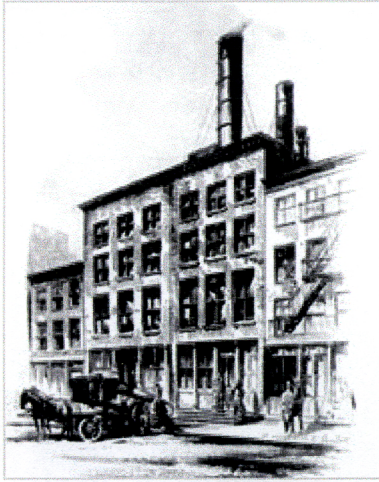


Off Goes the Power Current Started by Thomas Edison

By JENNIFER S. LEE

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Con Edison's original power plant on Pearl Street. (Illustration: Consolidated Edison)

Today, Con Edison will end 125 years of [direct current](#) electricity service that began when Thomas Edison [opened his Pearl Street power station on Sept. 4, 1882](#). Con Ed will now only provide [alternating current](#), in a final, vestigial triumph by [Nikola Tesla](#) and [George Westinghouse](#), Mr. Edison's rivals who were the main proponents of alternating current in the AC/DC debates of the turn of the 20th century.

The last snip of Con Ed's direct current system will take place at 10 East 40th Street, near the Mid-Manhattan Library. That building, like the thousands of other direct current users that have been transitioned over the last several years, now has a converter installed on the premises that can take alternating electricity from the Con Ed power grid and adapt it on premises. Until now, Con Edison had been converting alternating to direct current for the customers who needed it — old buildings on the Upper East Side and Upper West Side that used direct current for their elevators for example. The subway, which has its own converters, also provides direct current through its third rail, in large part because direct current electricity was the dominant system in New York City when the subway first developed out of the early trolley cars.

Despite the clear advantage of alternating current — it can be transmitted long distances far more economically than direct current — direct current has taken decades to phase out of