Inventors and Scientists: Nikola Tesla

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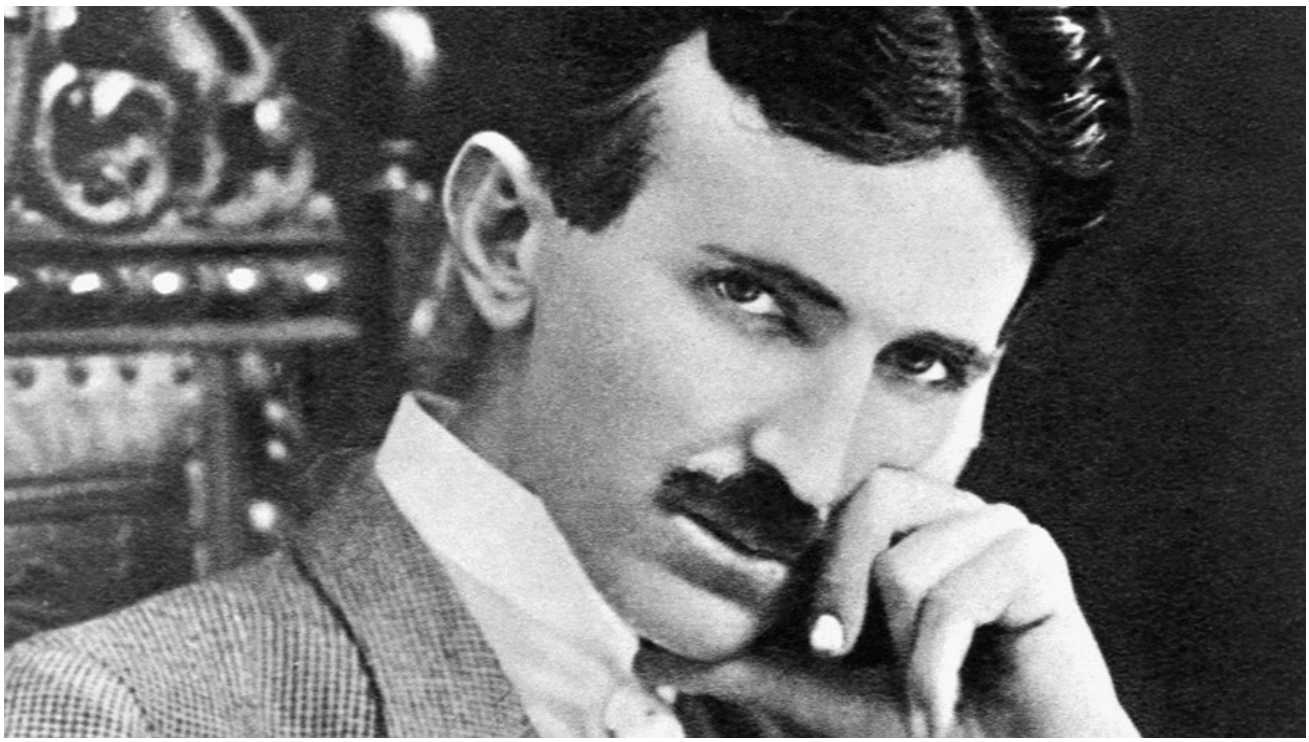

A photograph of inventor Nikola Tesla. Wikimedia Commons

Synopsis: Inventor Nikola Tesla was born in July of 1856 in what is now Croatia. He came to the United States in 1884 and briefly worked with Thomas Edison before the two parted ways. Tesla invented the alternating-current method of delivering electricity. His 1891 invention, the "Tesla coil," is still used in radio technology today. Tesla died in New York City on January 7, 1943.

Early Life

Nikola Tesla was born on July 10, 1856, in what is now Smiljan, Croatia. Tesla watched his mother, Djuka Mandic, invent household appliances. This started his interest in electrical invention. Tesla studied at schools in Germany, Austria and the University of Prague during the 1870s. In Budapest he came up with the idea for the induction motor. No one was interested in it, though. He moved to America at the age of 28.

Famed Inventor

In 1884 Tesla arrived to the United States with a letter of introduction to famed inventor Thomas Edison. Edison had invented a way of sending electricity to homes. He called it the direct-current system. Edison hired Tesla, and the two men started working together. Several months later, they parted ways. They were too different to get along together.

In 1887, Tesla found money from investors to build his alternating-current, or AC, electrical system. The system caught the attention of American engineer and business man George Westinghouse. Westinghouse wanted to bring long-distance power to the nation. In 1888 he purchased the rights to Tesla's invention. They were now competing with Edison, who was trying to sell his direct-current system to the nation. Edison said bad things about AC in the press.

The Westinghouse Corporation was chosen to supply the lighting at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Tesla could show the public how his AC system worked there. In 1895, Tesla designed one of the first AC hydroelectric power plants at Niagara Falls. It used the force of the waters of Niagara to create electricity. The following year, AC power from Niagara was used to power the city of Buffalo, New York. The alternating-current system quickly became the leading power system of the 20th century. It is still the worldwide standard.

Tesla discovered, designed and developed ideas for other important inventions. He was a pioneer in the discovery of radar technology, X-ray technology and remote control. His "Tesla coil" was important to the invention of wireless technologies. It is still used in radio technology today.

The Fall From Grace

Tesla became obsessed with sending energy without wires. Around 1900 he set to work on a global, wireless communication system. He wanted to share information and free electricity all over the world. Tesla received money from a group of investors including J. P. Morgan. In 1901 Tesla built a lab with a power plant and a huge tower. The place, called Wardenclyffe, was located on Long Island, New York. However, Tesla's investors started to worry about his system. His competitor, Guglielmo Marconi, was making great advances with his own radio technologies. Tesla abandoned his project. By 1915 Wardenclyffe had run out of money and fell into foreclosure. Two years later Tesla declared bankruptcy. The tower was taken apart. They sold the parts to help to pay Tesla's debts.

Death And Legacy

After Tesla suffered a nervous breakdown he started having strange ideas. The FBI was concerned with his talk of building a powerful "death beam."

Nikola Tesla died on January 7, 1943 in New York City at the age of 86. He died a poor man, but the value of the work he left behind him lives on to this day.

Several books and films have highlighted Tesla's life and famous works. In 1994, a street sign identifying "Nikola Tesla Corner" was installed near where his New York City laboratory had been.

Wardenclyffe Project

Over the years many people bought and sold Wardenclyffe. In 2008, a group called the Tesla Science Center was formed. They wanted to buy the property and turn it into a Tesla museum.

In February 2009 Wardenclyffe was put up for sale for nearly $1.6 million. The Tesla Science Center worked hard to raise the money to buy it. In 2012, Matthew Inman of TheOatmeal.com joined the TSC for an Internet fundraising effort. They were able to buy the site in May 2013. Wardenclyffe is currently being restored.