

ELECTRICITY COMES TO HIGHLAND

Charlie Greenland

There are a variety of stories about the coming of electricity-probably because it came to different parts of Highland in different years.

The power plants in American Fork Canyon were built long before any of the electricity was available for use by the local residents. The lower power plant, at the mouth of the canyon, across from the canyon road to Cedar Hills, was built in 1900 and had 2 GE 325 KVA generators. The upper plant, about two miles above (one building still remains), was built in 1907 and had 2 Westinghouse 667 KVA generators. There were four homes at the lower plant and it took four men to operate it. The upper plant was operated by one man and there was one residence there. Utah County Light & Power was organized Aug 2, 1899 and UP&L was organized Sep 6, 1912. Lehi City built their own power plant at 300 N and 500 W.

Before electricity most people lit their homes with kerosene (they called it coal oil), lanterns or candles. They provided enough light to read by if you were within a few feet but the rest of the room was pretty dim but since people went to bed early it didn't matter too much. The flame was quite dirty and the glass chimneys had to be cleaned frequently. In the 1880's or so, a new technology was devised and some communities were using a carbide system-expanding on the system used by underground miners. Individuals adapted it for personal use and Ludvig Larson had such a system for his home and outbuildings in the late 1920's. About half way between their home and barn they had an underground tank for water-about 20 feet deep and five feet in diameter. The tank was about half full of water. Above that was a container that could hold 200 lbs of carbide granules which were metered into the water, creating the carbide gas which was directed through deep underground pipes (to prevent freezing) to the home and outbuildings. This provided a much more brilliant white light and was wonderful to behold. It was a lot of work carrying water by the buckets to fill the tank and burying the pipes was laborious but they loved the result. The Larson's used their system for about 3 years.

In about 1928, Mr. Larson began talking to Utah Power and Light about getting service to Highland but they refused at first because of the cost. In a year or two, with a bit more prodding, they finally agreed to provide electricity for the approximately forty homes if each family would pay \$100 and purchase an electric stove. The \$100 was to be paid back to each customer over a period of ten years. Mr. Larson made it his mission to contact everyone and try to convince them to participate. It seems he convinced all but two or three so the power was provided. Each homeowner had to provide the wiring for their house so many people were a few years getting that done. Consensus is that the power was available sometime in 1932 for most people. There were many, maybe most, people who never used their electric stove-it was too hard to learn new systems. My grandparents bought an electric stove and never used it and when Grandma passed away in 1945; my mother was given the stove but never used it either. The coal range was just too familiar and easy.