



Smithsonian
National Museum of American History
Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the Thomas Alva Edison Photoprints

NMAH.AC.0299

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October 2000

Archives Center, National Museum of American History
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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	Thomas Alva Edison Photoprints
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.0299
Date:	1890s-1933
Extent:	0.67 Cubic feet (2 boxes)
Creator:	Keystone View Company Shinn, Walter Scott Underwood & Underwood, Inc. Fotograms (New York (N.Y.)) International Newsreel Corp (New York (N.Y.)) ETL Testing Laboratories, Inc.
Language:	English
Digital Content:	Image(s): Arthur Williams, Thomas A. Edison, John W. Lieb, Nicholas F. Brady and Thomas E. Murray in office of Mr. Murray [photoprint]

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Collection donated by ETL Testing Laboratories in 1985.

Provenance

These photographs were found in the archives of ETL Testing Laboratories and were donated to NMAH by the firm in 1985. Dr. Bernard S. Finn, curator of electricity at the museum, made arrangements for the gift. The posed nature of most of the photographs suggests that they were made for publicity purposes. ETL Testing Laboratories, Inc., is a New York testing and certification laboratory which was created in 1896 by Edison's companies for the purpose of testing electric lamps.

Transferred from the Division of Electricity to the Archives Center on February 17, 1988.

Processing Information

Processed by David E. Haberstick, archivist, 1988.

Some of these photographs are fragile, with tears, ragged edges, etc. Many have labels and captions glued to the verso of the prints and should be inspected periodically. Until additional conservation measures and rehousing have been conducted, the photographs should be handled with great care. Eventually it may be useful to remove the labels from the prints; before this occurs it would be advisable to expand the Container List into an item-level list with complete transcriptions of all the labels. This work was underway at the time of this revision.

Due to the fragile nature of the original photographic prints, use of the xerographic copies in Series 2 for browsing purposes is encouraged.

Preferred Citation

Edison Photographs, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

Collection items available for reproduction, but the Archives Center makes no guarantees concerning copyright restrictions. Other intellectual property rights may apply. Archives Center cost-recovery and use fees may apply when requesting reproductions.

Most images probably public domain due to expired copyrights.

Biographical / Historical

Photographs cover Edison's later life, beginning in his early 50's and continuing until his death in 1931 at age 84. Edison with an electric car: the car is a 1914 Detroit Electric Brougham model 47, serial number 5426. It was shipped December 19, 1913 to East Orange New Jersey, with an Edison Battery but with no motor (very unusual) (according to Galen Handy, 2/09/07; see <http://earlyelectric.com>).

Dr. Bernard Finn, Curator of Electricity, National Museum of American History organized a traveling exhibition based on these and other photographs (most supplied by the Edison National Historic Site), "[Edison After the Electric Light: The Challenge of Success](#)," in 1986; it was circulated by the Association of Science-Technology Centers. In 1994 a revised version of the exhibition was prepared (again curated by Dr. Finn) for display in the National Museum of American History basement photography gallery; it was retitled "Edison After Forty: The Challenge of Success." In 1996, copies of the exhibit were given to museums in Japan, India, Yugoslavia, and China for circulation in those countries. Another version of this compilation had been published as "Thomas Alva Edison After Forty: The Challenge of Success in USA Today, July 1994, pp. 84-92.

Biographical / Historical

One of the most famous of all Americans in any walk of life, Thomas Alva Edison hardly needs an introduction. He was the quintessential "genius" who invented or perfected a variety of electrical and technological devices which are still fundamental features of everyday life, not only in the United States, but around the world. Many of his or his companies' "inventions," of course, built on the pioneering work of others. Another Archives Center collection, the Gordon Hendricks Collection, includes the efforts of one scholar to debunk or minimize Edison's personal role in the development of motion picture cameras and projectors.

Edison was born in Milan, Ohio, February 11, 1847, and died October 18, 1931 at 84 years of age. His Edison Electric Light Company was the predecessor of the General Electric Co. While operating this company, and later working at laboratories in Menlo Park and West Orange, New Jersey, he was credited with patents for over one thousand inventions. A bibliography follows.

