

Meet  
**THOMAS  
EDISON**  
An eStory

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES

**DR CHARLES MARGERISON**  
The Amazing People Club®

**Bio**  **Views**®

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# Life Stories of Amazing People

Welcome to this Amazing People Club eBook, which contains unique and fascinating life stories. This ebook is provided on a sponsored promotional basis and recipients agree they will not use it for sale or resale. It is part of a series developed by the Amazing People Club, written in the form of a BioView®, which is a short name for a biographical interview.

A BioView® is a new concept that reveals amazing stories, as if the person has given an interview about their life. Each of the stories can normally be read in around five to ten minutes and is based on the known facts of the individual's life alongside what they may have felt about their experiences.

BioViews® provide an easy way of learning about people who made major contributions to our world. The unique format and flow enables each person's story to come alive, as if it is being personally told to you. Each one of them reflects the interests, emotions and passions linked to the amazing person's achievements. They are stories that can provide inspiration and ideas for your own journey through life and we hope you will enjoy them.

The career notes at the end of each story provide background information on each person's life, reflecting their achievements and some of the recognition they have received.

Please visit [www.amazingpeopleclub.com](http://www.amazingpeopleclub.com) to explore this book and audio series.

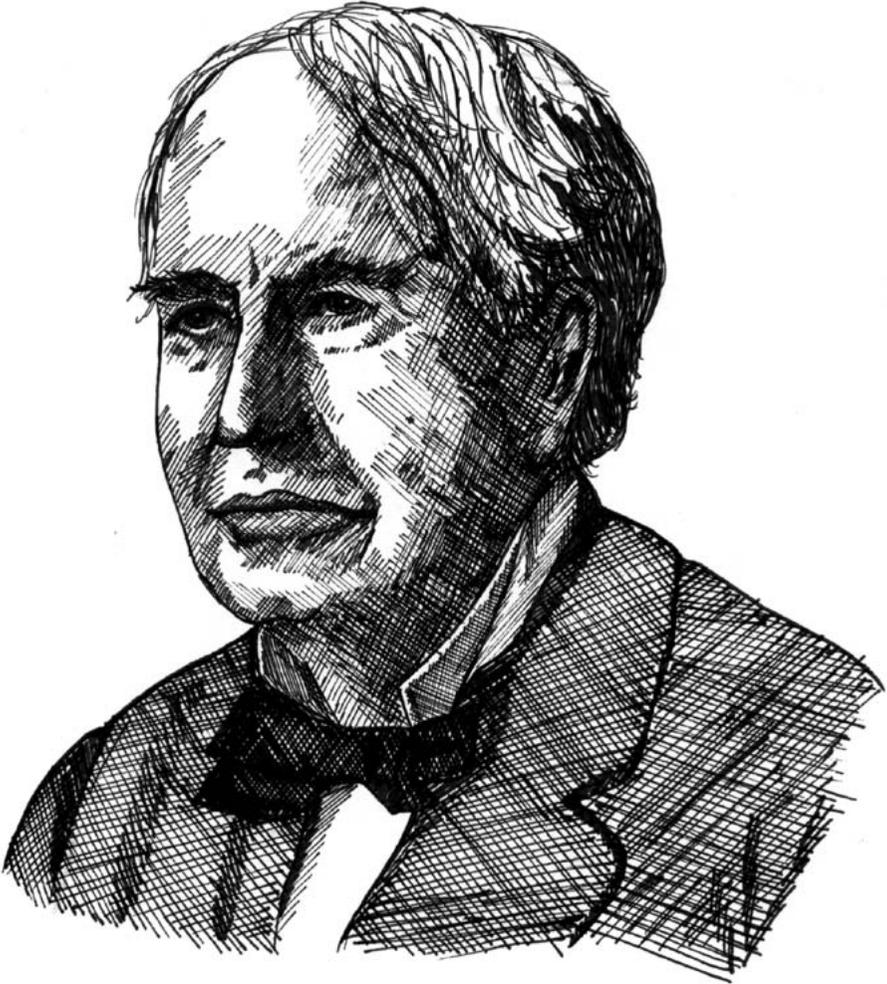
**Bio**  **Views**®

eStory

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**The Amazing People Club®**

