

# PRELUDE TO POWER

(Continued from Page One)

Electric light companies were numerous and the Ball Electric Light Co. appeared next on the scene in December 1890. A committee of council "after mature consideration" recommended the Ball company's offer of 10 arc lights of 1,000 candle power each for the sum of 15 cents each per night be approved — but the lights were not to be lit more than 200 nights per year. The company was responsible for placing the lights as directed by the council.

The council was not acting hastily. Indeed they saw in the electric lights a financial saving. The report, signed by Thomas McDowell, chairman of the fire and lamp committee, added it up this way. "... the town of Milton now has about 40 lamps in operation and finds that to do justice to parts of the town where lamps are very much needed, your committee would require at the least six more lamps ... which if the town should return to the contract system, which was four cents per lamp, it would amount to \$1.84 per night. Therefore your committee believe they will be getting a superior light and should ten lights be found sufficient, it would be a financial saving."

Just two months later Miltonians were busy figuring out plans of the town with "red wafers stuck where they want electric lights placed." Reported the Canadian Champion of the day, "The probabilities are that the town will soon be lighted by electricity."

But the path of progress was not to be entirely simple. In April of 1891 the fire and light committee of council intro-



duced a by-law at the council table granting the Reliance Electric Manufacturing Co. the "right and privilege of erecting the necessary poles and running circuits on any of the streets in the town for the purpose of supplying electric light to any of the ratepayers ..."

The by-law got only two readings, however, and one month later things were evidently in a turmoil. Council minutes of that day record that the committee declined to carry out any contract with Reliance until they erected the poles and strung the wire as they promised. The clerk was ordered to write Reliance and relay this information.

After hearing L. C. Peake of the Reliance firm, council, on July 20, 1891, concluded that the firm's proposition was "not at all in accord with the verbal propositions made by Mr. Slight, the President of the company to this council ...". No agreement was to be signed by council.

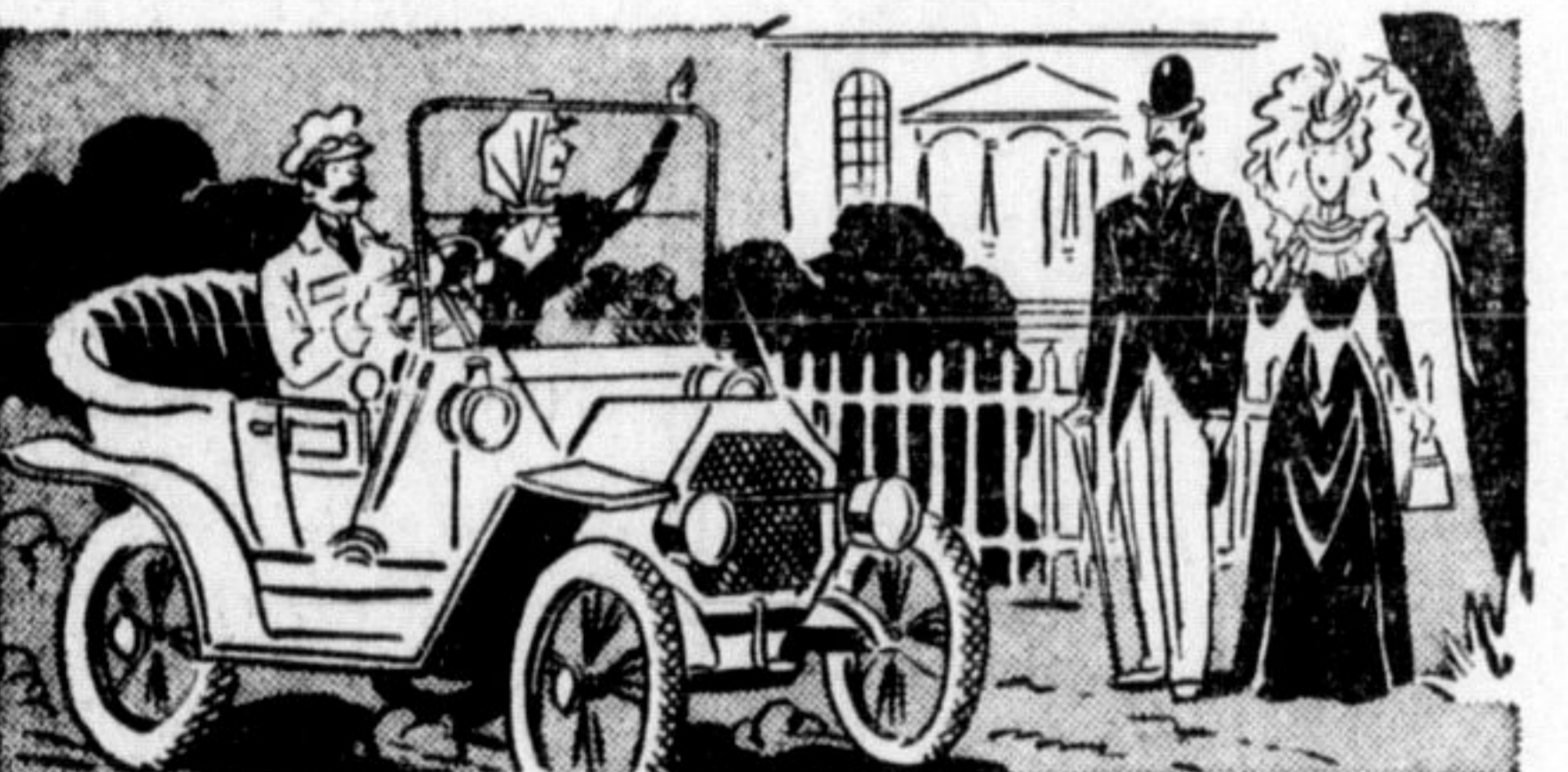
Meanwhile council was experiencing difficulties with its board sidewalks, the town hall stage required new scenery and there was considerable discussion about the cost and construction of the new Pine St. bridge that was to span the Sixteen.

