

A STORY OF PRIVATE INITIATIVE AND LOCAL CAPITAL

Chapter VII

THE KITCHEN CATCHES UP



IF A MODERN WOMAN could reverse Rip van Winkle's adventure and wake up in a typical kitchen of twenty years ago, she would have surprises aplenty in store for her. She would remember what she has almost forgotten—how tedious kitchen chores used to be. And chances are, she'd feel like Cinderella, committed to a life of drudgery before a black, ogreish cook-stove.

Kitchens were huge in those days. They took up a whole wing of the house. Floors were bleached from many scrubblings and rag rugs marked the spots where women spent most of their time—standing before the stove, the sink and the big center table.

The cook-stove dominated the room. Its massive iron body, towering high against the wall and trimmed with lavish scrolleries, had to be blackened once a week. In many cases it had to be fed with wood or coal. Here the homemaker established her fame as a hostess. When everything was finally "on", simmering away, she could drop into her nearby rocker to sew—and keep an eye on the oven. During summer months she almost roasted herself along with her dinner.

Milk, eggs and butter were kept in a cellar "cool spot" and a dozen trips down and up had to be made every day. All kitchen work was done by hand. No wonder this back room used to be the homemaker's living room.

The welcome change followed closely on the heels of the World War. A new freedom for women was ushered in—and largely responsible for it was the new kitchen. It shrank in size

to save steps. Color was introduced to cheer it up. And gas and electricity were put to doing a variety of routine tasks—tasks that they could do more efficiently and in a shorter time.

Ugly, black cook-stoves became compact porcelain ranges fueled by electricity or gas and styled for beauty and convenience. Their ovens were insulated so as not to add to the heat of the room. Their heat could be kept automatically at a given temperature. Meals could be left to cook themselves. And the homemaker came out of her kitchen—to spend pleasant afternoons with her friends.

Mechanical refrigerators now keep healthful cold locked up in porcelain cabinets. Motor-driven ventilating fans whisk cooking odors out-of-doors. Automatic mixers whip cream, mash potatoes, beat up cakes. Incinerators deal with the garbage problem. Dishes can be washed and dried electrically—and a gas-fired water heater in the basement provides all the hot water needed at the turn of a faucet.

The Public Service Company has shouldered an active responsibility in the equipping of these new kitchens in northern Illinois. The development of leisure-giving appliances has not been left to chance. Because it has given much attention to the requirements of customers, the Company has been able to offer definite specifications to manufacturers for the improvement of appliances of all kinds. As a further safeguard to housewives, the Company submits all equipment displayed in its stores to severe laboratory tests—sells only appliances that will give long, satisfactory service.

PUBLIC SERVICE COMPANY OF NORTHERN ILLINOIS

This is the seventh 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.