Editorial Policy

This book edition of Thomas Edison's papers provides the scholar and the general reader with definitive transcriptions of documents that unveil the man's personality, technical creativity, and business efforts. Introductory headnotes and annotations establish the context within which these documents were created, including the family and immediate associates who sustained him, the technical and financial communities that supported and challenged him, and the society and culture that stimulated and unleashed his technical and innovative energies. It is recognized that despite Edison's promethean achievements, his inventions, business adventures, and personal relations were not always unblemished successes as measured by the values of his day or ours. In preparing this edition of his papers, therefore, the editors are selecting documents that represent the full range of his activities—his triumphs and his failures.

Selection

This edition will finally include nearly 7,000 documents, a significant portion of which Edison himself created. The editors are selecting from three and a half million pages of extant Edison-related materials: incoming, outgoing, and third-party correspondence; laboratory notes and drawings; patent materials; legal and litigation records; and financial accounts. They are also selecting drawings and artifacts, because these materials provide critical evidence of visual-spatial thinking, an important dimension of creative technical thinking and design. Accordingly, these artifacts and drawings are treated as independent documents, in a manner parallel to the treatment
of traditional verbal documents. For the period covered in Volume 1, the editors have included every entry from Edison's Newark laboratory notebooks. Aided by the editors' annotations, the interested reader can reconstruct the notebooks. In cases where the meaning of a notebook entry is dependent on a previous or following entry, the first endnote to the dependent entry directs the reader to the related document.

This first volume covers Edison's boyhood and early career, a period for which there are relatively few extant documents. For this reason, the initial volume contains about 90 percent of the known Edison-related materials (about 50 percent if one includes accounting records). The editors have diligently sought records relating to Edison, his family, and the settings in which he grew up and worked as a young telegraph operator and inventor-entrepreneur. They discovered small caches of previously unknown Edison documents in this country and in England, and also found Edison publications and related notices in obscure telegraph journals. Because of the paucity of extant Edison documents for the period of his childhood and early career, the editors have selected for this volume a small number of third-party materials that illuminate such matters as the nature of the curriculum in a school he attended, public notices of his activities, and published references to his publications or inventions. In addition, the editors have systematically searched numerous retrospective sources and have used for annotation the important information they provide regarding Edison's formative years. One of these sources is the collection of Edison's autobiographical notes that he prepared in 1908 and 1909 for Frank Dyer and Thomas Martin's biography of Edison. These notes are presented at the end of this volume, in Appendix 1. Another source is the extensive collection of Edison's late nineteenth and early twentieth century correspondence that relates to the Edison family in Milan and Port Huron and to his itinerant years. Included among these sources are a significant number of letters by Edison himself, in which he reflected upon people and events pertinent to his early years. This manuscript material and related published works are discussed in Appendix 2.

Thomas Edison obtained 1,093 U.S. patents (and many more from nearly two dozen foreign countries), the largest number ever issued to an individual by the U.S. Patent Office. Clearly, these documents could not be reproduced in their totality in this edition. However, a complete set of Edison's U.S. patents is included on reels 1 and 2 of the microfilm edition.
of the Edison Papers. The issued patents that Edison executed during the period covered by this volume are listed in Appendix 4. Other patent application materials are cited, where pertinent, in the editors' annotations to the documents.

The editors have not provided a comprehensive calendar of Edison documents. The vastness of the archive made preparation of such an aid unfeasible. The editors have, however, included in their annotations references to relevant documents in the microfilm edition. These references are indicated by the acronym TAEM. Thus, the book edition may serve as an entrée into the microfilm edition, just as the latter may serve as an entrée into the archives.

Organization

The documents in this edition are organized in chronological order. The editors chose chronological rather than subject or document-type organization in order to maximize the historical understanding of Edison's work and to eliminate the need for multiple publication of the same document. Edison generally pursued several projects at one time, and often they were technologically interrelated. With chronological organization the juxtaposition of documents from different projects reveals the interconnectedness of the technical work and the significance of its historical context. A subject approach would have isolated Edison's developmental thinking and in some cases would have placed later labels on work originally conceived quite differently. Organization by document type—that is, personal, business, or technical materials—would have ripped activities from their historical fabric and would have isolated related ideas and events. The chronological approach presents Edison's work in the richness of its personal, technical, financial, and social interrelationships.

Accordingly, the documents are grouped chronologically within chapters that are themselves chronologically ordered. Organizing documents in chronological order is basically straightforward; however, arbitrary rules apply when elements of the date are missing or when two or more documents of the same date are selected. If the date of a document does not contain the day but is accurate to the month, season, or year, the editors have placed the document at the end of that month, season, or year. For example, if a letter is dated "October 1870," it appears immediately after all fully dated documents for October 1870. If two or more documents carry the same date and no logical order is dictated by their content, they are ordered by document type:

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Multiple notebook entries are kept in sequence. Within the category of correspondence, the order is:

- Edison outgoing
- Edison incoming
- third-party correspondence

Two or more Edison incoming or third-party letters are ordered alphabetically by author's last name; two or more Edison outgoing letters are ordered alphabetically by recipient's last name. The date and authorship of an artifact are based upon its design, not the date of construction or the builder of the artifact.