Scope and Contents

This collection is divided into two series: (a) Silver gelatin prints; and (b) xerographic copy prints made in the museum. The collection consists of approximately 340 photoprints (count to be verified) documenting the life of Thomas Alva Edison, especially the later period, beginning in his early fifties, continuing until his death in 1931 at age 84 (there are also later pictures, including his funeral, and awards and sculptures). The photographs are arranged chronologically and are clearly captioned with pasted labels containing dates, places, notations of circumstances and identification of persons. These photoprints show Edison, his family (including his wife and son Charles), friends, associates, and famous persons, including Charles Proteus Steinmetz, Henry Ford, Harvey Firestone, George Eastman, Charles Lindbergh, and Presidents Harding, Coolidge and Hoover, including scenes in New Jersey, Florida, Michigan, and other locations.

Some photographers' rubber stamps appear on the verso of prints. Photographers, studios, and agencies include Fotograms, Underwood & Underwood, Keystone View Co., International Newsreels Photos, and Walter Scott Shinn.

Many of the photographs are not original prints, but were made from copy negatives. Such copies, where fairly obvious, are identified in the Container List. Photographs are clearly captioned with dates, places, occasion and persons identified. More than 300 photoprints show Edison, his family, friends, associates, and famous persons, including Henry Ford, Harvey Firestone, George Eastman, Charles Lindbergh and Presidents Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover. Locations include New Jersey, Florida, Michigan. Photographers, studios, and agencies include Fotograms, Underwood & Underwood, Keystone View Co., International Newsreels Photos, and Walter Scott Shinn.

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Arrangement

Collection is arranged into two series.

Series 1: Silver Gealtin Prints

Series 2: Xerographic Copy Prints

Bibliography

Israel, Paul. *Edison, A Life of Invention*. John Wiley, 1998. Recent and comprehensive.

Dyer, Frank, and Martin, T.C. *Edison, A Biography*. McGraw-Hill, 1959. The first modern researched biography; economic emphasis.

Wachhurst, Wynn. *Thomas Alva Edison, The Biography of a Myth*. MIT Press, 1981. Interesting study of the development of Edison's reputation.

Friedel, Robert; Israel, Paul; and Finn, Bernard. *Edison's Electric Light: Biography of an Invention*. Rutgers University Press, 1987. The definitive account of that invention.

Pretzer, William, ed. *Working at Inventing: Thomas A. Edison and the Menlo Park Experience*. Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village, 1989. Compendium of articles about Edison at Menlo Park.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Automobiles -- 1910-1920

Electricity -- 1900-1930

Inventions -- 1900-1930

Inventors -- 1900-1950

Presidents -- United States

Types of Materials:

Photographs -- 1900-1950

Names:

Coolidge, Calvin, President, 1872-1933 -- Photographs

Eastman, George

Edison, Thomas A. (Thomas Alva), 1847-1931

Ford, Henry -- Photographs

Harding, Warren G. (Warren Gamaliel), 1865-1923

Hoover, Herbert, President, 1874-1964 -- Photographs

Lindbergh, Charles A. (Charles Augustus), 1902-1974

Container Listing

Series 1: Silver Gelatin Prints, 1900 - 1933

8" x 10" or smaller, unmounted unless otherwise noted

Subseries 1.1: Item list with transcriptions of pasted captions, 1900-1914

29 Items

Box 1, Folder 1-29

Note: original count. 28. Studio portraits; with Firestone, Ford, and John Burroughs; in library; in laboratory; sailing for Europe; in car in Budapest; with Charles Proteus Steinmetz.

