

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

THOMAS EDISON BIRTHPLACE

AND/OR COMMON

Thomas Edison Birthplace

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

Edison Drive

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Milan

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT  
8th

STATE

Ohio

VICINITY OF  
CODE  
39

COUNTY  
Erie

CODE  
043

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Mrs. J. E. Sloane, President, Edison Birthplace Association

STREET & NUMBER

Llewellyn Park

CITY, TOWN

West Orange

VICINITY OF

STATE  
New Jersey

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Registry of Deeds, Erie County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

Columbus Avenue

CITY, TOWN

Sandusky

STATE

Ohio

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Historic American Buildings Survey

DATE

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Library of Congress/Annex/Division of Photographs and Prints

CITY, TOWN

Washington, D.C.

STATE

# 7 DESCRIPTION

## CONDITION

EXCELLENT                     DETERIORATED  
 GOOD                             RUINS  
 FAIR                              UNEXPOSED

## CHECK ONE

UNALTERED  
 ALTERED

## CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE  
 MOVED      DATE \_\_\_\_\_

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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Thomas A. Edison Birthplace is a one and one-half story gabled brick house located in Milan, Ohio. Designed by Samuel Edison, Edison's father, the house was constructed in 1841 on the lot purchased that year by Nancy Elliot Edison. The house has seen very few exterior or interior alterations and appears much as it did when the Edisons occupied it.

Located on the west side of the street, Edison Drive, the birthplace sits on a small lot. A white picket fence encloses the front yard. There are four windows on the east facade with the door located in the center. Each of the windows are graced with white shutters. Stone lintels cap all windows and the doorways. Tour entrance is made from the south portico. One enters first the living room where is located a registration book which sits on a desk owned by Edison's uncle. Numerous furnishings of family provenance are located here. A mirror belonging to Edison's oldest sister, Marion, and a rocker in which his mother sat while knitting are major artifacts. To the south of the sitting room is the bedroom in which Edison was born. The actual "rope bed" in which the famous inventor was born sits here. A very simple single bed, it is covered with an intricate hand made quilt fashioned in Milan. There is a date at a corner of 1847, the year of Edison's birth. On the north side of the house, across a small hallway with staircase, which leads to the second floor, is another parlor. To the west of this room, adjacent to the Edison birth room is a display room in which are various Edison inventions and other memorabilia including letters, sketches and characteristic doodles. On the second floor two bedrooms are open to the public. On display are pieces of clothing worn by various members of the Edison family. In the north bedroom are some quite fashionable clothes of Mr. Edison including shoes, suits, top coat and the cane which was constantly with him. A stairwell located behind the staircase to the second floor leads to the basement. Whereas on the other levels of the house there are four rooms, the basement only contains two rooms. The kitchen is the only room on this level open to the public. Against the north wall is the cooking hearth on which family meals were prepared. There is a pine dresser containing china used by Miss Marietta Wadsworth, an Edison cousin, who was resident in the house for many years. In the kitchen are also other antiques which date to the Edison period of occupancy. These include an old candle stick maker, a "betty lamp," and a coffee grinder. The tour of the house ends with an exit through the basement door.

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES

1847-1854

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Thomas Alva Edison, one of America's most illustrious inventors, was born in this house on February 11, 1847. Although he left Milan in 1854, before this structure could exercise any marked influence on his later life, Edison cherished the memory of this small brick cottage in Milan, Ohio. As he grew older, Edison remembered his birthplace in Milan, acquiring it from his sister in 1906.

Uninterested in formal schooling, Edison worked hard at educating himself, and by the age of sixteen had made several inventions in telegraphy. Several years later, in company with a number of talented friends, he formed what has been called the first "invention factory," which produced numerous new products, particularly for the telegraph and telephone. Edison and his colleagues also developed the incandescent lamp in 1879, the Pearl Street power plant in New York City in 1882, and discovered the "Edison effect" in 1883.

The Nation recognized the tremendous benefits resulting from Edison's long labors in 1928 when Congress awarded him a gold medal for his contributions to mankind. He died three years later on October 18, 1931.

