The inventor took note that the sand produced in this way allowed for the manufacture of a



harder and more durable cement. From 1898 to 1902, he developed new cement-processing technologies, including a giant rotary kiln, which eventually allowed the Edison company to increase production and realize cost-savings.

Still, according to Edison Papers Director Paul Israel, who wrote about the development of these technologies in his book *Edison: A Life of Invention*,

the cement company did not become a profitable enterprise until 1922, the year construction began on the stadium. Perhaps the sale of concrete for Yankee Stadium put Edison Portland Cement Co. in the black. According to a 1923 news report, more than 30,000 cubic yards of concrete, made from 45,000 barrels of cement, 30,000 cubic yards of gravel, and 15,000 cubic yards of sand went into the stadium’s construction.