The Champion of July 9, 1891 posed a question to the citizens, after pointing out another agent was in town offering to put in an electric plant if the town would guarantee to take 15 lights at 20 cents each per light for 250 nights. "\$750. What say the citizens? Spend this amount in lighting the town or repairing the sidewalks and streets with the same amount."

The answer perhaps came in August 1891 when the town granted the Ball Electric Light Co. permission to erect poles and string wires. But council had grown wary and agreed to leave the offer open for one month only.

The company proceeded with its plans for installing poles and stringing wire with the assurance of a demand for the service from stores and dwellings in the town. Council, still doubtful of the value of the electric lights, asked the firm to erect two lights as a test of their capacity "so the committee could report as to the number of lights that would be required to light the town."

The Champion of September 3, 1891 reported the firm's offer of 10 lights at 15 cents per light for 200 nights at a cost of \$300 per year or as many more lights as may be required at the same price. The newspaper observed it would require at least 15 lights to light the town properly.



"On Tuesday the fever of the electric light question got so high that five of the town councillors signed a requisition (drawn by the mayor) to the mayor to call a special meeting to reconsider the report adopted at the meeting on Monday evening. The mayor and all the members of the council being present, the report was mutilated to two clauses and an agreement was then approved of with the Ball Electric Light Company to furnish 10 or more lights of 1,000 candle power at 15 cents per light each night for 200 nights in the year for a term of three years or an additional term or terms of three years", reported the newspaper.

The stage was set and it was agreed that if the company would sign the proposed agreement the town could have electric light by October 6. Council also concluded the fire and light committee should plan on 15 lights and have them placed in the most suitable places on the streets in the town.

Time passed, however, and it was not until late in October that the town finally completed an agreement with the company to furnish 15 lights of 1,000 candle power, burning from dusk to midnight for 200 nights at 15 cents each per night.

Where did the 15 lights go? In explicit detail the fire and light committee spelled out the 15 locations this way:

1. At the corner of Main and Court Sts.
2. At the corner of Main and Commercial.
3. On Main St. near the band stand.
4. At the corner of Main and James Sts.
5. At the corner of Main and Elizabeth Sts.
6. On Mill St. opposite Mr. J. W. Elliott's.
7. On Victoria St. about 400 feet from James St.
8. On Martin St. opposite Mrs. Carmer's.
9. On Mary St. west near Mr. James Deforest's.
10. At the corner of King and Brown Sts. (Registry Office)
11. At the corner of Hugh and Queen Sts. (Mr. Austin Willmott's)
12. At the corner of Sarah and Foster Sts. (Dr. Freeman's)

13. At the corner of Prince and Pearl Sts.
14. At the corner of Pine and Court Sts. (Mr. Deacon's)
15. On the corner of East Mary and Charles Sts.

By this time the company expected to have the plant working within three weeks and as the fall days darkened earlier the promised brighter illumination no doubt tempted eager citizens. Merchants were preparing for the Christmas trade. Mr. James Lindsay's saw mill at the corner of Pearl and Fulton was busy turning out barrel heading material. But just after 6 p.m. on a Saturday in November 1891 disaster struck at the mill when high winds "blowing a perfect hurricane" fanned a blaze and levelled the mill despite valiant efforts of the town's two hose reels who were "early on the spot".

At the school the headmaster was preparing for the Christmas examinations at the end of the first term and found it necessary to thrash 11 youngsters.

