

Move to the United States



Edison Machine Works on Goerck Street, New York. Tesla found the change from cosmopolitan Europe to working at this shop, located amongst the [tenements](#) on Manhattan's lower east side, a "painful surprise".^[41]

In 1884, Edison manager [Charles Batchelor](#), who had been overseeing the Paris installation, was brought back to the United States to manage the [Edison Machine Works](#), a manufacturing division situated in [New York City](#), and asked that Tesla be brought to the US as well.^[42] In June 1884, Tesla emigrated to the United States.^[43] He began working almost immediately at the Machine Works on [Manhattan's Lower East Side](#), an overcrowded shop with a workforce of several hundred machinists, laborers, managing staff, and 20 "field engineers" struggling with the task of building the large electric utility in that city.^[44] As in Paris, Tesla was working on troubleshooting installations and improving generators.^[45] Historian W. Bernard Carlson notes Tesla may have met company founder [Thomas Edison](#) only a couple of times.^[44] One of those times was noted in Tesla's [autobiography](#) where, after staying up all night repairing the damaged dynamos on the ocean liner *SS Oregon*, he ran into Batchelor and Edison, who made a quip about their "Parisian" being out all night. After Tesla told them he had been up all night fixing the *Oregon* Edison commented to Batchelor that "this is a damned good man".^[41] One of the projects given to Tesla was to develop an [arc lamp](#)-based street lighting system.^{[46][47]} Arc lighting was the most popular type of street lighting but it required high voltages and was incompatible with the Edison low-voltage incandescent system, causing the company to lose contracts in cities that wanted street lighting as well. Tesla's designs were never put into production, possibly because of technical improvements in incandescent street lighting or because of an installation deal that Edison cut with an arc lighting company.^[48]

Tesla had been working at the Machine Works for a total of six months when he quit.^[44] What event precipitated his leaving is unclear. It may have been over a bonus he did not receive, either for redesigning generators or for the arc lighting system that was shelved.^[46] Tesla had previous run-ins with the Edison company over unpaid bonuses he believed he had earned.^{[49][50]} In his own biography, Tesla stated the manager of the Edison Machine Works offered a \$50,000 bonus to design "twenty-four different types of standard machines" "but it turned out to be a practical joke".^[51] Later versions of this story have Thomas Edison himself offering and then reneging on the deal, quipping "Tesla, you don't understand our American humor".^{[52][53]} The size of the bonus in either story has been noted as odd since Machine Works manager Batchelor was stingy with pay^[54] and the company did not have that amount of cash (equivalent to \$12 million today^[when?]) on hand.^{[55][56]} Tesla's diary contains just one comment on what happened at the end of his employment, a note he scrawled across the two pages covering 7 December 1884, to 4 January 1885, saying "Good by to the Edison Machine Works".^{[47][57]}