

Edison Invention Factory
West Orange, New Jersey
7/14/98

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
Edison National Historic Site
West Orange, New Jersey
July 14, 1998

Thank you, thank you very much. I couldn't help but thinking as I sit here on the platform, watching all of you fan yourselves and seek some shade that this day gave entirely new meaning to one of Edison's famous comments that, "Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration." I think that it is especially applicable today as we celebrate all that Thomas Edison has meant to our country, and to technology, and to the future as well, as the past. I want to thank Elizabeth Sloane and Nancy Miller Arnn, who are descendants representing the Thomas Edison family. I want to thank Congressman William Pascrell for being with us and for caring about historic preservation. Mayor John McKeon and the West Orange Town Council who sits here in the front row with their children.

I think what has already been said from this platform is true that not only is Thomas Edison being honored today but the hundreds and thousands of people who live right in this community who make such a difference to help America develop and what our possibilities became. I want to thank everyone associated with the Park Service, particularly Robert Stanton, the Park Service's Director, Marie Rust. Bob Stanton was the Park Service Supervisor in charge of the capital region for a number of years and was there when the President and I moved into the White House. You may not know that the White House is dependant upon the Park Service because the grounds are cared for by the Park Service and we got to know Bob Stanton through that. We are delighted that someone who started out as a ranger at Grand Teton National Park is now the director of the Park Service. I also want to acknowledge State Senator Richard Cody who is here with us today. And is see and old friend of my husband and I, former Governor Brendon Burn, and I thank you for being here, Governor Burn. We also have representatives from the National Park Foundation, including its board and President, John Maddy. Also I believe former Mayor of Newark Kent Gibson is here, and I'm delighted he could be here as well as former Mayor Sam Spurna. There are representatives from other business corporations: The Main Street Development Corporation.

All of us are gathered here because of the significance of this announcement, and what it means, not only for this community, and even for this state, but for our entire country and I would argue even for the rest of the world. As we went through this incredible invention factory that Thomas Edison built here, I became more and more excited about what the possibilities are of taking this particular park service site and making it more accessible to people, enabling students to come here and learn and be inspired by what happened here so many years ago. The creativity and scientific discovery, the application of the technology that were created here by Thomas Edison and his team of people really put America's business in technological development on the road to the future.

The future is created every day, the future is not something that is out there waiting to happen to us. The future is something that we make, every one of us in our private and public and professional capacities are always making the future. Certainly it is imperative that we remember where we came from, and that we reflect upon those values and lessons in order for us to carry with us into the present and then to help make the future based on what has worked and what is the best of the past. And that is why we want to say a special word of appreciation today to General Electric, and particularly to its Chairman and CEO Jack Wells, because as you've already heard, Thomas Edison was one of the real creative geniuses, not only of America's history, but of the entire world history. *Life* magazine is surveying the last one-thousand years, the millennium preceding the one that will turn in just a few years, included that of all the people who influenced how we live today, Thomas Edison was the most important.

Now just stop and think about that for a minute, think about all the men and women, the military leaders, the political leaders, the artistic leaders, the religious leaders, the scientific and creative leaders who have lived and worked in the last thousand years. And yet based on a survey of experts from all fields, Thomas Edison was chosen as the most important person of the last thousand years. Now that to me is almost breathtaking because we take so much for granted about what he did here at this invention factory.

The millions of documents and artifacts and machine pieces that fill this park service site have been endangered of deteriorating, being damaged beyond repair. Why? If you look around you there is so much that goes on here, there's ten buildings. I just went through one of them, into his library, and then up to one of the workshop areas, and yet I can see how much there is to be preserved, if we are to remember how this man, who some believe is the most important contributor to what we call modern civilization, lived and worked. From this place where genius was transformed into invention, we find that Thomas Edison never stopped thinking and working. And we can see all around us the results of that effort. Now when he died, his staff promptly sealed his death. They understood that they had worked with someone of great genius. They understood that, in this place, so much of what we now enjoy, in terms of progresses and advances, first took thought and then were put into action.