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| Box 1, Folder 1 | Edison standing, by Underwood & Underwood (stamp on verso) |
| Box 1, Folder 2 | "About 1900 / Fort Myers, Florida, ...Edison on his Florida estate. Underwood & Underwood stamp on verso. Pencil: "158449" |
| Box 1, Folder 3 | Edison bust portrait. "About 1900..." Brown Bros. stamps on verso |
| Box 1, Folder 4 | TAE seated in chair, holding book. "1900..." Rubber stamp on verso: International News Photographs, Inc., 235 East 45th Street, New York City. Pencil on verso: 410913 |
| Box 1, Folder 5 | TAE seated holding hat and cigar. "West Orange, N.J., About 1900 / ...Edison in his fifties." Keystone View Co. stamp on verso |
| Box 1, Folder 6 | "1900 / Left to Right: Henry Ford; Harvey Firestone, ...Edison, Unknown, and John Burroughs." (Standing in field.) Underwood & Underwood stamp on verso; "No. 292158" |
| Box 1, Folder 7 | "Camping party, Green Island / About 1900 / Thomas a Edison on camping trip with, left to right, first H. S. Firestone, Jr., Harvey Firestone, ...Edison, John Burroughs, Mayor Watt, Henry Ford, Hokes and Scott". Probably a copy. Brown Brothers rubber stamp on verso |
| Box 1, Folder 8-9 | Edison with hands in pockets, two prints from same negative (from copy negative?), one trimmed more closely. Larger print includes "Falk / Photo / N.Y." at lower left. Captions "1904" and "About 1904." Brown Brothers rubber stamp on verso of one |
| Box 1, Folder 10 | "1905." Edison working at desk, with bookshelf and calendar on wall. Text in negative (prints white, lower right): "...Edison / Copyright 1905 by / Irving Underhill, New York / B7064." Pencil on verso: 65444-3 |
| Box 1, Folder 11 | Copy of painting of Edison, seated with cigar. "About 1907..." |
| Box 1, Folder 12 | Men seated at table, one standing in back. Probably from copy neg. "1908 / Arthur Williams, ...Edison, John W. Lieb, / Nicholas F. Brady and Thomas E. Murray in office / or [sic] Mr. Murray". Pencil on verso: 65455 |

[Image\(s\)](#)

Arthur Williams, Thomas A. Edison, John W. Lieb, Nicholas F. Brady and Thomas E. Murray in office of Mr. Murray [photoprint], 1908
1 Item (9.0" x 10.1")

[Image\(s\)](#)

ETL Testing Laboratories, Inc., Donor
In box 1, folder 28 or 12.

Unrestricted research use by appointment. Photographs must be handled with cotton gloves unless protected by sleeves.

Silver gelatin on paper.

Local Numbers

AC0299-0000001 (AC Scan)

Names: Edison, Thomas A. (Thomas Alva), 1847-1931
Topic: Inventors
Genre/ Form: Photographs -- 1900-1950 -- Black-and-white photoprints -- Silver gelatin

- Box 1, Folder 13 3 images on one sheet. "1910 / Left: ...Edison / Right: Form for concrete house / Below: Finished house". On verso: Underwood & Underwood stamp; pencil numbers 268466; 268464; 268465
- Box 1, Folder 14 Edison's head only, background masked or opaqued out. "About 1910..." International News Photos stamp and 35921 in pencil on verso
- Box 1, Folder 15 "About 1910 / ...Edison sitting in his library" at rolltop desk. International News Photos stamp and B3409i [?] in pencil on verso
- Box 1, Folder 16 "About 1910 / ...Edison in his Laboratory", probably from copy neg. International News Photos stamp on verso
- Box 1, Folder 17 "...Edison posed in his library / 1910?" (standing). International News Photos stamp and B3409g in pencil on verso
- Box 1, Folder 18 "About 1911. / ...Edison in his laboratory" (from copy negative). Underwood & Underwood stamp on verso
- Box 1, Folder 19 "1911 / A picture of ...Edison taken in Florida." Pencil on verso: 63049
- Box 1, Folder 20 "1911 / Peter Cooper Hewitt and ...Edison on / board the S.S. Mauretania outbound for England."
- Box 1, Folder 21 "Budapest, Hungary, 1911. / Left to right: Mr. Etienne de Fodor; Mrs. Edison, Mr. Alexander de Stromszky, Mr. ...Edison" (outside Savoy)
- Box 1, Folder 22 "...Edison sailing for Europe / 1911" (from copy negative). Brown Bros. stamp on verso

