

PEOPLE TO KNOW / VOCABULARY

CHAPTER 18

Thomas Edison

Thomas Edison (1847-1931) was born in Ohio in relatively poor circumstances. He had little formal education, being mostly taught by his mother and himself. Edison had an intense curiosity about everything especially science and electricity.

As a young man, Edison began tinkering in his workshop and ended up leading the technological revolution of the late nineteenth century. He invented the stock ticker, the carbon filament lightbulb, the motion picture camera, and other gadgets. Later in Edison's life he developed a battery for Henry Ford's Model T automobile. In all, Edison amassed a record 1,093 patents in his lifetime. At Menlo Park, New Jersey, he created the first research and development lab.

Alas, Edison also had some failures. His attempt to make direct current (DC) the standard power supply fell apart. In 1892, J.P. Morgan and others forced Edison out of his own company, Edison General Electric (later renamed General Electric). Edison worked into his 80s and passed away at the age of 84.

John D. Rockefeller

John D. Rockefeller (1839-1937) grew up relatively poor. He worked hard, hated waste, and constantly tried to keep his environment under control. In 1853, his family moved from New York to Ohio. Six years

later, Rockefeller got into the grocery business but soon saw money could be made in making kerosene—a lamp fuel that was quickly replacing the much more expensive whale oil.

Rockefeller joined a partnership in the oil refining business in 1863. By reducing wasteful spending and expanding the business, Rockefeller and his partners established the Standard Oil Company in 1870. Standard Oil used ruthless business practices to eliminate competition. Railroad rebates, underselling competition, spying on competitors were some ways that Standard Oil maintained its dominance. By 1881, Standard Oil controlled ninety percent of all oil refining in America.

Standard Oil became a monopoly. In 1911, the federal government broke up Standard Oil into dozens of smaller companies. Yet, Rockefeller's wealth only increased as he amassed more money than any other American who ever lived. Before he died, he gave away much of his wealth to charitable causes.

Andrew Carnegie

Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919) was born poor in Scotland and, in 1848, came to America with his family seeking a better life. He worked as a telegraph operator as a boy and became an assistant for Thomas Scott, president of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company. From Scott,

Carnegie learned how to invest in business.

By the 1860s, Carnegie's investments had paid off making him comfortably wealthy. It was then that Carnegie saw the future of steel. In 1873, Carnegie invested all of his money into the steel business, forming the Carnegie Steel Company. By cutting costs of production and investing in new technology like the Bessemer process, he improved the quality of steel and reduced its price. He bought companies at every level of production (vertical integration) from mining to distribution in order to control his costs and maximize profits.

In 1901, Carnegie sold his company to J.P. Morgan for \$480 million. This made Carnegie one of the richest Americans of all time. However, Carnegie believed it was a disgrace to die rich. Before he passed, he gave away all of his money to charities.

Jane Addams

Jane Addams (1860-1935) grew up in Pennsylvania. She was one of the first generations of women to graduate from college. She traveled to Europe where she became interested in settlement houses—institutions to help people, often immigrants, become independent and successful.

Addams opened up Hull House in 1889. She offered a place for men, women, and children to learn how to overcome obstacles and live up

to their potential. Hull House became a place to go for people who were in trouble. Eventually, Hull House expanded to over 450 locations nationwide. In addition, Addams extended her social work beliefs into politics. She helped pass child labor laws, called for compulsory education for children, and demanded women's suffrage. By the beginning of World War I, Addams worked tirelessly in a world peace movement to end all wars. Her political views got mixed reactions from the public. Yet, in 1931, she received the Nobel Peace Prize for her efforts.

After Addams' passing in 1935, Hull House continued to operate, providing social services for people in need. However, in 2012, Hull House suffered from a lack of donations and a growing debt forcing management to close its doors for good.

Samuel Gompers

Samuel Gompers (1850-1924) was born in England and came to America with his family in 1863. He made a living making cigars with his father. Eventually, he joined the United Cigar Makers Union in 1864 and by the 1870s became a leading member of union activities.

Gompers changed the nature of union activities. He helped found the American Federation of Labor (AFL) in 1886 and became its first president. He directed the union to focus on issues that directly affected the worker: wages and working conditions. Gompers argued that union goals could best be reached by using national strikes and boycotts against employers. By the early 1900s, Gompers concluded that the AFL must also use its members to support political candidates that

promoted laws that benefitted the workers.

Gompers' work made unions more acceptable to the American people and created the operating model for which all other unions would imitate.

Alexander Graham Bell

Alexander Graham Bell (1847-1922) was born in Scotland. He received little schooling but had a interest in everything. He was especially good at problem solving. His father made a living working with deaf people and Bell's mother was nearly deaf. In 1871, Bell moved to America.

Bell began work on improving the telegraph but soon became convinced he could send voice messages over wires. After several years of work with engineer Thomas Watson, they had a breakthrough. On March 10, 1876, they sent the first voice message over a wire completing the first telephone call. In 1877, he formed the Bell Telephone Company.

Bell spent a lot of time working on helping the deaf. He set up the Volta Laboratory, a research and development facility to improve the lives of deaf people. He also worked on flying machines and airplane design. He constantly pursued ideas that advanced science for the benefit of all.