

AND THEN THERE WAS LIGHT— ELECTRIC LIGHT

A burning candle or a kerosene lantern provided the only light by which our forefathers and mothers could read and work. Wood fires gave them their only heat. Flames and coals from these same fires cooked their food. People lived, worked and played without electricity.

Now Vermonters have electric lights to brighten their homes. Oil, gas, electricity, wood and solar generated heat keep us warm. Stoves and microwave ovens cook our food. It is hard to imagine what life was like without these conveniences. But if you think living without electricity was something only the early Vermont settlers had to cope with, think again. You might be surprised to learn how late electricity came to Vermont.

Benjamin Franklin experimented in the 1700s with electricity and scientists in both America and Europe worked on developing the electric light. But it was the American, Thomas Edison, whose work led to the first practical **incandescent light** bulb in 1879. Several years later the wonders of the electric light came to Vermont.

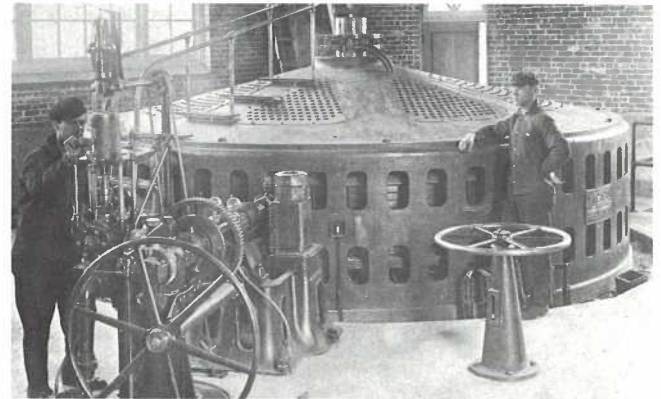
Slowly, city by city, and town by town, candles, kerosene lamps and gas lights gave way to electricity. The man who lit the street lamps at night and **extinguished** them in the morning had to find new work. Women no longer spent time cleaning the smoke-blackened chimneys of kerosene lamps. Instead of loading a cookstove with wood, they simply turned a knob under an electric burner.

In 1885 a representative of the Edison Company came to Montpelier and set up the town's first lighting in the Cross Baking Company. Later, the Thomas-Houston Company **installed** street lights in the capital city. Crowds of people came from surrounding towns to see these new-fangled lighting devices, pleasing store

owners whose shops were filled with customers after dark.

Legislators described Montpelier's lights to the people in their home towns. As the word spread so did the formation of small power and light companies. Towns located along streams or rivers that could power electric **turbines** were the first to switch from kerosene and gas to electricity.

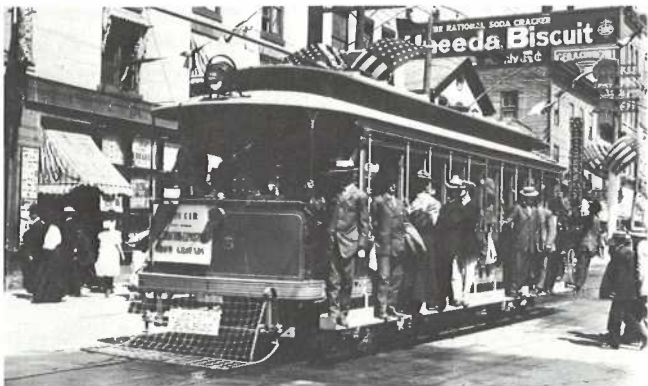
Electrical Turbine



Electricity was a luxury that not everyone could afford. Bills were figured differently than they are today. Customers were charged according to the number of lights installed in their homes. The charge was the same whether you turned on a light for five minutes or the whole day. Many families had only a single light and moved it from room to room with a long extension cord. The hours for electricity were different too. At first the power companies turned on the "juice" at dusk and shut it off before midnight. In Woodstock the lighting company shut off service on nights when the moon was bright enough to light the streets.

Like anything new and different, electricity was not welcomed by everyone. When Brattleboro proposed an electric street trolley several citizens complained, among them Rudyard Kipling, the famous author of

The Jungle Book. He wrote that the trolley would “enormously increase the risk of fires at the same time adding to the **perils** of extinguishing them and which in every city in the Union has **inevitably** been followed by the violent death of human beings.”

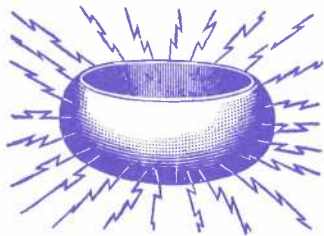


Burlington Trolley in 1909

The Brattleboro newspaper, the *Vermont Phoenix*, reported, however, that many people celebrated the arrival of the electric cars. They decorated their houses and hung bright colored lanterns around the common “which with the electric light presented a brilliant scene when lighted. At 7:30 when the band arrived. . . the street was one blaze of red fire, candles, rockets, etc., while from the throats of 2,500 people came a shout of joy and approval.”

People believed that the wonders of electricity would end hard labor, allow them more free time, and make

Electric Ring for Rheumatism.



These are the first rings introduced into the United States, all others being imitations. Their popularity has caused many rings to be placed on sale that are without any curative properties.

No. 8R1585
Gray metal, polished.

Price, each, 50c

No. 8R1588 Gray metal, gold plated on outside.
Price each.....95c

If by mail, postage extra, each, 2 cents.

From the Sears 1902 Catalog

their work days shorter. Electricity could do almost anything, or so it was thought, even cure illnesses.

In 1890 only thirteen communities in Vermont had electricity. By 1900 the number had grown to forty. As the technology to **generate** and **transmit** electricity improved it became cheaper to buy and found its way into more and more homes. However, in Vermont, the home of Thomas Davenport, the inventor of the world's first electric motor, fewer than one farm in nine had electricity.

George Aiken, Governor of Vermont and later United States Senator, worked hard to get electricity to farms and villages. “There is something about the electric light that brings courage and improved morale to a small community,” he said at a celebration of electricity's arrival to Addison, Bridport, and Shoreham on November 12, 1940.

The last places in Vermont to be hooked up to electricity were Victory and Granby. On November 8, 1963, the first electric lights shone in those northern Vermont towns.

The ability to generate power and transmit it over long distances was a technological revolution that few before Franklin and Edison had imagined. There is little doubt that other methods of producing electricity lie in the future. Perhaps someday we will be able to make our own power at home eliminating the need for centralized power companies and miles of cable.

VOCABULARY

cope - to deal with

incandescent light - type of lamp in which the filament is heated by an electric current until it glows brightly

extinguish - to put out

install - to put in

turbine - a machine which converts the energy of a moving fluid (like water) to mechanical power

peril - danger

inevitable - something that is bound to happen

generate - to produce

transmit - to send from one person, thing or place to another