# Thomas Edison



1847 1931

Some days are more important than others  
From the age of 12, I worked on the railways  
Initially, I traveled the line selling food and drinks  
In the baggage car, I set up a small printing press  
Collecting stories on the way, I produced the Grand Trunk Herald  
That was a news sheet on events up and down the line  
Passengers and local people liked my short stories  
Also, I set up a small laboratory to do some experiments  
One day, at Mount Clemens, I saw a child playing on the railway  
A train was approaching, so I raced out to rescue him  
The three year old was the Stationmaster's son  
In appreciation, Mr MacKenzie taught me telegraphy  
It opened up a new world of work to me  
One advantage was gaining a better paid job  
I was a young lad, living away from home  
Trying to survive as best I could  
It was hard, as I was substantially deaf  
This had already had an effect on my education  
At school, I was seen as disruptive as I demanded attention  
Not being able to hear properly led me to speak a bit loudly  
The teacher, not understanding, said I was 'addled'  
Aged seven, after three months of tuition, I left school  
My mother taught me at home until I was 12  
She was my guiding star  
My parents had seven children and I was their youngest  
In 1854, Father moved us to Port Huron, where he found work  
But, life for my parents was difficult  
All my brothers and sisters were out trying to find work  
By 1861, I felt I should do the same, not wanting to burden my family  
The country was in turmoil as the Civil War had started  
Thanks to Mr MacKenzie, the Stationmaster, I gained a skill  
It enabled me to become a 'tramp telegrapher'  
Between 1863 and 1867, I traveled each day from city to city  
My job was to send telegraph messages through mid-America  
It was clear that people needed business tools and techniques  
That set me thinking, as I had a knack of making things work  
I liked taking machines to pieces and creating better methods  
When I was 19, I went to Louisville, to work for Western Union

On the night shifts, I experimented with batteries  
Acid spilt in the office from one effort and I was dismissed  
Therefore, in 1868 I went to Boston and tried my luck there  
Having lived an itinerant life, it was a new challenge in a new place  
Electricity fascinated me, and I invented an electric vote recorder  
Politicians did not want it though, and I was running out of money



Thomas Edison as a Telegraph Operator

In 1869, aged 22, I went to New York  
With no money, I was starving, but that day changed my life  
Like many others, I arrived in New York with hope  
Firstly, I was hoping to borrow some money  
Just enough to get me started, so that I could earn a living  
After that, maybe I could find good friends and fun  
At the time, I had no money  
Knowing only one person in the city, I went to see him  
He was surprised to see me  
After a few minutes, I asked if he could lend me some money  
'I'm unemployed,' he said  
'The most I can loan you is a dollar'  
Promising to pay him back, my first priority was a meal  
That raised my spirits and energy levels

Next, I went looking for a job  
Being desperate, any job would do  
In the business area, I talked with a few people  
One of them, Franklin Pope, was helpful  
On hearing about my telegraphic work, he showed me where he worked  
It was called The Gold Indicator Company  
That night, I was allowed to sleep in their battery room  
The next day, I studied how their machines worked  
They were state of the art, which I found fascinating  
On the third day, fortune smiled on me  
A machine sending information to the Gold Exchange stopped working  
Panic ensued when many people had to stop work  
Having studied the machine the previous day, I mended it  
Dr Samuel Laws, in the Exchange, heard of my work  
He offered me a job at 300 dollars a month to maintain the machines  
From rags to riches, all in a day, and I repaid my friend his loan  
It enabled me to learn more about the machines  
My work became known to General Lefferts  
He was the new President of the Gold & Stock Telegraph Company  
His business depended on the new machine-based technology  
When the machines broke, the stockbrokers lost thousands of dollars  
'Can you maintain the machines in good order?' he asked  
Being bold, I said, 'Yes sir, it would be a pleasure to do so'  
He wanted to know the cost of doing the job  
Should I ask for 5000 dollars a year, or settle for 3000?  
Not sure, I asked him to give me a figure that he thought was fair  
'I propose 40,000 dollars a year,' he said  
I thought I had misheard  
Trying not to look surprised, I shook his hand and accepted  
With that sum, I was able to send money to my parents  
In addition, technicians were hired to do research  
It was the start of my entrepreneurial career  
I had two shops, plus printing and auto-telegraphy inventions  
From poverty to prosperity  
Thus began my whirlwind life as an inventor  
Moving to New Jersey, my friendship with Franklin Pope developed  
He was a telegraph engineer, artist, patent attorney and writer  
We worked together, for many a happy hour on technical issues

He let me sleep in the basement of his house and encouraged me  
In 1869, we founded a company called Pope, Edison and Co  
We called ourselves 'electrical engineers', which was a new term  
Franklin Pope taught me the financial and legal aspects of innovation  
We set up The Financial and Commercial Telegraph Company  
Also, we established The American Printing Telegraph Company  
Mr Pope later became the first president of the professional body  
Although only 23 years of age, I took some bold decisions



