

THE GREATEST DISCOVERY

By Richard Sorokin

What discovery in just the last few hundred years has the most effect on your life? Would you choose gun powder, medicines, space travel, fire, trains, boats, airplanes, computers or what? Only one discovery has generated so much scientific and practical innovation in such a short time. Electricity!

Just about 200 years ago, around the time of our war of Independence, a new discovery happened. It was first played with like a toy. No one had any use for it yet. An old friend in history was one of its first users. Ben Franklin was one of our first electricians. It was at first a play thing. There was no use for it. Just think, back then (just 200 years) all lighting was by fire, candles, oil lamps, fireplaces. All work was by physical labor, water power, or wind power. There were no motors.

Think how you use electricity today. Your lighting, heating, air conditioning, hand tools, clocks, cooking, all kinds of motors, are all based on electricity. Computers, almost all communication and transportation are based on electricity. Radio, television, telephones, telegraph GPS, satellites, are all based on electricity. When the electricity stops in a winter storm, everything stops. We take electricity for granted. It is so woven into our daily life.

If you ever go camping in the wild the first thing you'll miss is electricity. No running water, no lights, no heat. Everything that needs to be done will call on your physical ability. Just think, that's the way it was for thousands of years. It is only recently, a wink in time, that we have harnessed electricity to help us with our burdens. And how it has grown from simple things to the most complex. Inventions in electricity are like an inverted pyramid. Starting off with very little and expanding enormously.

How has electricity affected maritime life? Before electricity, all propulsion was by sail or steam engine. All lights were mostly oil lamps. No radios, no telephones no telegraph, just semaphore flags for communication. Electricity gave us the gas and diesel engines, lighting, cooking and heating. All have arrived with the great leaps in radio communication.

Just 30 years ago we were out on our sail boat on the Chesapeake. We left the kids at home in Philly, and were anchored for the night in a little pond. I called the Baltimore radio operator who connected us to our home phone and the kids. I thought that is was a miracle that we could communicate with them so easily. Of course we now have come so far that my son calls me from all over the world at the pushing of a button, with no lag time, I might add. Yes we have been blessed with electricity and what it has and is doing to make our lives better.

Today we are instantly connected to one another, although it is not always a voluntary process. In the movie "*The Day the Earth Stood Still*" a visitor from space wishes to get the attention of the leaders of the Earth's governments. He turns off the electricity all over the Earth. Everything stops, no cars, buses, airplanes. No telephones radios or TV work. He does get their attention. Imagine a day in your life without electricity.