

# National Electrical Week - - February 6 to 12

The Champion, Milton, Ont., Wednes., February 2, 1972

National Electrical Week feature

Second Section

## Hydro in Milton - - 80 years of progress

It was in 1889 that the town fathers of Milton decided there was a need for electric street lights in the town. Until then, coal oil lamps atop the poles were in use in Milton although neighboring cities had the "flaming electric light."

Electric light companies were numerous in Ontario around 1890. Milton Council hassled with Edison Electric Light Co., Ball Electric Light Co. and Reliance Electric Manufacturing for a year before granting a contract to the Ball firm to erect 15 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. They were finally installed and put into use just before Christmas of 1891.

On Dec. 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."

After the town of Milton got its

first electric street lights in 1891, homes and business places began "living better electrically". The Ball Electric Co., which installed the street lights and the dynamo to keep them operating in the evenings, transferred ownership to the Milton Electric Light Co. Soon demands for power outweighed the local firm's facilities and residents were complaining that although the lights were on, they weren't very bright. In January of 1905 the "freeholders" of Milton voted 119 to 61 in favor of the council buying the electric utility at a total cost of \$8,000 and the business was turned over to the

town that summer. "First class lighting service with power to spare" was promised by proponents of the day.

A by-law passed in November of 1905 urged Milton electricity users to "take due care to prevent waste of light and switch off all lamps when not in use." Rates in those days were 40 cents per month for up to two lights, 30 cents for up to five lights, 27 cents for up to eight lights, 25 cents for up to 12 lights, and all over 12 were to be charged at 12 cents per 1,000 watts. The popular light was a 16 candle power light.

Having purchased the local power utility company in order to improve its service, the town council of 1905 purchased the lands next door to the town hall (now a service station east of the building) for the sum of \$275 for erection of a new power station. K. L. Aitken of Toronto built it at a cost of \$8,000 and it was first put in operation in January of 1906.

Ruby Ellis was the town's electrician in 1905 and he was responsible for running the power plant, handling its repairs, installation of all services plus collection of the monthly accounts—all for a salary of \$50 a month. He was also to furnish power from dusk to midnight.

His assistant Richard Maurel earned \$40 a month and his shift provided power from 5 a.m. to daylight. His contract was limited to no more than 10 hours a day but left a loophole that if he did work more than 10, he was to be paid 20 cents an hour for the overtime hours.

When Milton Council first got into the business of supplying municipal electric power to consumers in 1905 there were 1,405 people in town. Taxes were based on a rate of 20 mills, it cost \$4 a day to hire a team and buggy, the chief constable received \$50 yearly for his services, and the proposed removal of platforms in the school classrooms was a local issue.

After the new town hydro plant beside the town hall came into operation in January, 1906, The Champion of the day reported: "There is a tremendous improvement in the lighting, which was always dim and unsteady under the old arrangement. There were too many lights for the limited power. Now the lights are brilliant and steady and there is plenty of power to spare for extra lights." Not only did the new plant power the lights around town, it also provided steam heat for the town hall.

Around 1906 the Hydro-Electric Power Commission of Ontario was established with the famed Sir Adam Beck as chairman. It began delivering power to the town of Berlin (now Kitchener) in 1910 and Toronto tapped into the lines the following year. In 1912 Milton council called a vote of the people on the question of purchasing power from Ontario Hydro at \$30.50 per horsepower and the vote was successful, 189 to 4 in favor.

"Plainly the electors realize that a defeat for the by-law would mean putting an end to the progress which the town has been making lately," the Champion reported. It hinted the town's other amenities—location, water supply, fire protection, railway connections and shipping facilities—in addition to the great supply of electrical power—would make Milton a great manufacturing centre.

New hydro poles were placed along Milton's Main St. from Brown St. to Commercial St. (or from one hotel to the other) in 1913 after the town hooked up to Ontario Hydro, and a line was extended to provide the first hydro power to P. L. Robertson's screw manufactory on Bronte St. in March of 1913. "It is hoped the town will soon secure new industries," prayed The Champion of the day. "The Willmott buildings, vacated some time ago by the Edwards Motor Co., are vacant and manufacturers have been looking at them."

The Robertson plant was using 375 horsepower of current and

shareholders of the still-young company were jubilant at their annual meeting to learn the

installation had brought "greatly increased output."

That year 1913 was a memorable one. The population had (Continued on Page B2)



ONE OF THE FIRST candid photographs in existence that actually shows Thomas A. Edison conducting an experiment in his famous West Orange, New Jersey laboratory. (Photo courtesy of Thomas A. Edison Foundation, Inc.)

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### Local commission serving since 1914

By C. B. W. MacIntosh  
Public Relations Officer  
Ont. Hydro Central Region

Half a century of service to the residents of Milton, the picturesque county town of Halton, was celebrated in 1964 by Milton Hydro Electric Commission.

It is noteworthy that many Milton residents were aware of the need for an adequate supply of electrical power as far back as 1909. They had become conscious of the advantages that

municipalities with ample electricity in the surrounding area were enjoying. Consequently the first overtures to Ontario Hydro from Milton requesting estimates on the cost of supplying electrical energy came in that year.

But it was not until 1913, after considerable discussion and negotiating, that hydro power was brought into Milton from Niagara. Prior to that a limited supply of electric power was obtained from a small municipal steam electric generating plant. However, communities in the nearby district with hydro power by then were forging ahead, and this promoted Milton citizens to take positive action to get sufficient power.

When the first electric power from Ontario Hydro became available, after rebuilding of local distribution lines, new street lighting, new lines to industrial customers and the construction of transformer stations, the municipal council dealt with the electric powers affairs at first, but the council prepared a bylaw to be voted on at the December municipal elections to create a municipal Hydro Commission. The first Milton Hydro Commission took office early in 1914.

At the initial meeting, Dr. R. K. Anderson was elected Chairman and the other Commissioners were Vice-chairman W. B. Clements and Mayor Dr. H. McColl.

The advent of sufficient low-cost electrical power to take care of the demand has helped to give impetus to the steady growth and development in Milton.

Milton Hydro has a progressive Commission. The members are chairman, W. C. Rowney; vice-chairman Charles Thomson and commissioner, Mayor Brian Best. O. L. Hadley is the manager.

—Reminder, wedding stories and photos must be submitted to The Champion for publication within one month of the wedding.



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