

*The Private Diary of
Thomas Alva Edison*

Menlo Park, NJ
Friday, April 14, 1876

I have finally pursued my dream of establishing the Invention Factory, and may now declare that dream a reality. Menlo Park, New Jersey is to be the site of my main laboratory, a carpenters' shop, blacksmith forge and of course a home for Mary, the children and me. Here in Menlo Park, as I work on perfecting Alexander Graham Bell's thrilling invention, the telephone, I will continue my quest to create a device that can capture the sound of the human voice. I also continue my attempts to make an incandescent lightbulb that can burn for more than the scant moments other inventors have achieved.

Here in Menlo Park my goal will be the betterment of the day-to-day life in America and on distant shores. These scientific endeavors will provide useful purpose, unlike the inventions of a certain gentleman – inventions that I still believe to be splendid but utterly impractical.

New York, NY

Monday, September 4, 1882

Today the first central power station of the Edison Illuminating Company opens at 257 Pearl Street in Manhattan. Eighty-two customers will benefit from electricity provided by this coal-fired power plant.

Burning the coal allows the steam engines to power turbines and generators to create the electrical current. These steam engines also provide additional revenue. I have secured a deal that allows me to sell steam to nearby businesses which they will use to heat their buildings. The path to success on which we travel is well-lit!

Menlo Park, NJ

Thursday, October 31, 1889

Here I sit, the “Wizard of Menlo Park” defending my “wizardry” from attacks on all sides. By entering the electrical distribution business, George Westinghouse has firmly planted a thorn deep in my side. G.W. and his lapdog, N.T., are recklessly handling lightning-force power as if it were no more threatening than a bee in a bottle.

The Edison Electric Light Company is based on low-voltage, direct-current electric distribution. This allows for the lighting of lamps and powering of motors with the exact amount of electricity required, as it flows in one direction only. This makes DC a safe method of delivering power.

Westinghouse Electric Company’s high-voltage alternating-current, on the other hand, is a menace and danger to every citizen and shelter in which they live. The high voltage moving overhead through transmission wires is a deadly hazard, and the protective insulation on those wires is about as effective as a molasses-covered rag. The heat that is released through these wires is an extreme waste. Worse still, as the voltage travels back and forth and is stepped up through transformers, it becomes more and more dangerous. The “Electric Wire Panic” is terrifying and completely justified. One can only hope that calm and cool heads will prevail and direct-current will become the standard.

West Orange, NJ
Tuesday, May 2, 1893

Inconceivable! To be underbid by George Westinghouse at the last minute is an insult. Even though I am focused now on iron ore mining rather than electricity, it is a sting to my pride to see the company that once bore my name stumble. The lighting of the Columbian Exposition, or World's Fair as it is commonly known, would have been a feather in the cap of the General Electric Company. Now, because of Westinghouse, the grounds and buildings of the fair are to be illuminated by his alternating-current or AC distribution system.

At the World's Fair, there is to be a complete Electrical Building with a display by that young Serbian man I once employed of fantastic gadgets and machines that amount to no more than electric parlor tricks. One thing is certain – not a single Edison bulb will be sold to support this endeavor. We'll see how much light they can make without lightbulbs!

West Orange, NJ
Saturday, January 12, 1895

Today the hydroelectric power plant at Niagara Falls will officially begin supplying power to New York. Again, George Westinghouse and his protégé have succeeded with a successful bid for a large-scale project of great prestige. General Electric is limited to providing transmission lines and other equipment.

Looking back after these many years, considering the “War of the Currents” and the hullabaloo that built up around George, Nikola and myself, I admit that alternating-current seems to be here to stay and is frequently a practical alternative to direct-current. Given the fact that DC would have required many, many power plants due to the short distance the current can travel, I suppose that the success of AC has saved a score of cities from the eyesore of far too many crude brick buildings strung together with wire.