Edison's New Jersey Workplace

In 1870, I established the Newark Telegraph Works in New Jersey  
With William Unger, it produced stock printers  
The Universal Stock Ticker was one of my first inventions  
Also, within a short period, I established another organization  
The American Telegraph Works developed the automatic telegraph  
It was a whirlwind time  
Then, great emotion came upon me  
My mother took ill and died in 1871  
The year before, I had met 16 year old Mary Stilwell

She had applied for a job and worked for my organization  
Within a short period of time, we were courting  
We married the next year and had three children  
Manion was born in 1873, Thomas in 1876, and William in 1878  
However, there was little time for me to be at home  
Ideas for new products kept flowing  
I invented the motograph, paraffin paper and carbon rheostat  
Also, the automatic telegraph system was in demand



A lot of energy was needed to convert the innovations into a business  
I raced ahead, to gain financial support for my inventions  
One was the quadruplex telegraph in 1874  
It could send four signal messages over the same wire  
In 1875, I discovered the 'etheric force'  
That research lead to wireless telegraphy  
It was a magic time, during which I also invented the electric pen  
It was necessary to expand and I sold some of my assets to gain cash  
With that, I was able to build a research site at Menlo Park in 1876  
The world's first dedicated industrial research production laboratory

My business empire expanded through the research  
The carbon telephone transmitter was invented there in 1877  
It was to be used in telephones for generations  
There was hardly time to sleep, as I raced forward  
Selecting and building my team of ‘mucker’ inventors was exciting  
Learning how to organize patents was a challenge  
Then, another great day, when I said, ‘Mary had a little lamb’  
My voice was replayed on the Phonograph  
We had invented a new product that millions of people wanted  
The recording and sale of music became a reality  
A new world of communication  
A newspaperman called me the ‘Wizard of Menlo Park’  
We also developed the Kinetograph for motion pictures  
But, the real challenge to me, was to change our world for the better  
Half of the time we lived in darkness, as sunlight met the night  
We knew about electricity, thanks to Faraday and others  
Yet, amazingly, we did not have a light bulb that worked  
After more than a thousand experiments, we found carbon filament  
This provided what we needed  
The magic of electric light was born  
A new age of light, electric power and economic improvement  
What a revolution in homes, hospitals, factories, offices, schools and life  
In 1878, I started the Edison Electric Light Co and had to learn quickly  
Major contracts to be managed, testing my organizational skills  
But, I wanted to continue with my inventions  
My workmates, ‘muckers’, as I called them, were with me  
Each a hero, testing, trialing and trying practical applications  
Hours and hours of hard work, and then a breakthrough  
In 1879, after testing hundreds of filaments, we found one that worked  
October 21st was the day we made the breakthrough  
William Hammer did great work in the development process  
The carbon filament incandescent light was born  
Even when the sun disappeared at night, we could have light  
The research led to the electric light  
Dynamos were improved, and the first electric motor was created  
Returning to New York, I arranged to set up lights in the street  
A power plant was built at Pearl Street Station, in lower Manhattan  
The first central power plant in the USA

On September 4th 1882, we lit up 400 lamps for 85 customers

What a night!

We celebrated in grand style, and then started work again

It was the start of a social, as well as technical, revolution

The beginning of the 24-7 lifestyle

New York was about to be transformed, and it gained a new name

‘The City That Never Sleeps’



Pearl Street, New York

I opened offices at 65 Fifth Avenue, and a new factory

New York had indeed been good to me

It was all due to my friend that lent me that dollar

One that was repaid with interest

A loan that changed both my life and the city of New York

Other cities wanted electric lights

Under Francis Upton's management, we produced 50,000 in one year

Distribution was via our Edison Electric Illuminating Company

We installed electric lights in cities for homes, hospitals, and business

It was also the start of our international business in Britain  
There we formed, with Joseph Swan, the Ediswan Company  
However, the first public building to have electric lamps was elsewhere  
The Mahen Theatre in Brno, Czech Republic had that honor  
In addition, in 1883, we established T. Edison Construction Inc  
The same year that we found incandescent materials emit electrons  
A phenomenon called the Edison Effect or thermionic emission  
Then, a sad day arrived that changed my life  
In 1884, my wife took ill and died from typhus  
In the days that followed, I thought about the situation  
I had three children and a colossal business to manage  
Stretched to the limit, I worked even harder  
However, fortune once more smiled upon me  
In 1886, aged 38, I met Mina Miller, aged 19  
We enjoyed each other's company  
She asked me to teach her the Morse code  
Before long we were more than good friends  
Tapping a code in her palm, I asked her to marry me  
Her reply on the back of my hand made me happy  
We started a family and had three children  
Madeleine in 1888, Charles in 1890 and Theodore 1898  
Therefore, I had teenagers and young babies to think about  
However, with my workaholic nature, I saw little of my family  
Mina became a good stepmother to my other children  
It enabled me to focus on technical innovation and business  
Larger business premises were acquired at West Orange  
With William Dickson, the kinetoscope was produced  
The start of the motion picture industry  
In 1892, I founded the General Electric Company  
Then, I formed the National Phonographic Company in 1896  
It was as if the world was revealing its secrets  
Such as the X-rays, which I worked on  
Invention, development and commercialization  
Those three words defined the process  
Hard work, every day and week  
New work began on radios and electric railways  
In the main, I developed the ideas, and my team made them work  
On average, I registered one patent every ten days