- Box 1, Folder 23 "Budapest, Hungary, 1911. / Seated: Mrs. Edison, Mr. ...Edison, Mr. Alexander de / Stromszky. Standing: Mr. Etienne de Fodor" (in "Protos"? car)
- Box 1, Folder 24 "Budapest, Hungary, 1911. / Left to right: Mr. Etienne de Fodor; Mrs. Edison, Mr. Alexander / de Stromszky, Mr. ...Edison" (outside Savoy)
- Box 1, Folder 25 "1912. / Charles P. Steinmetz and ...Edison (Man at right unknown)" (from copy neg.). Pencil on verso: 63119
- Box 1, Folder 26 "1912 / Charles P. Steinmetz and ...Edison". Pencil on verso: 63122
- Box 1, Folder 27 "...Edison and Secretary Daniels / boarding the dreadnaught [sic] (1914)" (from copy neg.) International News Photos stamp and pencil 1939 [?] on verso
- Box 1, Folder 28 "...Edison viewing aerial wire- / less apparatus on board the dread- / naught New York at the Brooklyn / Navy Yard on October 10, 1914". International News Photos stamp on verso. Number 19934 in pencil on verso and in ink on negative
- Box 1, Folder 29 "...Edison at his home in West / Orange, N. J., taken December, 1914". International News Photos stamp and pencil number 21998 on verso

Subseries 1.2: Folder-Level Summaries with Highlights of Contents, 1915 - 1933

- Folder 2, Item 1-26 1915-1917
26 Items
"At control of his first storage battery car"; with family; in laboratory; taking nap in laboratory; posing for movie camera; holding recording cylinder; inspecting portable searchlight; at Panama Pacific Exposition; on birthday with cake in storage battery warehouse.
- Folder 3, Item 1-31 1918-1920
31 Items
Includes portraits by Walter Scott Shinn, incl. portraits of Edison with daughter and grandchild; Edison with Luther Burbank; pictures from Brown Brothers; Keystone View Co.; Underwood & Underwood; etc.
- Folder 4, Item 1-40 1921-1924
40 Items
Ford, Edison, Harding and Firestone camping; portraits by Bachrach; Edison in his laboratory; Edison with Steinmetz; Edison with Coolidge; Edison with Coolidge and movie camera.
- Folder 5, Item 1-36 1925-1926
36 Items
Portraits by Underwood & Underwood; Edison with monument and bronze tablet.
- Folder 6, Item 1-38 1926-1927

38 Items

Incl.: Edison driving; listening to phonograph; with auto camper's trunk; with locomotive; with Henry Ford.

Folder 7, Item 1-40

1927-1928

40 Items

Edison with son Charles; with Gov. Harry Moore (New Jersey); Herbert Hoover; writing name in wet concrete; opening baseball game.

Folder 8, Item 1-37

1929

37 Items

Portrait by Eugene Hutson; with Hoover; with Ford; with Lindbergh; congratulating scholarship winner.

Folder 9, Item 1-34

1929-1930

34 Items

With Charles Schwab and Adolph Ochs; Harvey Firestone; with giant birthday card; receiving honorary degree; with Supreme Court justice Owen J. Roberts.

Folder 10, Item 1-30

1930-1933

30 Items

With 1930 scholarship winner; with Charles Lindbergh; opening new bridge; waiting for train; funeral, including tributes and procession; unveiling of bronze plaque to Edison at Roxy Theatre; sculptures of Edison.

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Series 2: Xerographic Copy Prints, 1900 - 1933

Description ("Vol." nos. are equivalent to folder nos. in Series 1)

(Consult to locate Smithsonian copy negative numbers, 88-10810 to 88-11155)

Box 2, Folder 1	Volumes, 1-2, 1900-1917
Box 2, Folder 2	Volumes, 3-4, 1918-1924
Box 2, Folder 3	Volumes, 5-6, 1925-1927
Box 2, Folder 4	Volumes, 7-8, 1927-1929
Box 2, Folder 5	Volumes, 9-10, 1929-1933

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