

He Brought Us From Darkness

By Tom DeWeese

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Into the chilled October night four figures cut through the dark. Over the railroad tracks, down the dirt streets, past the preserved homes and the silent shops, they quietly made their way to a group of buildings just ahead.

The short elderly man in the middle seemed to be the center of their concern. As the group ascended the stairs inside the long wooden building one man held his arm in assistance. At the top of the stairs another helped him out of his coat. The third led him to a seat at the end of a long work bench.

In front of his chair there had been erected a plank of wood about six feet high and six inches across. On it were tubes and wires running from the top to the floor. A glass globe lay on the workbench.

The old man paused for a moment, brushed the lock of white hair from his eyes and began to work. One of the men assisted as the other two watched with smiles and intensity for the work being completed.

The date was October 21, 1929, and the location was the newly restored Menlo Park Laboratory now in its new location at the Greenfield Village historic park connected to the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan. The two men watching were President Herbert Hoover and Henry Ford. The elderly gentleman was Thomas Edison and the fourth was Franci Jehl, a former Edison assistant. The event was the Golden Anniversary of the creation of the first successful development of electric light. Edison was about to recreate that historic event of fifty years before.

As Edison worked, over in the Henry Ford Museum some four hundred world dignitaries were gathered to honor Edison. As they waited for him to complete the recreation they sat in darkness. In fact, around the nation and the world, many other nations reduced their lighting as the world waited and listened to the events over the radio.

It had been a long day for Edison. At 10:00am that morning he had toured the perimeter of Greenfield Village in a Civil War vintage train. The train pulled into the reconstructed Smiths Creek Station where sixty-seven years earlier an irate conductor had thrown Edison from the train because young Edison had accidentally started a fire when he was working on an experiment in a baggage car. Now the depot had been moved to Greenfield Village and Edison descended to the platform on the arm of the President of the United States.

That afternoon Edison entered the Menlo Park laboratory compound for the first time since it had been moved from its original New Jersey location where it had been the location of Edison's greatest achievements. Over one thousand patents had been filed from that laboratory, including the electric light.

Henry Ford, a man who savored the drama of history, had restored the entire complex to the smallest detail. So thorough was he that even the old trash dumps were dug up and placed in a glass case outside the building – because here was the refuse tossed out the window from untold vital experiments. Due to the fame of the building, before restoration people would come and take boards from the site as souvenirs. Ford sent out teams of men to reclaim them. Those they could not replace were replaced with new boards and Ford ordered that the new ones new be painted in order to keep it as legit as possible.

Upon entering the building on that historic day Edison seemed to lose himself in memories. Ford asked him how close to the original appearance the building now looked. Edison answered,

“About 99 percent, we never kept it this clean.”

Finally, that night Edison finished his task of recreating the light bulb. As it began to glow, Suddenly the generators throughout the compound were turned on and Greenfield Village and the Henry Ford Museum were flooded in light and cheers. The same reaction was seen and heard around the nation and the world.

When he completed the light bulb, Thomas Edison, “The Wizard of Menlo Park,” “The Man Who Made the Future,” pushed back his chair, breathed deeply, stood up and left. He never returned. Henry Ford, sensing the drama of the moment, had the chair nailed to the floor where Edison had left it.

Ford’s Greenfield Village, the Henry Ford Museum, and the Menlo Park compound stand today as a shrine to the free minds and free markets that created the world’s freest nation, as it led the world in innovations from creative thinkers who were motivated with new ideas for human society. Today those minds are bound in rules and regulations designed to enforce the controlled order of collectivism. It’s time to bring the past out of the museum and reestablish the free world.

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