

Edison & Ford

WINTER ESTATES

Florida's Genius Snowbirds

By **Melissa Wolcott**

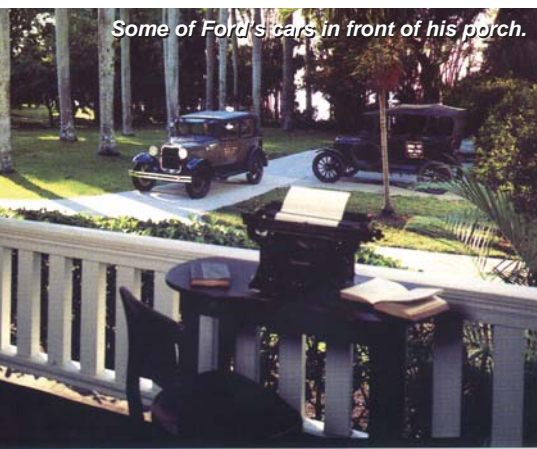
The next time you're planning a trip heading south from the Tampa Bay area on I-75, allow a few hours for a visit to the Thomas Edison & Henry Ford Estates in Ft. Myers. It is well worth the time. Two of history's most important figures of discovery and innovation, and who catapulted our world into the future, were good friends and wintered next door to each other in Florida.

In 1885, Thomas Edison built a home in Ft. Myers, and started spending his winters there. He later became friends with Henry Ford, who then purchased property next door and wintered alongside Edison. It was inevitable that the two visionaries would toss ideas around and work on some projects together.



A few of Edison's inventions.

We all know about Edison and the light bulb, but you may be surprised to learn of some of the other innovations Edison came up with, or envisioned for the future. Most are aware of his invention of the phonograph and improvements to the telephone and movies, but he also held patents — and astounding 1,093 in all — on the curling iron, the electric waffle maker and the X-ray machine, to name a few. All this from a guy who never even completed grade school. His teachers thought he was “slow”.



Some of Ford's cars in front of his porch.

Along with Edison's many hits were a few misses, such as his idea of using cement to build things such as cabinets and cheap houses from cast molds. Concrete was very costly at the time, and the idea wasn't feasible. However, it wasn't a total failure, as his

cement company was hired to build Yankee Stadium in the Bronx. His foray into iron ore and rubber were also non-productive.

Along with Edison's home, the estate houses his laboratory and a



Three titans in front of Edison's lab - Henry Ford, Thomas Edison, and Harvey Firestone.

museum of his inventions. The house (designed by Edison himself, of course) is located on the Caloosahatchee River, on a beautiful expansive lawn, with carefully planned trees and gardens. The grounds cover 20 acres with botanical gardens, including 500 unique plants. Edison's Banyan Tree (given to him in 1925 by Harvey Firestone) is the second largest in the world, with a circumference of the aerial roots at over 400 feet.

His caretaker's cottage (the oldest building in Ft. Myers) predates the house, as it already existed on the land he bought. When Edison's wife died in 1947, she deeded the home to the City of Ft. Myers for \$1. All of the original furnishings are still in it. Many of the bulbs in the house are very old, and still burning

to this day.

Ford's home dates from 1911, and the furnishings are period pieces, but not of the Ford family. A garage on property houses some of Ford's autos.

Just think, without these guys we'd be sitting in the dark, riding around in horse-drawn buggies, and you can forget about your i-pod!

The Edison & Ford Winter Estates is one of the top 10 visited sites in the nation and an award winning National Trust site. The estates are open year-round (except Thanksgiving and Christmas), and are located at 2350 McGregor Blvd., Ft. Myers. For more information, call 239-334-7419, or visit www.edison-ford-estate.com.



The dining room in Edison's Guest House.

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