

## A STORY OF PRIVATE INITIATIVE AND LOCAL CAPITAL

## Chapter III

## MAKING "SERVICE" MEAN SOMETHING

THE "LAKE COUNTY EXPERIMENT" demonstrated a new and better method of bringing electric service to scattered suburban and rural communities in northern Illinois. One centrally-located electric station was substituted for a dozen small local plants—and wooden pole lines carried service long distances to twenty-two customer-communities. But the story of the Lake County Experiment has already been told . . .

What had been done once could be done again. What had worked in Lake County could be made to work over 6,000 square miles of territory surrounding Chicago. And that was the job of the Public Service Company twenty years ago.

All over northern Illinois, local electric stations that served only one town were abandoned. A few modern stations capable of serving twenty . . . thirty . . . forty towns replaced them. This extension of the "central station" idea demonstrated by the Lake County Experiment brought service to almost 100 new communities within a few years.

The wooden wire-strung poles that paralleled every main highway became symbols of a new era of electric service—a service that was available twenty-four hours a day instead of a meager six. It meant much to the residents of northern Illinois.

Storms, however, still played havoc with these pole lines. Terrific winds uprooted poles, tore down wires. Service was interrupted. Trouble-shooting crews were dispatched at once to repair the damage. They

worked twenty-four hour shifts, if necessary. But service *had* been interrupted.

So the next job was to forestall as many of these interruptions as possible. The network of pole lines was strengthened. Old lines were replaced with new lines of sturdier design. Communities had service brought to them over more than one route. In case of an accident on the main line, service could be switched immediately to an indirect or "detour" line. The large investment in this reconstruction program resulted in a definite advance toward the high quality of service which is taken for granted today.

In 1923, an even greater step forward was taken. Interconnection of electric systems was introduced into northern Illinois. Just as, twelve years before, the files of wire-strung poles typified an era of improved twenty-four hour service, the steel tower lines that now began to appear typified an era of *super-service*. These steel towers, anchored in concrete and transmitting vast quantities of energy, strengthened the pathways of power between important generating stations.

Today steel tower lines are a familiar sight. They interconnect all the Company's large electric stations, making the power produced at any one of them available to all the others. They interconnect, also, the power resources of neighbor utility companies, tying in 317 northern Illinois cities and towns with the greatest pool of power in the world. Here are vast power highways ready to serve the future, forestalling the possibility of any "electrical famine" in the years to come.

## PUBLIC SERVICE COMPANY OF NORTHERN ILLINOIS

*This is the third of a series of stories chronicling the development of the Public Service Company of Northern Illinois and the service it is bringing to the area into which Chicago is growing. Copies of previous chapters will be mailed you if you will write to the Company, 72 West Adams Street, Chicago*

TWO DECADES IN THE SERVICE OF NORTHERN ILLINOIS