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Willmar municipal utilities : a century of service



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Willmar municipal utilities

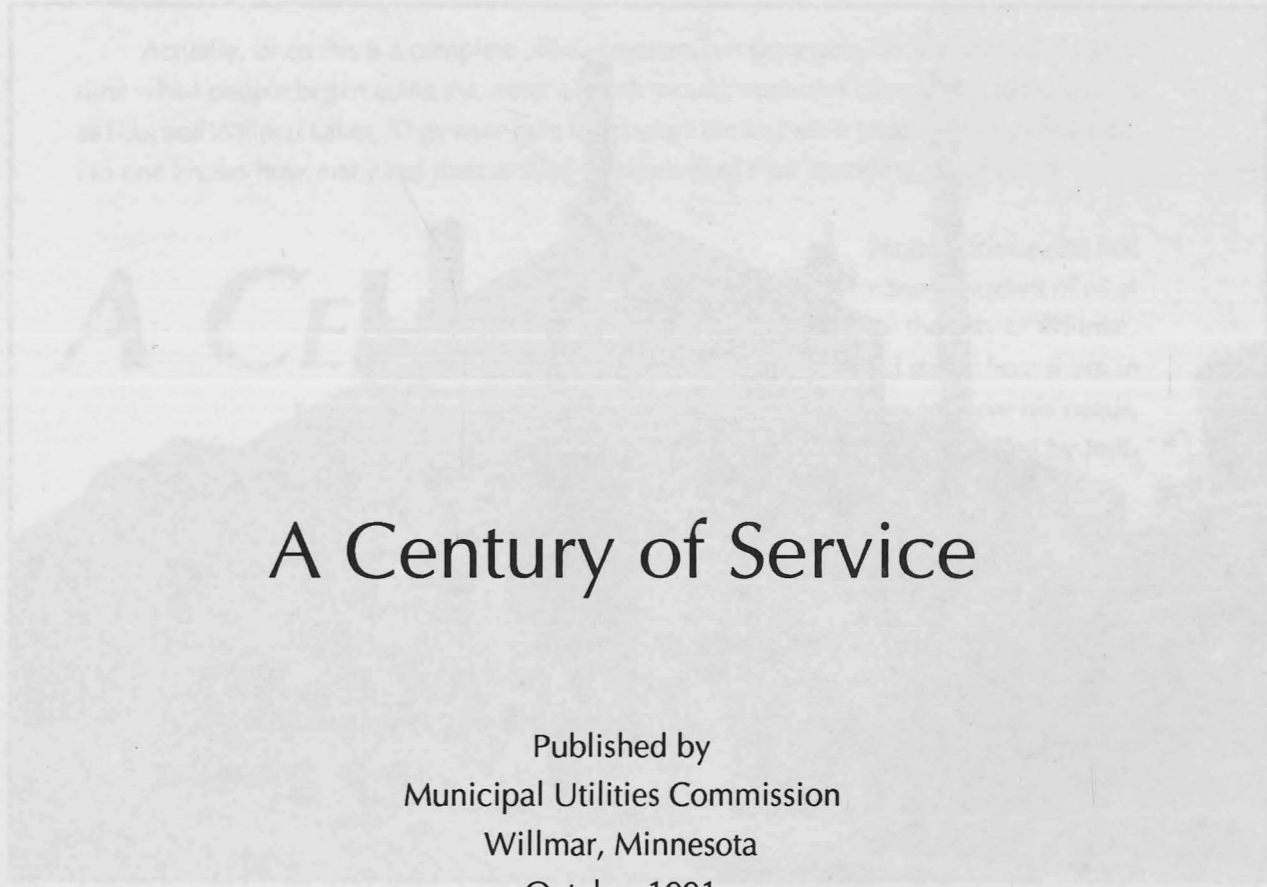
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Willmar Municipal Utilities

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A Century of Service
1891 - 1991



A Century of Service

Published by
Municipal Utilities Commission
Willmar, Minnesota
October 1991

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GENERAL MANAGERS/SUPERINTENDENTS

C. Ted Nelson	1983 - Present	N. W. Larson	1914 - 1928
Ted Odenwald	1978 - 1981	Clarence Haskell	1912 - 1914
George Davis	1972 - 1977	C. Dickerson	1912
Bill Latham	1965 - 1972	Peter Pearson	1907 - 1912
Andy Heiberg	1961 - 1965	A. C. Johnson	1903 - 1907
Warren VanTassel	1947 - 1951	O. L. Lien	1891 - 1902
E. T. Kleve	1928 - 1947		

Our story, like that of every other electrical generation facility, should begin in 1831, when Michael Faraday produced the world's first electrical generator.

Actually, since this is a complete utilities system, our story goes back beyond that to the time when people began using the water of what would, centuries later, come to be known as Foot and Willmar Lakes. They were here long before the first white people came to this area. No one knows how many red men availed themselves of their sparkling, clear water.

A CENTURY OF SERVICE

Berger Thorson, the first permanent resident of what is now the City of Willmar, hauled water from them in buckets to serve his needs, until he was killed by Indians during the Uprising.

Erick Nelson, the first post-Uprising resident of this area, relied upon them for his water supply, and when A. S. Lybe, the first storekeeper in what was to become Willmar, moved his stock of goods from New London to set up the Sutler's Store, which he hoped would serve the needs of the advancing railroad track-laying crews, he depended upon them for his water supply, too.

The body of water which we know as Foot and Willmar Lakes has served the people who lived here before there was a town, the residents and some businesses and industries in the growing village and, finally, it has become a part of the City of Willmar's utility system.

Thorson, Lybe and Nelson all lived very close to the lakes, with Thorson settling in what is now the Oak Lane area on the east side of the big point, Nelson building across the bay and Lybe setting up shop where today's Ella Avenue crosses the lake, near Seventh Street NW.

