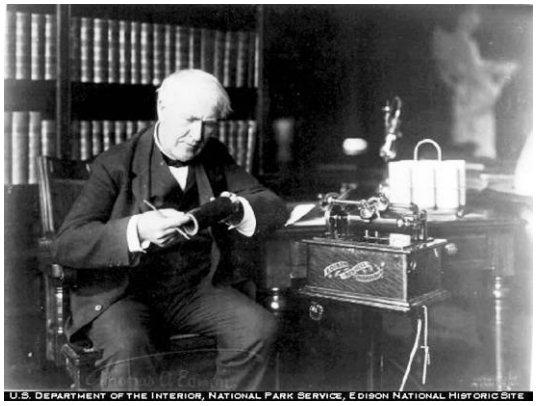
Article by Michael Miller, PES Regional Representative for Regions 1 & 2

Thomas A. Edison recognized in IEEE Milestone Event

The North Jersey Section sponsored an IEEE Milestone on the 77th anniversary to Edison's death in 1931 on Saturday, October 18th, 2008.



The event commemorating the West Orange, NJ, laboratories and factories was attended by more than 60 members and dignitaries of the West Orange Township, NJ, municipality and the IEEE. The event began with a tour of Edison's Glenmont estate courtesy of the National Park Service.

In 1886 Thomas Edison bought Glenmont as a gift for his bride, Mina Miller. After moving in, Edison said that the 23-room Victorian mansion was"a great deal too nice for me, but it isn't half nice enough for my little wife."

Mina was only 20 at the time and assumed responsibility for Edison's three children and running the estate of 13½ acres with a total of six full time staff. The Edisons and their children often used the grounds for sports and games, to entertain visitors, and to relax on the estate that Thomas Edison called home for 44 years. In the back are the graves of Thomas and Mina. The dedication program included both a tour of the estate with historic home, garage, green house as well as the dedication.

After the tour we proceeded to the West Orange Township, NJ, Municipal Building for a welcome by Kirit Dixit, IEEE North Jersey Chairman followed by opening remarks from the Honorable John F. McKeon, State Assemblyman and Mayor of West Orange Township, NJ. Mayor McKeon spoke on the dedication of the West Orange Laboratories to recognize this important citizen of the township as being of cultural, inventive, scientific, and engineering significance along with establishing a commercial factory enterprise which provided hundreds of jobs for the citizens of West Orange and still continues to attract numerous tourists to the area. Having a personality of such magnitude within the boarders of your town gives many occasions for educational activities, scientific adventure, civic gatherings, and other events. Mayor McKeon was instrumental in allowing the placement of the milestone on the lawn of the Township Municipal Building when it was determined that it could not be placed on the National Park Site. The next speaker on the program was Carl Sulzberger, IEEE History Committee Milestone Coordinator who spoke eloquently and at length on the two year process of obtaining milestone status

for the work of Thomas Alva Edison in West Orange, NJ. IEEE Milestones in Electrical Engineering and Computing is a program that honors significant achievements in electrical, electronic, and computer engineering and the associated sciences. Milestones recognize the technological innovation and excellence for the benefit of humanity found in unique products, services, seminal papers and patents. The program is administered for the IEEE History Committee by the IEEE History Center. Each milestone recognizes a significant achievement in an area of technology represented in IEEE and having at least regional impact. To date, over 80 Milestones have been approved and dedicated around the world. This milestone was number 82. The Keynote address was given by Dr. Paul Israel, Director,

Edison Paper's Project, Rutgers University and author of the book Edison: A Life of Invention. Edison, Israel argues, was not only an educated tinkerer and genius, but the creator of the prototype for the modern corporate research lab. He stressed his two major inventions the phonograph and light bulb that catapulted him to financial wealth in addition he knew how to find talent, how

to organize it to get the most out of people, how to beat competition by both speed and the creation of entire new systems of technology. Edison knew how to manipulate the media and build on his fame, creating a myth to which he had to live up. That being said, he had a pitch-perfect intuitive sense not only of potential new markets, but of how to create technical solutions to exploit them. He learned from his failures and strove to apply his less-successful inventions elsewhere, often to great effect. Taken together, this was a true business genius and Israel explained it all succinctly, including the exposure of Edison's many weaknesses in management, his family, and his financial affairs. Some of his many flops nearly bankrupted him. His presentation was a masterpiece of scholarship, a plethora of different disciplines articulated in prose and good storytelling. Region 1 Director elect, Charles Rubenstein, had the honor to present Mr. Lewis Terman, IEEE President and CEO who indicate that the IEEE is not just concerned with past excellence; but more geared to the future: 125 years of Engineering the Future.

Terman, an IEEE Fellow, has been active as an IEEE volunteer and member for almost 50 years. A member of the IEEE Board of Directors, Terman has been involved with the IEEE Awards Board for over three decades, and served as chair of the presentation and publicity committee in 2005. He also has served as special issue guest editor of four IEEE publications. Retiring from IBM's Research

Division in 2006 after 45 years, Terman currently holds the title of IBM Research Emeritus. He stressed the global aspect of the IEEE and its broad spectrum of involvement, not only in Engineering and Electronics; but in all areas of related fields including computers, design, concept, trade, production, etc. He stressed that in these financially stressed times the future lies in new engineering and electronic concepts that can bring a world of new inventions to us in a way similar to what Edison did. Finally, to complete an inspiring afternoon the IEEE milestone plaque was unveiled the following citation was read:

"Thomas A. Edison West Orange Laboratories and Factories, 1887

From the left: Carl Sulzberger, Warner Johnston, Lewis Terman, Kirit Dixit, Charles Rubenstein, & Robert Pellegrino

Thomas Alva Edison, a West Orange resident from 1886 until his death in 1931, established his final and most comprehensive laboratory and factory complex about one-half mile (0.8 km) north of here in 1887. Edison's visionary combination in one organization of basic and applied research, development, and manufacturing became the prototype for industrial enterprises worldwide. Work here resulted in more than half of Edison's 1,093 patents."

On the right: Howard Leach, Jr., Historian, IEEE North Jersey Section