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The 'believe it or not!' bridge

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FORT MYERS --- February 11th is a big day in this beautiful South Florida city. That’s tire birth anniversary of tire great inventor, Thomas A. Edison, who came here in 1886 in search of a suitable filament for the incandescent lamp which he was later to perfect. He didn’t find what he was looking for, but he did find a healthy spot to spend 50 winters after that.

In 1931, the folks here chose Edison’s birthday to cut the ribbons and dedicate a shiny new bridge across the Caloosahatchee River and named the Thomas A. Edison Bridge. Edison himself was on hand for the gala occasion and sliced the ribbons. (He died in October that year.) Members of the State Road Board at the time were Robert W. Bentley, chairman, W. A. Shands, B. R. Graham, George B. Hills and Mallie Martin.

The excitement died down and travelers enjoyed using the new span. In 1935, the nationally-syndicated cartoonist, Robert L. Ripley, pointed out in his famous feature an oversight about the Thomas A. Edison Bridge: Though dedicated to the inventor of light, the span had no lights on it! Forthwith, the City of Fort Myers contracted with Florida Power & Light Co. to put up lights, and quick. They were installed in November, 1937.

Reminded the people that back in 1889, Edison had offered the City street lights; he would furnish the wire, bulbs and current if the community would furnish the poles. It wouldn’t, and Edison didn’t. Some old timers said that fire couldn’t be sent across wires. Besides, the bright illumination would scare the cattle away!