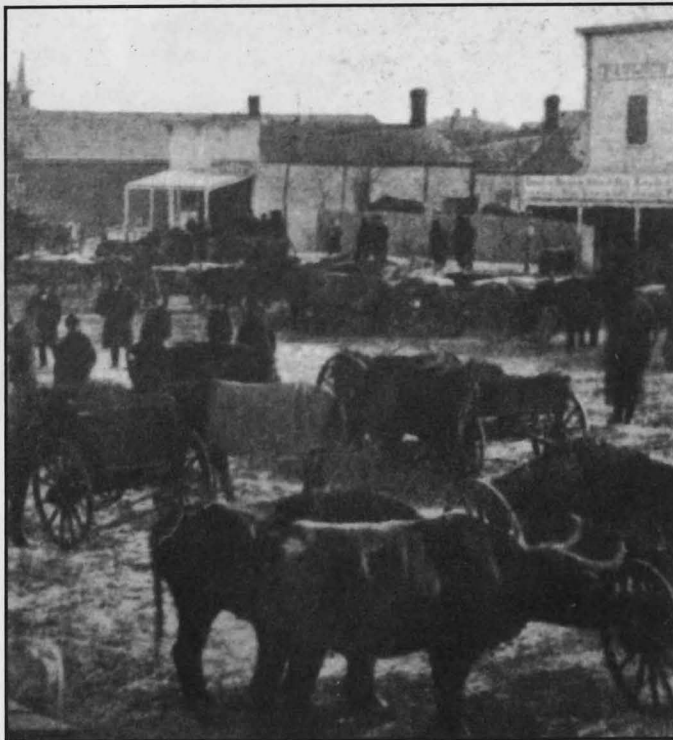
All three lived close enough to the lakes to draw water from them easily and to use that water for drinking and other household purposes, because it was clear enough and pure enough to be used safely.

As what was to become today's Willmar received the first of its permanent settlers in 1869 . . . Lybe, A. E. Rice, John Paulson, Erick Nelson and the man who built the Herrick House hotel . . . the lakes became their water supply, too.

3.16.92 g.

Lybe was appointed Willmar's first postmaster, when a post office was established here in 1869, but discovered that his store was just a few feet outside the village limits, so he had to move the store, which was also the post office, into the new town or give up the job. He moved it about three hundred yards south of its original location, but still built near enough to the lakes to draw water conveniently.

When the railroad's track-laying crews reached Willmar December 23, 1869, they closed up shop for the winter. This was, literally, the end of the line, even though one train did come this far. That wasn't intentional. Litchfield was supposed to be the western terminus of the line until the spring of 1870, but one train crew had heard that the track had been laid and went on through to Willmar before the winter really closed in and made the new tracks impassable.



Street Scene in early Willmar

There was more to come, however. When this part of the Minnesota Territory was opened to settlement, two counties were organized from land which had been part of Davis and Meeker counties. The northern new county was named Monongalia (derived from Monongahela, a Pennsylvania river area which many of the new county's residents once called home). The southern county was named Kandiyohi (from the Dakotah name for the

1870 became a very important year for this area and its new towns. Willmar had been chosen as a division point of the rapidly expanding railroad long before the tracks reached the little skeleton of a town. Later, it was to become the place where the east-west rail line was intersected by another line, which ran from Duluth to Sioux City. The St. Paul & Pacific Railroad built a station here in the spring of 1870, followed shortly by the construction of a railroad-owned grain elevator. These, together with Lybe's trading post, the Paulson & Rice General Store and the Herrick House, gave the burgeoning town a good start.

lakes it encompassed). That was in 1856. By 1870 the new Monongalia County had a population of about 3,400, while the new Kandiyohi County had only half as many residents.

That small number of people really didn't need two governments so, as an economy measure, a merger of the two counties was proposed. A referendum was held on the question and the proposition for merger carried handily. The new county was given the name Kandiyohi



Foot Lake, c. 1885

without opposition, but the matter of a county seat was a different story. Residents of former Monongalia County wanted the county seat in Willmar, since it was already the railroad's division point, and they believed it would grow more rapidly than any other community in the new county.

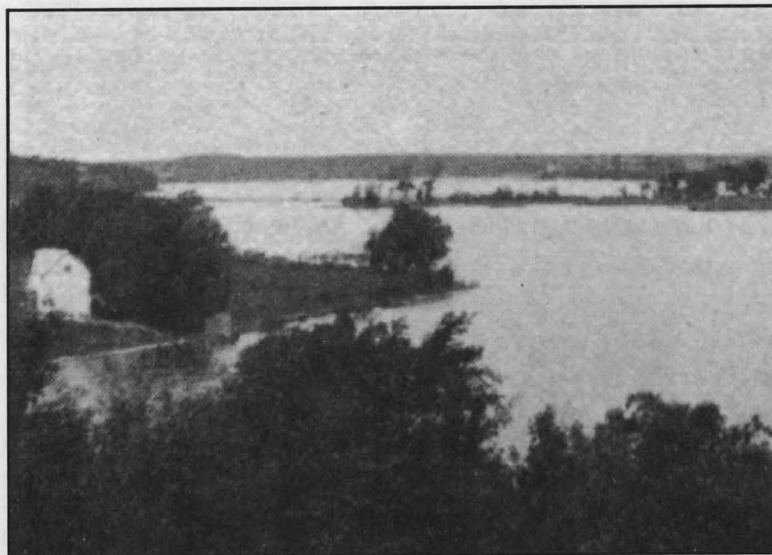
The residents of Kandiyohi County, on the other hand, wanted Kandiyohi Station to be the county seat, since it had been serving in that capacity for several years and was, at the time, more developed than Willmar.

The people in the southern half of the new county backed a senator from Hutchinson who promised to keep the county seat in Kandiyohi Station, while residents of the former Monongalia County elected Andrew Railson to the legislature as a representative, pledged to move the county seat to Willmar. The senator blocked all of Railson's attempts at legislating the change until the day he fell ill, and Railson got his bill passed in the House and then in the Senate and then signed by the Governor, all in one day! That was when Willmar became the county seat, which increased, even more, its opportunities for rapid growth.

