



Edison in Florida: The Green Laboratory

Olav Thulesius

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"This is the first comprehensive history of Edison's life and work in Fort Myers, and Thulesius covers the subject well, highlighting little-known segments of Edison's speculation and experimentation, such as life units, X-rays, and hybridizing, and conveying his keen interest in all that surrounded him." --Leah Burt, former curator, Edison National Historic Site, West Orange, New Jersey

In 1885, America's greatest inventor, the "wizard" of electricity and Yankee industrialization, established a second home in Florida. Unlike the many wealthy turn-of-the century vacationers who descended on Florida's tourist cities to unwind and escape, Thomas Edison chose a "cow town" in the Florida outback. In the mid-1880s, he built a modest house and a laboratory under the palm trees of Fort Myers, and this "green laboratory" became a quiet wellspring of invention for the next forty years.

In this first book devoted to Edison's life and work in Fort Myers, Thulesius reveals Edison the nature lover and medicine man. He traces Edison's first trips to Florida for simple health reasons and then follows Edison's expanding interest in the natural world, his camping trips with John Burroughs, his opposition to the exotic bird trade for the millinery business, his fascination with sponges, and his late experiments with hybridization of rubber and goldenrod. Thulesius also explores the relationship with Fort Myers neighbor Henry Ford, the visits from Henry Firestone, and the joint founding of the Edison Botanic Research Company of Ft. Myers.

Thulesius's background affords him insight into the medical history of the Edison family, and he traces Edison's lifelong interest in medical issues, his development of "polyform," experiments with X-rays, and cures for gout and yellow fever. What emerges is a new portrait of a brilliant, industrious personality whose imagination and insight were inspired by the natural world he discovered in Florida.

Olav Thulesius is professor and vice dean for research, Faculty of Medicine, Kuwait University.

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