Annotation

The editors’ goal is to make this both an enduring edition and one that is accessible to a variety of scholars and the general public. Because of the limited scholarly literature and the technical complexities discussed in many of the documents, there are more introductory headnotes than is common in historical documentary editions published in America since 1945. The editors recognize that in a selective edition the process of selection and annotation is fundamentally interpretive; nonetheless they have tried to avoid a level of interpretation in the headnotes that would diminish the useful life of the edition. Accordingly, this first volume begins with an interpretive essay that identifies current historical issues and seeks to relate them to the material in the documents.

The chapter introductions, document headnotes, and endnotes are intentionally less interpretive than the volume introduction. From them the reader can derive a context for the documents, including the identification of individuals, organizations, technical terms, and events not otherwise specified in the documents. Each chapter begins with a brief introduction that highlights Edison’s personal, technical, and business activities during the period covered by the chapter. Within chapters there are occasional headnotes to groups of documents. Artifacts and drawings without accompanying text are preceded by headnotes. These introductions and headnotes serve as guides for the general reader. Usually the initial por-
tions of discursive endnotes also deal with general matters; the remaining portions refer to business or technical details that are likely to be of more concern to the specialized reader. In general, the editors have provided more detailed information for technical issues that have received little scholarly attention than for topics that are treated in the secondary literature. The reader who wishes to reconstruct the original documents may do so with the aid of the textnotes.

Form

The editors of this edition have considered the nature of the documents, their potential use, and the transcription principles that are most appropriate for them. The technical and nonverbal characteristics of the documents contribute to their complexity. Their verbal qualities, however, present fewer problems than many historical documents of an earlier era because the literary conventions of Edison's era are still largely understandable to the modern reader. Therefore, in order to provide a readable text, it is not necessary to adopt a "clear-text" approach, a method used by modern literary editors which employs neither critical symbols nor note numbers in the text but buries all of the editorial emendations in notes at the end of the volume.¹ It is also not necessary to adopt the more liberal of the "expanded" methods, which have been popular with recent American historical editors.² Such an approach standardizes many elements in transcription and leaves the reader without specific knowledge of many editorial changes. A decade ago historical editors who employed the "expanded" method were criticized in a detailed analysis of their work by G. Thomas Tanselle.³ Tanselle's critique has encouraged deliberative approaches to the principles for historical documentary editing, and it is in that context that editorial decisions have been made for the Edison Papers.

The editors believe that it is important that the readers of this edition have the evidence of Edison's creative mind at work—that they see the first primitive sketches of a new design; sense the hurried hand that makes false verbal starts, leaves out letters in words, and disregards the conventions of capitalization and punctuation; and note the evidence of Edison's verbal facility as well as his visual-spatial capabilities. Only obvious mechanical errors in typed copies have been silently omitted. By following a conservative expanded approach that does not try to "clean up the text," the editors have sought to strike a balance between the needs of the scholar
for details of editorial emendation, the requirements of all users for readability, and the desire of the editors that all readers obtain a feel and flavor for Edison, his associates, and their era.

This edition incorporates the principles of publication style presented in the thirteenth edition of the *Chicago Manual of Style.* Where the range and complexity of documents and annotations presented problems that transcend those treated in the *Chicago Manual,* the editors adapted the basic principles to meet the needs of this edition.

**Titles.** A title precedes each document. When Edison is the author or recipient of a document, his name is omitted from the title. For example, a letter from Edison to the former head of the Associated Press, Daniel Craig, appears under the title “To Daniel Craig.” When Edison is coauthor, corecipient, or coinventor, “And” precedes the name(s) of his associates: “And Frank Hanaford from D. N. Skillings & Co.” Third-party correspondence is presented in the following format: “Milton Adams to Frank Hanaford.” Notebook entries authored by Thomas Edison are presented as “Notebook Entry.”

**Place and date lines.** Regardless of where the information appears in the original document, the editors have positioned the place and date on the first line of the published document, flush to the right margin. The form, spelling, and punctuation of the place and date are as they appear in the document unless otherwise indicated by a textnote. The use of letterhead stationery is noted in the textnote. If the editors have supplied any element of the place or date from a source other than the document or its immediate context (e.g., the journal or newspaper in which a document appeared), that element is set in brackets. A conjectured date or place appears with a question mark within brackets. Routine inside addresses, return addresses, and dockets have not been transcribed.