While the new town's earliest settlers had built on what is now the North Side of Willmar, the business district was south of the railroad tracks. Later settlers bought land on the south side of the town, feeling that that would be more convenient. So many, in fact, built on the

south side, that stores, which had been built facing Pacific Avenue eventually reversed their interiors and made their back doors, which had opened on an alley, their front doors. Other stores sprang up on the other side of the alley, moving it closer to becoming our Benson Avenue. The firm of Carlson Bros. & Frost was the first to turn itself about and the Carlsons always took credit for turning Willmar's business district around.

With new residents building homes on the side of the tracks away from the lakes, the matter of a community water supply began to assume some importance. The new people dug wells, as was common in those days; and that wasn't much of a trick because water levels were very high in that part of what is now the city. Even twenty-five years later residents still shot ducks in the slough where Heritage Square now stands.



Foot Lake, c. 1895

The lakes continued to provide water for some of the town's residents for a number of years. They also supplied ice, much of it for railroad use. Every winter large crews would harvest thousands of tons of ice and store it, carefully covered with hay, in ice houses near the railroad tracks.

The St. Paul & Pacific Railroad built a roundhouse here, along with other service facilities. Water for the engines was drawn from the lake, and pipes, through which the water supply was drawn, were run out from shore. That worked nicely during the months when the lake wasn't frozen. When winter descended full force those pipes froze solid, and the yard crews had a very difficult time getting water to the engines. Someone came up with the idea of insulating the pipes, which were just inches above the surface of the water. Once the lake was frozen, insulating was no problem. Horse manure was hauled out onto the ice and piled on and around the pipes, a method which effectively kept them open all winter.

The new community grew rapidly. Railroading became its major industry and employer, bringing many new people to town.

Relatively few of the newcomers had easy, regular access to the lakes, and most people weren't too thrilled with the idea of drinking water which had been laced with horse manure.

Just when the agitation for a water system began is hard to say. Those things usually start very quietly – one neighbor talking to another, perhaps – but quickly grow to major crises.

We know that the new village was incorporated January 16, 1874, with the first village council holding its first meeting just four days later. We know that the council was alert to the needs of a growing community and that it began buying up certain lots for municipal purposes, installing kerosene street lamps in the business district and that there was even some discussion about establishing an electrical generating plant.

That was forward-thinking, indeed. The world was only a very few years into the age of electricity. Its first industrial dynamo had been invented only two years before the new town was incorporated and Thomas Edison's method for cheap production and transmission of electrical current was still four or five years in the future.

By 1890, when the 20-year-old town had a population of 1,825, the need for some type of central water distribution system was becoming very apparent. Accordingly, the city fathers entered into a contract with the Fairbanks Morse Company, to draw plans and specifications for a municipal water system. The Council agreed to pay the company \$250.00 for its engineering services when the contract for the actual construction of the system was let.

At the same time the Council voted to install three wells: one at 3rd and Benson, another at 4th and

Water Rates for the City of Willmar
July 2, 1902

Banks	\$ 5.00
Bakeries	8.00
Soda Fountains	10.00
Soda Foot Fountains	3.00
Barber shops: first chair and basin	4.00
" " each additional chair	1.50
Baths, private	2.50
" for barber shops, hotels and boarding houses	8.00
" each additional	3.00
" public	8.00
Blacksmith shops	3.00
" " each fire	3.00
Boarding houses: Special fountains not to be used over 6 hours a day for season of 5 months	10.00
All day and night	25.00
(Not over 11-16 in. nozzle, over extra).	
Meat market	6.00
Offices	4.00
Printing offices	6.00
Photograph galleries	6.00
" " basins extra	3.00
Residences occupied by one family of 5 rooms	4.00
Residences occupied by one family of 7 rooms	5.00
Residences occupied by one family of 10 rooms	6.00
Residences occupied by one family of more than 10 rooms, each room extra25
Hotel special	10 to .15
Restaurants	
Laundries, special	
Stables, private first stall and carriage washing	1.50
" private and additional stall	1.00
" livery, special	
" feed and sale stables, special	
Stores	4.00
Saloons with pump	20.00
School houses, per scholar05
Sprinkling street cart	1.25
(Per 25 feet front.)	
Closet in saloons	6.00
Urinal in saloons	3.00
Urinal, public	3.00
Sprinkling lawns 5 months of 50 feet frontage, 6 to 9 a.m. and 6 to 9 p.m.	3.00
Sprinkling lawns, each additional 25 feet50
Water closet, private	3.00
Water closet, public	6.00
Brick work, per 1,00005
Stone work, per perch05
Plastering per square yard	1/4¢
No permit less than \$1.00.	
Rate per barrel03
Where water is used for purposes not specified in the foregoing schedule of rates, the rates shall be fixed by the Water and Light Commission.	
Parties not satisfied may put in meters at their own expense and pay meter rate.	
No water will be furnished for any purpose, however small, without, at least paying at the rate of \$2.50 per annum.	
METER RATES.	
Less than 10 cu. ft. per day	50¢
10 cu. ft. to 25 cu. ft. per day	40¢
25 " " 65 " " "	30¢
65 " " 125 " " "	25¢
125 " " 500 " " "	20¢
The above rates are to read per 1,000 gallons.	
All over 500 cu. ft. per day, special rates.	

Pacific and the third at 5th and Benson. It isn't clear just when those wells were drilled but Chris Hennings, who later became a member of the Water Commission, said that the water "came right to the top of the pipe (of the first well drilled). It was nearly a flowing well."

The following year, 1891, marked the real beginning of the city's water system and the birth of the forerunner of today's Municipal Utilities Commission. In January of that year the Village Recorder was directed to "draft a bill and send it to our members in the legislature" which would authorize Willmar's citizens to vote on whether or not they wanted the village to issue bonds to finance a water works. Just over a month later the legislators had acted and Willmar's Village Council was authorized to issue \$20,000.00 in bonds, if the proposition was approved by a special election. That election was held March 7, 1891, and the proposition passed by an overwhelming majority - 227 to 42!