BIOGRAPHY

The Edison Family came to America from Holland in about 1730 and originally settled in New Jersey, only a short distance from where Edison would make his home some 160 years later. The family's fortune fluctuated with their politics. Because of loyalist activities during the American Revolution, John Edison, great-grandfather of the inventor, had his property confiscated and the family moved to Nova Scotia until 1811. Captain Samuel Edison, grandfather of Thomas, served in the British forces in the war of 1812. Edison's father, also Samuel, moved to the United States after the unsuccessful Papineau-MacKenzie Rebellion. He settled in Milan.

Thomas Alva Edison was born in Milan, Ohio on February 11, 1847. At that time Milan was a prosperous grain center. Changing conditions greatly affected the economy of the little town shortly after Edison's birth and the family moved in 1854 to Port Huron, Michigan.

Little is known about Edison's childhood in Milan. Even that information is based mainly on recollections of some of his youthful experiences--such as watching wagons passing through Milan as they made their way to California, visiting the shipyards on the Milan Canal, which ran only a short distance to

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the north of his home, sitting on a nest of goose eggs to see if he could hatch them, and burning down a barn. Some biographers saw in these incidents foundations of Edison's character and portents of the inventor's career. One author describes the destruction of the barn as Edison's first "spectacular experiment."<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, perhaps Henry Ford, a great admirer and friend of Edison's wrote more realistically about his friend when he stated that "Nothing...appears to have happened at Milan particularly to impress Edison."<sup>2</sup> That these years were important, as they are for all men, is undeniable, but, that they had any marked or direct influence on his later productive years cannot be demonstrated. Edison's rise to prominence after his family's move to Port Huron is well known. Although uninterested in formal schooling, he worked hard at educating himself, and by the age of sixteen had already made several inventions in telegraphy. In 1869 after much travel, a variety of jobs, and constant experimenting, the young man secured a good position in New York. However, he was employed only a short time, leaving the company to establish his own concern. In creating it, he gathered around him a group of talented individuals, and together they formed what has been termed the first "invention factory," which produced numerous new products, particularly for the telegraph and the telephone.

The scope and success of Edison's undertaking caused him to look for larger quarters, and in 1877 he moved from New York to Menlo Park, New Jersey. Here he remained for more than ten years in the new laboratory, until in 1877 he constructed an even larger factory in West Orange, New Jersey. Meanwhile, numerous discoveries and developments had come from Edison and his colleagues: the incandescent lamp in 1879, the Pearl Street power plant in New York in 1882 and the "Edison effect" in 1883. After he moved to West Orange, the inventor continued to startle America with new things, such as the development of motion pictures in the 1890's.

Besides his inventive ability, Edison possessed an unusual talent for organization. He formed numerous special companies to produce his inventions, as he felt there was little profit in devising new products if they were not put to use. Today's mammoth General Electric Company, for example, in large part traces its ancestry back to concerns organized by Edison.

Even in his last years, Edison remained an insatiable worker, exhausting others by being able to concentrate for long periods on one problem. The tremendous benefit resulting from his unremitting labors was recognized by the Nation in 1928, when Congress awarded him a gold medal for his contributions to mankind. Three years later, on October 18, 1931, Milan's most famous son died.

1. Mary C. Nerney, Thomas A. Edison, A Modern Olympian (New York, 1934), p.22.
2. Henry Ford (with Samuel Crowther), Edison As I Knew Him (New York, 1930), p. 19.

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The Edison Birthplace sits on the west side of Edison Drive on the original lot it occupied at the time of Edison's birth. On the north side of the house is the remnant of the once famous Milan Canal though it no longer contains water and is heavily grown over with foliage. A plat map which dates back to the 19th century shows the original lot. The extent of this property, shaded in yellow, is the landmark area. The lot is 66 feet by 115.5 feet. Beginning at the point of intersection of the Edison Birthplace lot and an adjacent lot to the south, proceed in a northerly direction along the west curb of Edison Drive 66 feet, thence proceed in a northwesterly direction 115.5 feet, thence in southerly direction 66 feet, thence in a southeasterly direction to the point of origin. The landmark contains less than one acre.