There were 1093 in total

One of them was the Edison battery, with an alkaline electrolyte

Many people contributed to the management and commercial success

This was only possible because I had companies to develop my ideas

One of them, the Portland Cement Company, led to building improvements

New houses and offices were developed

I continued to work when others of my age had retired

In 1913, another great day, when I synchronized sound to 'movie' films

Yet, it was also the year of the great fire

In all, 13 of our buildings were destroyed at West Orange

I woke my wife and said

'Look, you will never see another fire like this'

It required a lot of work to rebuild

But we did and I developed the Telescribe

It enabled telephone conversations to be recorded

However, problems elsewhere were far larger

The First World War in Europe had begun in 1914

My view was that it would be won by the best technology

The USA Government asked me to help them prepare

As Head of the Naval Consulting Board in 1915, I started work

Submarines would be a major new weapon in the war

Therefore, research was done on systems of defense

Overall, I had a whirlwind life based on my insatiable curiosity

People have asked how I did it

I said achievement is "1% inspiration and 99% perspiration"

Given my background, learning by doing was the only way

It was learning about people as much as technology

Learning about legal contracts and finance

Most of all, learning what customers needed and producing it

Active learning recorded in my 3400 diary entries

Notes on how my 'muckers' and I changed the world for the better.

# Thomas Edison

## Achievements

As a teenager, Thomas went to work on the railways. With a hearing disability, he had found learning at school difficult and his mother taught him what she knew at home. His life thereafter was one of learning from experience. He grew up in the 'school of hard knocks', often having to pick himself up when things seemed hopeless. For example, in his early 20s he arrived in New York with not even a dollar to his name. He borrowed one from a friend and spent it on a meal, then went in search of work. It was the start of his journey from rags to riches.

Thomas Edison was a prolific inventor. He gained 1093 US patents, plus others in the UK and mainland Europe. He developed and implemented electric-power generation and distribution to homes, businesses, and factories. In doing so, he changed the lives of people in many ways. Electric power and lights made it possible to do business 24 hours a day. Production and productivity improved. Hospitals were transformed and patients were saved by new technology and medical skills. In homes, candles disappeared. Edison helped change work and social living conditions.

Thomas formed many organizations, some of which have changed their names. Firstly, Edison General Electric, merged with General Electric (GE).

Commonwealth Edison, Consolidated Edison and Edison International were all major companies. Edison Mission Energy and Edison Capital, as well as Detroit Edison, are also examples of major organizations bearing his name. Likewise, regional organizations in California and, Ohio, New York and other states bear his name.

## Recognition

Success in business provides recognition in various ways. As mentioned, many of the companies Thomas formed bore his surname. Many people wanted to be associated with him and he was invited as an honoured guest to various public and private functions. Journalists began to realize that he was an important man in creating employment and wealth. Therefore, many stories were written about his business leadership. He was known in the

media as the ‘Wizard of Menlo Park’; Menlo Park being where he established his research centre in the early days.

On the international stage, Edison was honoured and won the Matteucci Medal. In 1890, he was elected a member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences.

The Edison Medal was created on February 11<sup>th</sup> 1904, by a group of Edison’s friends and associates. Later, the IEEE professional entered into an agreement with the group to present the medal as its highest award. It is presented annually “for a career of meritorious achievement in electrical science, electrical engineering or the electrical arts.”

Several places have been named after Edison, most notably the town of Edison, New Jersey. Three bridges around the United States have been named in his honour. The Edison State Park near the city of Edison in New Jersey is named after him. Also, the Edison Memorial Tower is at Christie Street and Route 27, near the Metropark Railway Station

Thomas Edison State College is a nationally-known college for adult learners, in Trenton, New Jersey. Two community colleges are named for him: in Fort Myers, Florida, and Piqua, Ohio. There are numerous high schools named after Edison.