Annual Water Rates 1891 - 1892

Glarum Hotel	\$20
Barn	\$10
Ice Rink	\$ 9
Depot	\$10
Merchant's Hotel & Bar	\$50
Sash & Door	\$30

Many things happened to move the installation of the water system forward in the next couple of months: The Council accepted the bid of Harrison & Hawley for the construction of the water system "as per plan" for \$17,853.00; the street department was ordered to drill a test well on the village lots which had been set aside for a pump house for the water system (those lots were located on the south side of Litchfield Avenue, between Fifth and Sixth Streets West, which is now the First American Bank's parking lot); at least two of the three wells authorized by the Council were drilled and the bonds, to finance the entire enterprise, were sold.

A month or so later, on August 10, 1891, the first Board of Water Commissioners was appointed. While H. S. Peterson, G. W. Tyler, C. Hennings, H. J. Ramsett and F. H. Wold were appointed, provision was also made for the election of the Board of Water Commissioners by the Village Council at its meeting on the second Monday in April each year.

There doesn't seem to be an official record of the time the first water moved through the mains, but it must have been in early summer, before the appointment of the Board of Water Commissioners, since it was the Council which set the water rates for the period from August 1, 1891 to January 1, 1892, at \$1, payable at the time each use permit was granted.

In October, with the Board of Water Commissioners now functioning, some residents of the Third Ward requested the installation of an iron "water fountain" (we'd call it a tap or faucet) on the corner of Third Street West and Benson Avenue. The citizens offered to pay for the "fountain" and its installation if the village would agree that all water from the "fountain"

would be free. Later, the village agreed to pay for the "fountain" and the installation, too.

The new water system stirred up a great deal of municipal activity. A large number of 4", 6" and 8" water mains were installed during the latter half of 1891 and in 1892. They were laid in an area bounded, roughly, by Dolson Street on the east, to Eleventh Street, on the west, from Park Avenue on the north to Minnesota Avenue on the south. A pending street improvement project probably spurred much of this activity since the Council had apparently decided that all excavations would be completed before the streets were graded and extended.

Meanwhile, things were happening in the rest of the world, and Willmar's residents were anxious to keep up. In 1891 the game of basketball, the dial telephone and the electric flatiron were all invented, and the world's first electric oven was installed in a St. Paul, Minnesota, residence.

The population of the village had grown to 2,511 by 1895 and five wells had been put in operation to supply the demand for water. Four of those wells were of 4" diameter and 100' deep, while the fifth was an 8-incher, driven to a depth of 270 feet.

Business had been brisk, according to the first Board of Water Commissioners annual report. During the 1894-95 fiscal year, their report showed

Water Rents Collected	\$871.45
Water Rents Uncollected	\$114.50
Water Permits granted	9

1895 Power and Water Rates

In the early days charges were made, not generally by meter, but by item or varied use. It was only in the fore part of 1906 that the City Council determined that all consumers of water or electricity must have meters installed and these were ordered.

Prior to that time, here are the rates for light for most general uses (1895) - - -

Stores	50¢/light on 10 o'clock circuit
Hotels	60¢/light on 12 o'clock circuit
Saloons	Same
Residences	45¢/lamp (3-4¢/hr per lamp when meters used)
Offices	45¢/lamp
Barbershops	50¢/lamp
Putting in light (complete)	1.60
For Water Services	
Banks	\$5
Schoolhouse	5¢/pupil
Saloons with pumps	\$20
Residences occupied by one family (5 rooms)	\$4
Sprinkling lawns, 5 months, 50' frontage, 6-9 a.m. and 6-9 p.m.	\$3
Plastering	1/4¢/sq. yd.
Stone work	5¢
Rate per barrel	3¢
Printing offices	\$6
Soda Fountains	\$10
Sprinkling street cart, 25" frontage	\$1.25
Water closet, private	\$3
Water closet, public	\$6
No permit less than	\$1

Meter Rates: Less than 10 cu. ft./day - 50¢ 10-25 cu. ft./day - 40¢; 25-65 cu. ft./day - 30¢; 65-125 cu. ft./day - 25¢; 125-500 cu. ft./day - 20¢; All over 500 cu. ft./day at special rates.

Willmar Tribune, October 14, 1925

The growing population was putting other strains on the village with more and more inquiries about the possibility of the establishment of an electrical generating plant. After all,

this was 1895 and there was telephone service between New York and Chicago, Robert Ingersoll had invented the \$1 watch, William Wrigley was busy selling chewing gum, someone had written "Happy Birthday To You," and people could now buy Coca Cola, Van Camp's Pork and Beans and Hershey chocolate bars!

COUNCIL PROCEEDINGS

Council Room,

WILLMAR, Minn., Sept. 28, '95.
8 p.m.

Special meeting of the village council, President Williams in the chair.

Present, Aldermen Hennings, Nordin, Olson, Ekander and President Williams - 5.

Absent, Aldermen Holt and Cramer - 2.

On motion, the following rates were established for electric lights per month:

Stores, etc., 50 cents per light, on 10 o'clock circuit.

Hotels, saloons, etc., 60 cents per light, on 12 o'clock circuit.

Residences, 45 cents per light; 30 cents per light for bed-rooms.

When meters are used the rate will be $\frac{3}{4}$ cents per light per hour.

Offices 45 cents per light.

Barber shops 50 cents per light.

For putting in meters when desired, the actual cost of same, including cost of putting in.

On motion council adjourned.

BENJAMIN WILLIAMS,
President.

Attest:

SAM'L OSMUNDSON,
Village Recorder.

Willmar Republican Gazette
October 3, 1895

The "new-fangled electrics" were spawning convenience items at a great rate. Incandescent lamps had been on the market for several years; electric flatirons and electric fans had been in use for a half-dozen. Although electrical generation was new, its benefits were being touted far and wide, and Willmar's residents wanted their town to be an early supplier of electric energy.

They were becoming increasingly vocal in their insistence that the town fathers become very serious about bringing electrical energy to the homes and businesses of Willmar.

Willmar would meet the demand, according to Dr. Christian Johnson, a man active in village affairs and soon to become mayor. "Willmar is no longer a small rustic village, but the leading city west of Minneapolis, and must make substantial improvements as is fitting to our growth and importance."

