

A STORY OF PRIVATE INITIATIVE AND LOCAL CAPITAL

Chapter IV

LOWERING THE COST

SO FAR, these stories about the Public Service Company of Northern Illinois have been largely historical. They have described the Company's birth, its growing pains, its coming of age. . . . Now we turn to a consideration of what its progress has meant to the thousands of people who have made their homes in northern Illinois beyond the limits of the City of Chicago.

The World War is a convenient milestone for our generation—a logical starting-place from which to reckon changes in living conditions. Remember how full of drudgery the average home was before the War? How many families denied themselves certain conveniences because they were thought expensive? Strange as it seems today, electricity was often classed as a luxury twenty years ago.

From the beginning, it became the aim of the Public Service Company to make electricity available to all of northern Illinois—and to reduce rates whenever it could be done without jeopardizing the quality of service. In 1914, three years after the Company was founded, customers benefited by two rate reductions. In the following year came another reduction. In 1916, two more.

And this was during the World War crisis. Prices on all commodities were soaring. The "high cost of living" was discussed wherever people gathered. There were coal-less Mondays. Gasoline-less Sundays. Sugar was strictly

rationed. Through these trying years, in spite of the increased cost of raw materials and labor, rates for electric service in northern Illinois were not raised.

During the post-war period a slight increase in rates did become necessary, but this was temporary. In 1923 began a series of four substantial reductions. And today, in many northern Illinois homes electricity costs about half as much as it did in 1911. It is the only important item on the family budget which is substantially lower in price now than it was before the War!

Remarkable as this achievement is, it is not the complete story. You remember what "electric service" used to consist of in those early days. It meant *electric lights*—usually a drop cord suspended from the ceiling of each room. Electric washing machines and vacuum cleaners were too experimental, too costly, to be extensively used. Toast and coffee still had to be made in the kitchen. Electric refrigerators and radios were unknown.

Today electric time- and labor-savers are taken for granted. They have revolutionized living conditions in the home—working conditions in the factory, the office and on the farm. This vast new field in which the gas and electricity produced by the Public Service Company is being put to work makes an interesting companion-story to that of the greatly reduced rates at which these services are now available. It will be told next week.

PUBLIC SERVICE COMPANY OF NORTHERN ILLINOIS

This is the fourth 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