

Edison Supervised Electric Plant Installation in City

Like every American city in 1876, Fall River was a quiet, unjangled town of unpaved streets, gas lights, horse-drawn trolleys, and kerosene lamps. The coming of electricity changed all that. As the United States entered into an era of expansion in communication, transportation, and living conditions, the standards of Fall River changed with the times.

Electricity, displayed to the public for the first time at the 1876 Centennial Exposition, quickly developed under the genius of Thomas A. Edison and other inventive men, and became increasingly popular in American cities and towns.

On March 7, 1893, the Fall River Electric Light Company was founded, for the purpose of manufacturing and distributing electricity for street lighting. It was an isolated unit, generating its own electricity from an arc light machine belted to a saw mill engine on Blossom Street.

A competitor entered the field the same year. In October, the Edison Illuminating Company of Fall River was chartered to produce power for commercial lighting.

The great wizard of Menlo Park, Thomas A. Edison, personally supervised the installation of the Fall River plant, living in the city for some time while he worked on his plans. His signature is on the original charter which is now in possession of the Fall River Electric Company.

The two plants functioned on opposite sides of the river for a short time. The underground and overhead system conflicted. In one instance the street lighting company ran wires right through McWhirr's department store, encroaching on the territory of the Edison commercial company.

Realizing the waste in duplication of machinery and labor, the two companies united in 1896 to form the Fall River Electric Light Company.

Street Arc Lights

The first signs of electricity were the arc lights which went up on Main Street. At this time electricity was thought of in terms of lighting only, but with the development of motors, generating stations began selling power to manufacturing companies.

The Hathaway Street Generating Station was built in 1908 with a carrying capacity of 4,000 kilowatts. The Electric Light Company contracted to sell power to the mills, and in 1911 the Pilgrim Mill signed to have most of their power supplied by the company. Now all but two mills (which furnish some of their own power) are supplied by the Fall River Electric Light Company.

In 1917 the company increased its carrying capacity by hooking up with power companies in Brockton and Providence, thus becoming a

customer of New England Power Associates. Before this, the Fall River Electric Light Company generated all the electricity in this area.

The Montaup Electric Company became a generating station in 1923 for the Fall River company, Blackstone Valley Gas and Electric Company of Pawtucket, and the Edison Illuminating Company of Brockton. The station is a tidewater development, which means greater efficiency in the generation of power.

The Fall River company was one of the first in the country to use a transmission voltage of 23,000 kilowatts, and the first to use the technical device of shielded underground cables in paper-insulated cables which is now standard equipment.

With the increase of electric devices and motors, the Fall River Electric Light Company has developed. The original Edison contract of 1,600 installations (lamps) of ten candlepower each has grown to a company which services 43,966 customers and has 245 employees. Street lights number 4,434, and there are 17,816 poles and 1,113 man-holes. The company carries a peak load of 60,000 kilowatts.

Still Expanding

Still expanding, the Electric Light Company joined Eastern Utilities Associates in October, 1950.

The original incorporators of the company had a great deal of foresight in 1893 to envision the extensive development and use of electricity, scoffed at by cynics in 1876.

The first officers were: President, John D. Flint; Treasurer and Clerk, Henry T. Buffinton, Directors, W. H. Hathaway, Edwin Leigh; W. B. Hosmer, Marsden J. Perry, the financier, was one of the principal backers of Fall River Electric Light, and Charles A. Coffin, the first president of General Electric, helped in organizing the company.

Although not directly connected with the Fall River Electric Light Company, two men associated the name of Fall River with the progress of the electric light.

"One of the apostles of electric power," Sidney B. Paine, spent four years in a Fall River textile mill, and after learning the trade, toured New England mills selling the idea of using electric isolated units.

Arthur T. Bush, another contributor to the progress of electricity, wired the steamers Providence and Pilgrim of the Old Colony Steamship Company. On their way to New York, the steamers with their 2,000 lights were the wonder of the coast.