Progress was not without problems, however. Willmar was still a small community, where everyone knew everyone else. This caused the Board of Water Commissioners a considerable amount of grief. People were human before the turn of the century, too, and they were as prone to ask for special treatment as many people are today. The Board assumed a rigid stance and "went by the book," to the extent that, at its February 14, 1893 meeting, it was decided that the school's water supply was to be turned off, for non-payment of the account.

But such problems were generally mild, compared to the swelling insistence and demand for electric power for the growing community.

The matter came up for formal discussion at the July 1889 Village Council meeting, where arguments were presented for both sides of the question. No action was taken then.

It was about that time that the Edison Electric Company offered to furnish forty power lamps to the village at a rate of \$2 a month per light. As attractive as the proposal was (Edison Electric really wanted the electrical franchise for the growing city) the Council delayed action on that question, too.

The question of electrical power for Willmar seems to have been shelved for several years, until 1895 when the Council decided to hold a special election on the question. That election, held May 27, 1895, resulted in a vote overwhelmingly in favor of building Willmar's own electric light plant in connection with the village's water works. The tally: 287 votes for, and only 70 against the proposition.

Things moved fast, once the question had been decided. A Professor D. Shepardson, of the University of Minnesota, was engaged to draw up plans and specifications for the plant. In mid-July the Council accepted the bid of a Mr. Vater to install a 60-horsepower Ball single cylinder engine, for \$1,011.00. Two days later the bid of Burtis & Howard, a Minneapolis firm for an alternate system of light was accepted at \$5,346.00. Just over a month after that, the Council decided to purchase a Standard dynamo for the new plant. Ten months later another contract was let, this one for the construction of an addition to the electric light plant, for \$5,060.00.

A. E. Bishman became Willmar's first electrical engineer November 23, 1896, resigning three months later.

CITY OF WILLMAR

Water and Light Department

Rates for Electric Current effective after
May 1, 1917

LIGHT

First 50 Kw. Hours @ 8¢ per Kw. Hour.

Next 50 Kw. Hours @ 7¢ per Kw. Hour.

Next 50 Kw. Hours @ 6¢ per Kw. Hour.

Next 50 Kw. Hours @ 5¢ per Kw. Hour.

Hours. @ 6¢ per Kw. Hour straight.

1000 Kw. Hours and over @ 5¢ per Kw. Hour straight.
Minimum 50¢ per month.

POWER

First 50 Kw. Hours @ 6¢ per Kw. Hour.

Next 50 Kw. Hours @ 5¢ per Kw. Hour.

Next 50 Kw. Hours @ 4¢ per Kw. Hour.

Next 50 Kw. Hours @ 3¢ per Kw. Hour.

All over 200 Kw. Hours @ 4¢ per Kw. Hour straight.

Minimum charge 25¢ per Horse Power or K. V. A.
transformer capacity.

Less than 2 Horsepower 50¢ per month.

HEAT

3¢ per Kw. Hour straight.

Minimum \$3.00 per month.

Moving right along, the Village Council purchased an electric fire alarm system for \$319.00, and began investigating the installation of street lights in the business district. They set the salary of the Waterworks Engineer at \$504.00 a year and decided that power for street lights would be furnished without charge to the village.

The Water and Light Board's report for the year showed receipts of \$1100.00 from water rents and "rent" from 400 lights at 60¢ per month.

The experiments with the street lights are very satisfactory, and it is certain that the village streets will be lighted brilliantly when everything is in running order. The big lights have not yet arrived.
Willmar Republican Gazette, October 31, 1895

It wasn't long before the engineer's salary was increased to \$60.00 a month, because he was required to be on duty from 12 midnight until 12 noon, daily, and then still stay at the plant until he was sure that it was operating safely and was in proper condition for him to leave.

One of the problems of bringing electricity to many homes was trees. At its September 26, 1895 meeting the Village Council directed the Village Marshal to notify all property owners that their trees had to be trimmed enough so as not to interfere with the power lines.

The growing electrical system was having other problems, too – some of the town's citizens were unhappy with the way electrical poles had been located and set in a number of locations. Dissatisfaction grew to the point that the Council spent most of one meeting hearing complaints in the matter. It seems the village fathers came to the conclusion that "no one can keep every-

one happy at all times."

Commission Minutes

JUNE 3, 1903 Heimdahl and Copeland to pay 35¢ per month for water used from hydrants belonging to W. E. Kent and not to exceed 5 pails of water a day. Also granted lead for electric lights if not less than two lights be used at the rate of 75¢ per light.

The Willmar Republican Gazette's issue of October 13, 1895 indicates that "The experiments with the street lights are very satisfactory, and it is certain that the village streets will be lighted brilliantly when everything is in running order. The big lights have not yet arrived."

At the same time, "The electric light committee reported (to the Council) building for engine and dynamo complete according to contract."

Three months later, January 28, 1896, the Willmar Tribune reported, "The city council held a meeting last night, at which the contractors of the Village Electric Light System, and Prof. Shepardon, a specialist in electrical science at the State University, were present. The plant

was accepted, and with the exception of a few defects of minor importance which will be altered, it was found satisfactory."

Everything must have worked out well, since, just weeks later, the Gazette reported "The old street lamps have been taken down and housed. The village offers them for sale at a bargain."

In the few months the village's power plant had been in operation, electricity must have captured the fancy of a large segment of the populace, because the Gazette reported, in its first issue of 1896, published three weeks before the plant had even been officially accepted by the Village Council, "The demand for electric lights in Willmar, for commercial use, has been so heavy that the present capacity of the plant is already nearly exhausted. It may be necessary to increase the plant."

Apparently Willmarites were not above experimentation with the new power source, either. In its April 25, 1896 issue, the Gazette carried the following item:

"Who says that Willmar is not up with the procession? Why, even when the dog catcher wishes to relieve some supernumerary of the canine species from the burdens of life he has them electrocuted instead of shot. Several executions have been successfully performed. The vital spark of the dog is instantly extinguished the moment the current of 1100 volts is sent through his body. It is a humane way of ridding the town of worthless curs."

