A STORY OF PRIVATE INITIATIVE AND LOCAL CAPITAL

Chapter VIII

BETTER LAMPS . . BETTER LIGHT

HIDDEN AWAY on the inside pages of Chicago newspapers in the fall of 1879 were brief announcements of a new invention by Thomas Edison. By closing an electric switch he had caused a loop of carbonized thread to glow for 40 hours in a vacuum. He had created the incandescent lamp! Friends predicted that his invention would make it practical to light homes electrically. Critics ridiculed the idea—forecast failure.

The critics were wrong. Early the next year a lighting system using 115 of the new incandescent lamps was successfully installed on a large steamship. Soon wealthy homes began to supplement gas mantles with electric lights.

Improvements were made. The cotton-thread filament became a bamboo carbon filament. Then the carbon filament became a tungsten wire. The vacuum bulb became a gas-filled bulb. And the glass was "frosted" inside. Each change brought longer life, better light. The perfected lamps gave *four times as much light as the original carbon lamp.* "Mazda" became their trade-mark.

Rival lamps, of course, appeared on the market. Most of them were of the carbon type with low efficiency. Many of them came from foreign countries where cheap labor cut manufacturing costs. And while a few pennies were saved at the time lamps were purchased, less light was received for current consumed.

When the Public Service Company was organized in 1911, it recognized the superiority of Mazda lamps—recommended that customers use them exclusively. Many homes, however, continued to buy the cheaper foreign-made lamps even though they were often fragile and burned out quickly.

Something had to be done. A solution was found in 1925. The Company made it easier to obtain high-quality lamps than low-grade lamps. It introduced a policy of "loaning" 60- and 100-watt Mazda lamps to customers without charge—of replacing them with new lamps when they burned out. It began to exchange other sizes of lamps at concessional prices—less than must be paid for inferior lamps. Lamp exchange counters were set up in all Public Service Stores. Lamp agencies were established in dozens of communities.

To assure uniform quality, a sampling of all lamps the Company purchases from manufacturers is submitted to the Electrical Testing Laboratories in New York City. This independent organization puts the lamps through careful performance tests. If they fall below prescribed standards, they are rejected.

When customers make lamp selections, the Company's representative asks about the fixtures for which they are intended—suggests the proper lamp to burn. And new lamp styles are demonstrated so customers may always light their homes in the most up-to-date way.

Thus the Public Service Company considers its obligation to residents of northern Illinois as extending beyond the running of reliable service to the customer's premises. It co-operates with him, showing him how to make the best use of the service he receives. It was this idea that inspired the Company's liberal lamp policy. It is constantly behind the Company's efforts to put superior lamps and appliances into every customer's home.

PUBLIC SERVICE COMPANY
OF NORTHERN ILLINOIS

This is the eighth 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