Mid November arrived and Contractor Sid Young promised everything would be ready "for the illumination of the town by electricity by the end of the week." The poles were up and wiring was nearly completed.

Disappointment struck though, when the dynamo for Milton's electric light outfit failed to arrive, but optimistically the contractor promised it would be running before the end of the week.

On December 3, 1891 The Champion reported: "Contractor Sid Young set his dynamo to work on Monday evening and illuminated the town for the first time with electricity. The new method is a great improvement on the old coal oil lamps which were used up to last week, and the citizens of the town generally are more than satisfied with the change."

So it was, that for Christmas 1891 when Bastedo and Co. was offering its Christmas groceries as well as hanging lamps for \$2.50; Clement's Hardware was offering coal oil at 15 cents a gallon; Hemstreet Bros. had a special sale on overcoats and Head and Co. offered grey or black Yak robes, the town was illuminated for the first time with the "flaming electric light."

It remains for the imagination to visualize the scene as the new bright lights beamed out their rays of progress on the new fallen snow that Christmas. No doubt they attracted considerable attention as youngsters eyed the magic of the light that required no matches. No doubt the village constable, accustomed to making the evening rounds with ladder and light, welcomed the change that this progressive move produced — Streets illuminated by electricity in that year of 1891.



## THE PATH OF PROGRESS

MILTONIANS became accustomed to their new street lights and the placing of electric lights in homes and stores spread. With the increasing demands came the need for more and more power and this presented problems for the limited capacity of the equipment.

The next 13 years also included the transition from the Ball Electric Light Co. to ownership by the Milton Electric Light Co. and the demands for additional power became incessant. There were frequent complaints about the lack of lights at the railway station. In fact history records that one unfortunate girl stepped from a train as it stopped, thinking she was at the unlighted station platform and in the darkness plunged off the trestle bridge some distance from the station. Railway officials were sympathetic to the provision of lights at the station but reported the inability of the light company to provide any service.

In March of 1904 the town council instructed its committee to discuss a new contract with the Milton Electric Light Co. but apparently these discussions were not particularly fruitful.

Council then took matters into its own hands and declared, in a motion in May 1904, moved by Mr. Hemstreet and seconded by Mr. Higginbotham "that it is the opinion of this council that the town should own the electric light plant and place it under municipal control if it can be purchased at a fair valuation ..."

The cost of illuminating the streets had climbed in the intervening years and in July the company was paid \$3.30 per night for 64 nights.

Discussions and proposals passed back and forth between the council and electric light company between May and October of 1904, when the company refused the town's offer of \$2,500 for their plant. They asked the matter be submitted to the ratepayers.

The matter dragged on, and on December 8, 1904 The Champion commented: "The present electric lighting is not satisfactory. There is a shortage of power ... the lights now in operation are anything but brilliant and instead of improving its plant the company has given notice that it will increase its charges."

That same week, however, members of the electric light company agreed to accept \$2,600 for the plant, consisting of arc and incandescent dynamos, poles, wiring etc.

Council determined to submit the whole matter to the "freeholders" for ratification in the election January 2, 1905.

Estimated cost of a municipal plant was broken down this way: boiler and foundation \$1,265; engine etc. \$1,175; condensing equipment \$450; moving \$75; power house \$1,200; steam piping for hall \$500; incidentals \$200; new incandescent dynamos \$535; old plant \$2,600 for a grand total of \$8,000.

It will be noted from these figures the plans were to erect a municipal generating station next the town hall with the steam from the boiler to be used for heating the hall.

Late December arrived and circulars outlining the plans for a municipal power house were distributed to the ratepayers. Commenting on the circular, The Champion of December 29, 1904 editorialized that "It is made clear that if the by-law is carried the town will have a first class lighting service with power to spare for the doubling of the present number of incandescent lamps; that applications for 200 such lamps have been already received and that a considerable income from the additional light takers will be assured."

Selling electricity was not a losing proposition, it was emphasized. "It is stated that the audit of the present company shows a yearly profit, notwithstanding its lack of power and inability to supply lights to those who want them and are ready to pay for them."

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# CONGRATULATIONS

TO THE

Milton Hydro-Electric Commission

ON ITS

# 50<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY

The development of an adequate supply of electrical energy to meet the needs of a growing community has been possible through a sound partnership between the Milton Hydro Electric Commission, the Hydro Electric Power Commission of Ontario and the Town of Milton.

The Town of Milton has been pleased to participate with the Commission in the growth of the community. The Mayor and members of the Municipal Council, on behalf of the citizens, wish too, to express their sincere appreciation for the illumination of the exterior of the Town Hall by the Commission.

The special lighting will serve as a lasting reminder of the co-operation between the town and the commission in service to the community.

THE CORPORATION OF THE TOWN OF MILTON

