



ELECTRICITY AND THE CONSUMER AGE

The two most famous Americans to work with electricity were Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Edison. Benjamin Franklin's kite experiment proved that lightning was electricity. Thomas Edison applied electricity to change people's lives.

Edison harnessed the power of electricity. Edison created the first long-burning light bulb in 1879. Edison knew that no one would use his new invention unless he could also provide a steady supply of electricity, so he created the General Electric Company to provide that energy. At the start of the First World War electric companies could deliver electricity across the United States.

At the end of World War I, for the first time in US history, the majority of Americans lived in cities. They had more free time. They also enjoyed bigger paychecks. A huge market existed for personal consumer goods. Manufacturers filled that need. New appliances shortened work time and eased workloads. There were so many new appliances that we call this period the "consumer goods revolution." Electricity made this "consumer goods revolution" possible. The toaster is the best example of the "consumer goods revolution."

People have been toasting bread since Roman times. Early methods for toasting meant placing chunks of bread on sticks and holding them over an open fire, much like making "S'mores" today. Others placed loaves or slices of bread on heated stones for long periods. These methods did not work well.

The arrival of the electrical toaster overcame many problems. For the first time in history, toast could be made quickly. What had taken hours of labor and effort now became easy, convenient and commonplace. Today we can toast eight slices of bread at one time while we drink coffee from an electric coffee pot, eat eggs cooked on an electric stove and drink orange juice that has been chilled in an electric refrigerator. All of this is expected, common, and often taken for granted; much like the electricity that makes it all happen.