**Transcription principles.** The editors have sought to provide as literal a transcription of the documents as is possible in print; at the same time, they have tried to avoid elaborate editorial apparatus that would intrude unduly upon a smooth reading of the text. They have not corrected errors in capitalization, spelling, punctuation, grammar, and syntax, nor have they silently supplied punctuation or removed repeated words or slips of the pen. In distinguishing between capital and lowercase letters, they have considered the form and size of the letter, the author’s style, and usage. When uncertainty has remained, they have followed current convention. Edison
often capitalized words at the beginning of a line; the editors have retained such capitalization according to the general capitalization policy. Because of Edison's idiosyncratic use of commas and periods, the editors have distinguished between them on the basis of usage and meaning. Where Edison or others, according to current conventions, omitted punctuation, the editors have inserted extra space in lieu of commas, semicolons, colons, question marks, exclamation points, or periods. Paragraph indentations and the length of dashes and hyphens have been standardized.

When necessary for clarity, contractions and abbreviations have been expanded and the supplied text has been placed in brackets. Cancellations are indicated with overstruck type. Interlineations made at the time the document was created have been brought into the text and identified in the textnotes. Where significant marginalia accompany a document, they appear in the transcription enclosed in angle brackets. Unless otherwise indicated by a textnote, marginalia are in Edison's hand. Other interlineations are identified in the textnotes. Raised letters and numbers have been silently brought into alignment with the rest of the line. Revenue stamps, seals, and similar markings that accompany legal and commercial documents have not been transcribed, but because they may help establish the authenticity of documents, they are identified in the textnotes. Within a document, preprinted text is indicated in a textnote. Underlined manuscript text is underlined; double underlined text is singly underlined and is flagged by a textnote.

Words that serve only to indicate a page turn, such as "over," are identified in the textnotes rather than transcribed in the body of the document. Page numbers generally are not transcribed but are cited in the textnotes to facilitate finding documents in notebooks or large groupings of pages. Page breaks in the original document, and page numbers or other markings made at a later date, such as those of archivists or manuscript dealers, are not identified unless they are of special interest. Edison often used a flourished "and" placed in a circle; this has been transcribed as normal text. In transcribing multiple signatures, such as those appearing in agreements and notebooks, the editors have placed the first signature flush left and the second flush right, two per line, with the last signature flush right. The witness signatures appear flush left on the same line as the last signature unless there are too many of them for all to fit on that line, in which case
they appear on the following line. The editors have supplied the term “witness(es)” in brackets when it does not appear in the text of a document.

**Drawings and artifacts.** Drawings and artifacts have been photographically reproduced. The widely varying size of the drawings makes it impossible to reproduce them all at a standard scale. The editors have attempted to reproduce the drawings within a given document, notebook, or set of identically sized notebooks at a consistent scale.

**Endnotes.** Substantive and bibliographic endnotes are grouped at the end of the editors’ headnotes and after the textnote of each document. In substantive notes, the most general information is provided first and is followed by more details if appropriate. A person or technical term mentioned in the text is fully identified only once within the edition. The reader can locate that identification by looking up the boldface page number under the appropriate name or subject in the index. Bibliographic information in the endnotes appears in a shortened form that employs (1) the author-date system of citation for publications and (2) abbreviations for standard references, journals, and manuscript collections. For full names and titles, the reader is referred to the List of Abbreviations and the Bibliography.

**Textnotes.** A textnote immediately follows each document and is structured in five parts. The first part describes the document type, using a modified version of archivists’ and manuscript dealers’ abbreviations (see List of Abbreviations). The second part identifies the archival location of the document, using a Library of Congress repository symbol (see List of Abbreviations), and also indicates the document’s location within the repository. If the document has already been published in the microfilm edition of the Edison Papers, the third part then identifies that edition by the acronym TAEM and locates the document by reel and frame number. This information is contained within parentheses. The fourth part identifies special characteristics of the document such as its having been written on letterhead stationery. The fifth part consists of lettered notes that concisely identify textual problems such as interlineations and missing words. A superscript lowercase letter (a, b, c, etc.) is placed at a problem area in the text of the document, and the same letter introduces the note. If a textual problem arises more than once in a document, the same letter is used to mark each occurrence. If a note does not repeat or otherwise indicate words from the text, it refers
to only the word or signature in the text to which the superscript letter is attached. If the textual problem involves more than one word, the note indicates all the words and punctuation involved, either by repeating them or by providing an elliptical sequence of words and phrases, each set off by quotation marks.

An example of a textnote is as follows:


This means that the document is in the hand of its author, is a letter, and is signed. It is located at the archives of the Edison National Historic Site in West Orange, New Jersey, in the Document File; and it appears in the Thomas A. Edison Papers: A Selective Microfilm Edition, on the twelfth reel, in the forty-second frame. The letter was written on letterhead stationery of the journal, the Telegrapher. Within the text of the transcribed letter, one word that the author wrote between the lines of the original has been brought into the line of print and is identified with the superscript lowercase letter a.

1. For an excellent discussion of textual methods and the history of their application, see Mary-Jo Kline, A Guide to Documentary Editing (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), chaps. i and 5. A recent example of a modified use of the clear-text method in historical editing is Frederick Burkhardt and Sydney Smith, eds., The Correspondence of Charles Darwin, vol. i (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

