

March 25th

The Invention Factory

March 25, 1876

Thomas Edison's [Feb 11] new lab was inaugurated at Menlo Park, New Jersey: a white, two-story building, 100 feet long by 30 wide. Edison moved in a few days later.

The ground floor housed a machine shop filled with precision tools, and a science lab on the second floor. The technology was all "state-of-the-art", and unparalleled in the US.

Edison promised to produce "a minor invention every ten days [Dec 29] and a big thing every six months or so."

He duly invented the phonograph [Dec 6], [June 29], [April 15], the kinetoscope [May 20], [Jan 4], and incandescent light bulb, which earned him the nickname "The Wizard of Menlo Park," and the lab became "The Invention Factory."



Upstairs at Edison's lab, reconstructed at the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan. The organ's against the back wall. Photo by Andrew Balet. CC BY-SA 2.5.

Edison's research associates had to pass a tough interview process which included eating a bowl of soup. Edison carefully observed whether they added

salt before they tasted the soup. This weeded out those misguided souls who started out with too many assumptions.

Once through the door, Menlo Park was a fun place to work, with late night parties involving competitive playing of the lab's pipe organ (which Edison had obtained for his phonograph experiments), and contests over who could produce the highest voltage from a hand-cranked generator. Edison would also take his staff fishing in nearby Raritan Bay, employing his experimental electric railway (built in 1880) to get there.

Jean David Ichbiah Born: 25 March 1940;

Paris
Died: Jan. 26, 2007

An open tender by the US Department of Defense to design a new embedded programming language persuaded Ichbiah to submit "Green", which he'd developed at CII Honeywell Bull (CII-HB) in France at the end of the 1970's. It was selected by the DoD in 1978, and soon after renamed "Ada" [Dec 10] in honor of Ada Lovelace [Dec 10].

Ada/Green was far from Ichbiah's first language. In the early 1970's, he designed the LIS systems language based on Pascal [Feb 15] and Simula [Feb 10]. He was also one of the founding members of the IFIP [June 15] WG 2.4 on Systems Implementation Languages.

Ichbiah became a "Chevalier" (knight) of the French Legion of Honor in 1979, the highest French order of merit, established in 1802 by Napoleon Bonaparte.

Netscape Communications March 25, 1994

In the early hours of this day, Marc Andreessen [July 9] suggested to James Clark [March 23] that they develop a commercial Web browser, not unlike the freeware Mosaic browser [Sept 28] available from the National Center for Supercomputing Applications (NCSA [Jan 15]).

On April 4, Andreessen and Clark formed Mosaic Communications Corp. (MCC), hiring almost the entire team behind NCSA Mosaic, minus one programmer who had been snapped up by Microsoft.

The first Netscape browser, version 0.9 beta, was released on Oct. 10, 1994 as a free download. While it built upon ideas in NCSA Mosaic, the programmers had made sure that it shared no code with Mosaic. However, another company associated with NCSA, Spyglass Inc. [April 5], owned the rights to the "Mosaic" name, and so MCC were obliged to change its company name to Netscape Communications Corp. on Nov. 14.

Netscape Navigator was released on Dec. 15, 1994 (or perhaps on [Dec 10]), and Netscape 2 debuted on Sept. 18, 1995. It was the first browser to support Java applets [Feb 23] and include an email reader. It rapidly became the de facto browser for the newfangled World Wide Web.

Typically, Netscape's IPO on [Aug 9] 1995 is used to mark the beginning of the dot-com bubble.

WikiWikiWeb March 25, 1995

Ward Cunningham [May 26] began inviting people to add and edit content on his WikiWikiWeb, the world's first wiki (user-editable website). It

formed part of his "Portland Pattern Repository" site which focussed on software design patterns.

Cunningham later said that the inspiration for the name came from the Wiki Wiki Shuttle bus at Honolulu International Airport; "wiki" is the Hawaiian word for "quick". Indeed, Cunningham's original plan was to call the site "QuickWeb".

The wiki's design was partly inspired by HyperCard [Aug 11] which let users create links among its cards.

In Dec. 2014, WikiWikiWeb was attacked by vandals, and is now read-only.

Shadowbane Released March 25, 2003

Shadowbane was a commercial fantasy MMORPG created by Wolfpack Studios, noted for allowing player vs. player combat, and for its dynamic world content. This meant that a user could change almost everything in the environment, including buildings, fortifications, terrain, and even how AI characters behaved. Most of the property in the cities, and even entire cities, were player owned, which added a unique feel to the outcome of sieges and wars.

The game sold well but, due to technical issues, failed to become popular. On March 15, 2006 Shadowbane was made free-to-play, and started to display short ads to fund its operating costs. These were shown when the game opened or closed and when a character died. The game's servers were closed down in 2009.

Rescue Dragon March 25, 2004

The "Rescue Dragon" (official name: the T-52 Enryu) was a mechanized 5 ton, 3.5 meters

tall disaster-rescue robot. It possessed two mighty 6-meter long arms which could each lift 500 kg, and the dragon could move at a top speed of 3 km/hr.

It was primarily designed to clear a path through debris so that human rescue workers could get to disaster victims. The fearsome engine could be piloted from an on-board cockpit or remotely, but was not programmable.



The Rescue Dragon. (c) Tmsuk Co., Ltd.

Rumors that it could transform into a yellow Volkswagen Beetle [May 28] are unfounded.
