

**Volume 19**

**Number 048**

**Edison vs. Westinghouse – II**

**Lead: In the 1880s, two of America's great entrepreneurial innovators, George Westinghouse and Thomas Edison, were locked in a battle over electric distribution.**

**Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.**

**Edison was an advocate of direct current, DC, which sent power at low voltage, much like a battery in a flashlight, down the circuit from generator to appliance. It was expensive and cumbersome. Westinghouse was promoting a new type of electrical distribution system,**

**which sent very high power back and forth between the power plant and the electrical application. To solve the high-voltage problem, Westinghouse acquired the inventions of two European engineers, Lucien Gaulard and John Dixon, and lured away from Edison the creative genius, Nikola Tesla. Soon he had perfected the distribution system for alternating current (AC). Power would leave the station at 500 volts, hit transformers along the line and be reduced to 100 volts, sufficient for distribution to customer's homes.**

**Edison, threatened with the loss of his huge investment, struck back with a propaganda campaign amplifying some unfortunate early accidents with**

his rival's system. The public was treated to national headlines condemning Westinghouse such as "The Electric Murderer" and "The Wires Fatal Grasp." Eventually, however, the Electric Light Association determined that alternating current was no more dangerous than direct, and by the 1890s Westinghouse had won the battle. Soon even New York, long wedded to Edison's concept, shifted over to alternating current.

At the University of Richmond's School of Professional and Continuing Studies, I'm Dan Roberts.

#### Resources

Leupp, Francis Ellington. *George Westinghouse: His Life and Achievements*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company, 1918.

**Copyright by Dan Roberts Enterprises, Inc.**