Time of Payment will be Strictly Enforced.		POWER & HEAT BILL	
		Willmar, Minn.	191
Mr	To CITY OF WILLMAR, Dr.		
POWER METER			L.F.
Present Indication	Arrearages		Always Bring this Bill when Payment is made
Last Indication	Meter Rent		
Difference	Const. () K.W. at		
HEAT METER			
Present Indication	Arrearages		
Last Indication	Meter Rent		
Difference	Const. () K.W. at		
Total if paid at office of City Collector on or before the 20th inst.			
If not paid at office of City Collector on or before the 20th inst. a penalty of 10 per cent will be added.			
L. FRIDLUND, Secretary			
CHECKS REGARDED AS SUFFICIENT RECEIPTS			

This, remember, was less than six years after William Kemmler had become the first human being to be executed by electrocution.

There were some rumblings around town about some favoritism in the employment practices of the Board. In an 1898 Tribune editorial Victor Lawson wrote that the city owned a power and water plant worth more than \$50,000.00. His concern was that it was possibly being run under the "spoils system."

It seems that a young Willmar man had been engaged as the village's electrical engineer, mostly by virtue of the fact that he was a good boy and his mother was a widow, qualifications which did not exactly make him an engineer, as subsequent events were to prove.

Some time during the winter the electrical plant began to experience some difficulties with the equipment. The village's electrical engineer claimed that the problem lay with the exciter and the dynamo and were the responsibility of the manufacturer. When notified of the difficulty, the company promptly replaced the dynamo with one guaranteed specifically to operate properly. The exchange being made, the engineer claimed that a bearing still ran hot, and the equipment could not be brought up to more than 1/3 of capacity.

The chairman of the council's electrical committee submitted a resolution which directed the Village Recorder to write to the manufacturer, demanding that a man be sent immediately to effect repairs, or the village would engage such a person and charge the expense to the manufacturer.

A very stern letter was dispatched by the Recorder, to the effect of the resolution, which engendered a sharp retort, stating "Were it not for the fact we have already started a man for your place we should not have sent him under the circumstances of the action of the village council . . . We sent you a machine that anyone with ordinary electrical or mechanical ability could have or should have started off and run constantly without difficulty. Someone has undoubtedly done some fool thing that has occasioned what little annoyance you claim to have had with the machine sent you . . . we have given a new machine for an old one which had been spoiled by foolish experiments and ignorance . . . You evidently were not willing to pay the expenses of some competent person, but chose rather to employ someone with no practical knowledge whatsoever of that type of apparatus to tamper with and spoil the best working machine in the world . . . The injury you have done us by the malicious action of your council . . . will never be forgotten in future transactions."

The upshot of the entire controversy was that the expert from the manufacturer arrived, inspected the equipment in the presence of the village engineer and reported the results to Dr. Christian Johnson, who was then President of the Village Council.

The problems, according to the report, resulted from improper operation of the machinery and, with those corrections made and the addition of an extra \$45 field coil, Willmar would, in his opinion, be well equipped for electrical generation.

Dr. Johnson called a special meeting of the council to settle the dispute. The village's engineer was present at the meeting, as was the manufacturer's representative. The village engineer admitted, to the council that the equipment had been in good working order when it was delivered and the problems had not arisen from any fault of the manufacturer. The machinery was, once again, in good order and "hereafter as long as the plant is properly run the public may expect efficient service." Johnson ran a complete report on the matter in the Tribune, both as an explanation to the people of Willmar and as an exoneration of the manufacturer.

This wasn't the only problem experienced under the ministrations of the "widow's son." It appears that, shortly before the Christmas season, there was another plant failure, and the citizens were quite unhappy at the prospect of a powerless holiday. The same village engineer who had created the problem with the equipment manufacturer was still in charge, and claimed that the equipment could not be repaired on time. Johnson, as President of the Village Council, took it upon himself to consult with Litchfield's electrician, who diagnosed the problem without seeing the equipment. He came to Willmar by train and made the proper repairs in a matter of minutes. Willmar had electricity for the Christmas holiday, and the village engineer had a field day writing nasty letters to the council. Johnson asked that the council excuse his youth and innocence, and keep him on, but that a new village engineer be retained.

As if power plant troubles weren't enough, the Water & Light Board and the village were sued by the Odd Fellows Building Association. The Association had entered into a contract

Commission Minutes

Sept. 12, 1903 Application by Willmar Street Fair Assn. for installment of lights for coming fair and for use of current free of charge. It was moved and carried that as the Water & Light Commission cannot grant anyone free use of current or of work without charge this proposition be submitted to the City Council for instruction to grant this privilege, or by having the actual expense charged to the General Fund in favor of the Water & Light Fund.

Commission Minutes

Oct. 16, 1903 Application of Nelson and Harold to have light for restaurant on flat rates all night service. Resolved that when light is used all night the flat rate be fixed at \$1.00 per each/16 C.P. lamp per month.

Also moved and carried that water meter be replaced in Freese and Nelson Livery barn and put in such shape and place that meter cannot freeze or be tampered with.



Power Plant the day after the explosion

with the village, to purchase electricity for 22 bulbs for a year, at a fee of \$80. Late in 1897 the council had unilaterally rescinded the contract and changed the rate to \$145 a year. The Association refused to pay, and the village prepared to stop electrical service to the building. Agreement was finally reached and peace descended once again upon the Village of Willmar.

After all the unpleasantness of the previous year, it is a pleasure to report that things remained on an even keel during 1899, and a new boiler was installed at the waterworks.

Willmar's population had grown to 3,409, by the 1900 census, while that of the United States reached 81,000,000. The Boer War was going on in South Africa, the Boxers were rebelling in China, and Hawaii became a United States Territory. Looking back, we might be surprised at some of the things which happened that year: "Little Black Sambo," "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz," "Tale of Peter Rabbit," "Bird in a Gilded Cage," "Flight of the Bumble Bee" and ragtime music all made their first appearances. The world's first jazz band made its debut in New Orleans, Carrie Nation started her initial crusade and the Brownie Box Camera was invented. There were nearly 14,000 motor cars in the United States and 144 miles of highway had been hard-surfaced. The average American died at age 47, and "Casey" Jones met his fate in the wreck of the old 97. The first United States submarine made its maiden voyage, The Great Houdini was extremely popular and the first hamburger was sold.