When *Life* magazine names Thomas Edison as their person of the Millennium, they said that the dramatic changes in our political, social, and economic life, are in large part driven by changes in technology. Just think of that for a minute. Think about what the computer is doing to us today. And then think back to how so much of what Edison did literally changed the face of how we live. It's incredible to think that here with a few dozen other "mockers," as he called his colleagues, Edison created the model of the modern research and development lab that we see at GE and around the country. Today, all told, we spend more than 200 billion dollars a year on research and development. But in many respects, those investments today started with Thomas Edison. Because we benefit from the technological advances he made, we also might forget how really innovative he was in the way he used that technology. These weren't just inventions to sit on a shelf somewhere, they were inventions to be translated into the everyday lives of people. They became a part of how we lived in our homes and what our popular culture was meant like.

I just recently, an hour or so ago, made a wax recording, speaking into the large megaphone that Edison invented...And had to shout into the megaphone and this wax cylinder was turning and my voice was being recorded. And then the engineer and ranger who were supervising it, played it back for me. I must confess, I did not know about wax cylinder recordings. I knew about old-fashioned phonographs with big old records, my grandfather had one of those. So I brought to show you, and particularly for the children, what is the precursor of the CD. Edison Gold Molded Records echoed all over the world and if you were, in about 1910 or 1912, interested in having music in your home and you were lucky enough to afford one of these wax cylinder phonographs, and maybe you had a particular favorite. This one that I picked is song called, "When a Peach in Georgia Weds....etc," by Hart and James. You would go and you would buy this container with this wax cylinder and you would take it home and put it on your phonograph. Now we know this wax cylinder became a record. We know the record became a CD. We don't know exactly what comes next.

I think it's important for all of us to recognize that the technology we live with today did not just happen, that there was a lot of hard work and inspiration behind every one of these inventions. That is one of the reasons why the President and I have chosen to focus on saving America's treasures and looking toward the past and encouraging Americans to share all the ideas that we have drawn from the past to carry with us into the future. We want to be sure that Americans in future generations are able to come here and appreciate what Thomas Edison did. We hope that young boys and girls will come here ...as I've heard stories from engineers in the last day... who came here as children and were inspired by what they saw and learned here to think about what they could invent and add to the progress that human kind made.

So I want to thank all of you who have been apart of the announcement today. And I want to ask you to think with us about other ways we can give gifts to the future as we move towards the change of the century and the new millennium. Yesterday the President and I stood beneath the Star Spangled Banner at the Smithsonian to celebrate another wonderful gift from another American corporation and individual. And I thought then how lucky we were that brave people with confidence who had enough faith in our country in 1814 that when the great British empire was bombarding Baltimore, they were sure that we would last through the night. And indeed we did and Francis Scott Key immortalized that moment.

Well today, I'm also feeling very fortunate to be one of those people among all of us as Americans who have benefitted from the work done here. Not holding off the bombardment on one night in September in 1814, but day after day and year after year thinking of new ways to improve lives for people. Giving people more opportunities to enjoy their luxuries and their time with listening to music at home and changing the way we live together.

As I leave here, I'll be going on to other sites -- perhaps not as well known as Edison's invention factory or the Star Spangled Banner -- but each which represents a contribution to America's history, and I argue, to America's present and future. Because if we keep in mind where we came from, as we move into this new century together, then I'm convinced we'll have

the same confidence that the American troops did in Fort McHenry, holding off that bombardment. And we'll have the same energy, creativity, and know how that Edison and his team did... here, creating the kind of technology that has fueled America's drive to economic leadership throughout this century. So that is what Save America's Treasures is all about. It's not about just putting something on the shelf and admiring it. It's about taking it off the shelf, learning how it works and applying it day in and day out so that we can keep faith with those who came before us and contribute to an even stronger and more confident America in the future.

Thank you all for making that a reality.