The USA Navy named the *USS Edison* (DD – 439) in Thomas’ honour during 1940. In 1962, the Navy commissioned *USS Thomas Edison*, a fleet ballistic missile nuclear-powered submarine.

To mark the contribution of Thomas Edison, in 1928 the USA Congress voted him a special medal of honour. 55 years later, in 1983, the USA Congress decided that Edison’s birthday, February 11<sup>th</sup>, would be called National Inventors Day.

The American Society of Mechanical Engineers started the Thomas A. Edison Patent Award for individual patents in the year 2000. In Florida, the Edison Festival of Light is in its 71<sup>st</sup> year celebrating his spirit of innovation and encouraging others. The Thomas Edison National Historical Park is at Main Street, West Orange, New Jersey.

## The Author

Dr Charles Margerison is a Chartered Psychologist, a member of the Royal Institution and the Royal Society of Literature. He is Chairman of Viewpoint Resources Ltd, a publishing organization and the founder of the Amazing People Club. Previously, he was Professor of Management at the University of Cranfield, UK and also at the University of Queensland, Australia. He is the co-founder of Team Management Systems and the Chairman of Bell Hughes Music Group.



The author of more than ten books on management issues, he has also written an innovative continuing professional development system, called *The Communication and Problem Solving Resource*. This provides the educational support resources for the use of the Amazing People Series in schools and colleges.

The Amazing People Club Series commenced when Dr Margerison wondered what people like William Shakespeare, Marie Curie, Abraham Lincoln, and other great achievers would have said if he had interviewed them about their life and work. Therefore, he decided to research the known facts about their lives and write up what he thought they would say. In particular, he focussed on the psychological issues associated with their personalities and how they used their time and talents well in order to achieve. The stories give us an insight into their motivation and relationships with other people.

This unique range of stories is presented via a new concept called BioViews® that combines a biography with a virtual interview. The stories are an interpretation of the lives of amazing people, as in a theatre play. Each one is presented as if the person is talking to you personally. Every line of a BioView® has a meaning that provides a fact or an interpretation, or raises a question. There are no full stops, as in traditional writing, except at the end. The intention is to create the flow of conversation as in an interview.

BioViews® offer new and interesting ways of understanding major contributions to our world by amazing people. The stories are inspirational and we hope they can help you achieve your ambitions in your own journey through life.

# Amazing People Club Team

The following have contributed to the current publications of the Amazing People Club for which we express our appreciation.

- - -

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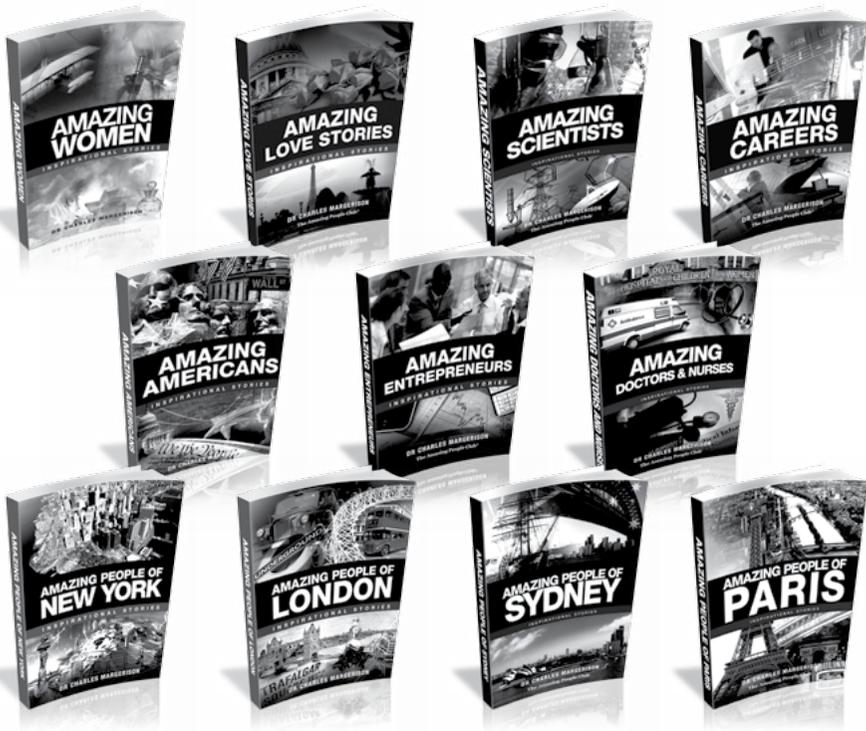
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