"Progress" was in the air and Willmar was doing its best to maintain pace with the rest of the world.

The Water & Light Board seems to have enjoyed a period of relatively serene operations, with no major problems raising their ugly heads from Christmas 1899 until September 22, 1901 when the roof fell in, literally!

That was the morning the municipal power plant exploded. Here's how it was reported in the next Wednesday's issue of The Willmar Tribune:

CITY PLANT IN RUINS

"Boiler at the City Power House Explodes and Wrecks the Light Plant.

"THE CITY IN DARKNESS"

"Nils Bredeson, the Engineer, Escaped Death Miraculously, Exact Cause of Explosion is Not Known, Dynamos and Engines Buried Under Tons of Brick and Mortar, City has \$10,000 Insurance, Which Will Not Nearly Cover the Loss, Power Was Supplied for Pumping Water in Fifteen Hours After Explosion"

"Many of the people of Willmar were rudely awakened from their slumbers at ten minutes past two o'clock last Sunday morning by a sudden shock or jar. Most of them, hearing nothing more, went to sleep again. Those who got up and went out to investigate found the city in total darkness, and realizing that something had happened to the electric light plant, rushed there to see what was the matter. They found the building a mass of ruins, and the cause was soon ascertained.

"One of the smaller boilers in the plant had exploded, and it had wrought fearful havoc. The roof was blown off and most of it splintered to kindling wood. The brick walls, except in the pump room, were razed to the ground. The latter walls were still standing, but in such dilapidated condition that they must be razed too. The boiler was rent wide open and torn into many fragments. The other small boiler was knocked down and dented so as to be beyond repairs. The dynamos were buried under the debris and presumably destroyed. The electric switch-board was totally destroyed. In fact, it looks as if everything in the plant was destroyed.

"Nils Bredeson, one of the men on the night force was the only one in the building at the time of the explosion. It seems a miracle that he could be in that awful wreck and escape with his life. He had gone on duty at twelve o'clock, relieving Joseph Williams. At that time everything seemed in perfect order. Mr. Bredeson made the following statement to a TRIBUNE

reporter:

"About five or six minutes before the explosion I had looked at the boiler. The steam gauge showed 90 pounds of pressure. There was not quite half a glass of water. There were four or five sticks of wood in the firebox and just enough fire to keep it alive. The boiler was not at the time connected to anything. I was just getting it ready to use, as I wanted to cool down the big boiler for cleaning it. I then went over to the big boiler and heard a crash and it flashed through my mind that the tank was falling. The next moment I was so dazed that I don't know just what happened to me. The first thing I knew someone was calling my name. I was then in the pump pit and trying to get out.

"I have no idea what caused the explosion. The boiler had been cleaned about a month ago, but had not been used over forty hours in all since that time. It was used only for a few hours every Saturday night, while we cleaned the big boiler. The boiler was never quite satisfactory, as it would foam whenever the steam went down to 90 pounds when carrying a full load. The safety valve was set to 105 pounds, and we had to keep the steam between those points.'

"John Quam and Henry Traue were the first ones on the grounds after the accident. They helped Bredeson out of the pit. Although stunned, he was able to walk to the Frost hospital. An examination revealed the fact that he had sustained no serious injuries. He had scorched one hand by grabbing hold of some hot pipes while groping around in the pit. The left wrist was scalded; there was a flesh wound in the right arm, and some scalp wounds in the head. Although weakened by the terrible shock he has been able to be around.

"There was only one place in the building where a man had any chance of escaping with his life, and it was Bredeson's good fortune to be in that particular

place. The two boilers between him and the exploding boiler acted as shields from the flying fragments of the boiler and pipes as well as the scalding water, and it happened that no parts of the roof or walls fell just there. But his good fortune did not leave him there. When he fell into the pit he might have been killed by striking the pumps or the fragments thrown in there by the explosion. When Henry Traue and John Quam reached the scene Bredeson had hold of the railing and was trying to climb out, but lost his hold and fell back a second time before they could reach him. He got up once more and Traue pulled him out. Few men have passed through



Power Plant and City Hall, 1903

such experiences and lived to tell the story.

"When morning dawned it appeared as if everything was ruined. But when things had been cleared away somewhat it was found that the damage was not by far as serious as it might have been. The two smaller boilers were destroyed as well as the smaller dynamo, but the water works were in good shape, the large boiler had lost only the safety valve, the big dynamo and the engines seemed to need only slight repairs.

"The building and contents were insured for \$10,000 in the Hartford Steam Inspection and Insurance Co. This company inspects the boilers twice a year. The last report of Inspector Murphy regarding the exploded boiler gives its condition as follows: 'Internally: shells, heads and tubes in good condition; incrustation light; no corrosion; bracings sound; openings to attachments clear. Externally: shells and heads in good order; sheets straight; seams and tubes tight; no corrosion; settings in good shape; steam gauges correct.'

"As soon as possible after the catastrophe the council placed themselves in communication with the company's representative in Minneapolis and obtained permission to clear away the debris, after taking photographs to show the exact conditions. A crew of men were put to work at once under the direction of Marshal Sorenson to clear away the debris in the pump pit and around the large boiler remaining practically intact. Every effort was made to restore the waterworks as quickly as possible, and by supertime the large boiler had been overhauled and steam connections made. In another hour the pumps were going, fifteen hours after the explosion. In the meantime the fire engine had been steamed up and was forcing water into the mains to supply immediate wants.

"The agent for the Hartford Insurance Company, Mr. Collins, was here Monday but he could do nothing in the way of adjustment. The adjuster will be here in a few days, and meanwhile an inventory will be taken to show what was lost. There is hardly any doubt that the village will recover the entire amount of insurance. It is difficult at this time to estimate the loss, but it will certainly go far above the \$10,000 mark.

"Until the adjustment is made there will be no definite plans made for rebuilding. It seems to be the general opinion of the aldermen that the two destroyed boilers will be replaced by one boiler of the same size as the one left. This will give more power and ought to be sufficient for many years to come.

"The most of the wreckage had been cleared away last night. A temporary building will be erected over the remaining engine and dynamo to protect them until a permanent structure can be erected. Alderman Williams is confident that the dynamo can be started by tomorrow evening.

"NOTES

"Large crowds viewed the scene of the explosion all day Sunday.

"President Tyler and Alderman Williams have been on the ground almost continuously personally directing the work.

"Henry Traue says that when he heard the concussion he thought some robbers had blown up one of the

banks. But the rush of escaping steam immediately told him what had happened.

"A large section of the firebox was blown over the residences of Dr. Ilstrup and A. N. Lewis, landing by the sidewalk north of the courthouse. The piece weighs about 300 pounds and, had it gone a little lower, would have wrought fearful havoc on the houses in its way.

"One brick was thrown clear over to the Osmundson store and crashed through the tin roof and the ceiling, cutting the laths without splintering. It must have been thrown to a great height to get such a momentum in its fall.

"The large woodpile undoubtedly saved Dr. Ilstrup's house from a brick bombardment. Very few landed in his yard, while A. N. Lewis received several cart loads of brick that he had no use for. A window sill was splintered by one of them.

"The 75-foot brick chimney was knocked down. The base of it appears to have been blown south, while the top part fell on the dynamo room. Our magnificent city hall got a little whack from it, smashing a cornice and a small part of the roof.

"The waterworks portion of the plant was erected in 1886, including the large brick chimney that was destroyed by the explosion. The electric addition was built in 1895. The estimated cost of the building destroyed is \$3,200. The loss to the village, that is not covered by insurance, was believed yesterday will reach \$10,000.

"President Tyler had been entertaining a company of friends at his house. When they were going home it was very dark, and he went down to the station to ask Bredeson to turn on the western circuit for a few minutes. Everything appeared alright at that time. When he came home he sat down to read. He heard the report and the lights went out at the same instant. He rushed down there and came on the scene just as Bredeson had been helped out of the pit.

"J. M. Spicer was sleeping upstairs in his cottage at Green Lake. He was awakened by a sudden jar, and got up to see what was the matter. He happened to look at his watch and found it was a few minutes past two. He is certain it was the jar from the explosion that he felt."

In the aftermath of the explosion things moved along smoothly and the October 2, 1901 issue of the Tribune had this to say:

COUNCIL PROCEEDINGS

Council Room,

WILLMAR, Minn., Sept. 9,
8 p.m.

O. L. Lien was declared elected engineer for water works and electric light plant, by the month or during the pleasure of the council, at a salary of \$60 per month, and to be on duty from 12 o'clock a.m. till 12 o'clock p.m., and until plant is in safe and proper condition to leave.

Willmar Republican Gazette,
Sept. 12, 1895

"The village authorities kept their word and had the electric light plant running by Thursday evening. It took some tall hustling to accomplish this result. The debris had to be cleared away; the main shaft of the large engine

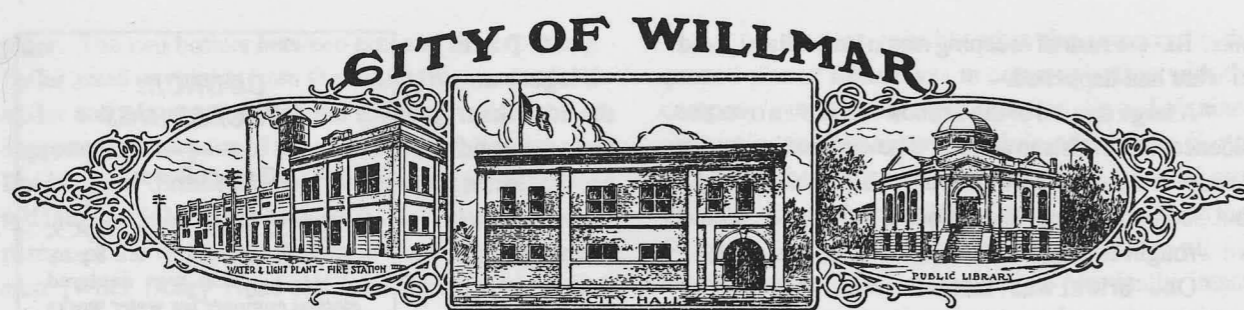
had to be taken out and straightened, a pulley was sent for and came by express and some repairs had to be made about the dynamo. A shed was built over the dynamo and engine, another over the big boiler and one over the pumps. The prompt work was greatly appreciated by all.

"Adjuster Blakely, of the Hartford Steam Boiler Inspection and Insurance Co., is here now to estimate the loss and settle for it. Nothing has been done so far.

"A sketch has been prepared for a new power house 58 x 62 feet, and as soon as the insurance matter is disposed of, arrangements will be made to build at once."

The day after the explosion the Village Council authorized the building of the temporary sheds mentioned in that story, for the boilers, pumps and dynamos. Ten days later it authorized the Electric Light Commission to procure plans and specifications for a new building, as was also mentioned in the follow-up story. Two weeks and a day after the explosion it accepted a bid, in the amount of \$2,825.00 for the construction of a new power house. The building was only a part of the expense of rebuilding. There was the matter of a new boiler, which cost \$1,120.00, and a used alternator, procured from a North Dakota city for \$500, plus a

LEWIS FRIDLUND, SECRETARY



WATER AND LIGHT COMMISSION
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

WILLMAR, MINNESOTA

variety of other expenses necessary to get Willmar's utilities operating again. Insurance covered \$6,764.00 of the total expense.

With the power plant rebuilt and all utilities functioning as they were intended to do, the Water & Light Board became the Water & Light Commission when Willmar was incorporated as a city under a charter adopted by a special election held November 17, 1901. The proposition carried by a vote of 270 for the charter and 88 against.

On April 28, 1902, the Water & Light Board was directed to take inventory before turning the affairs of the utilities over to the new Water & Light Commission, which was established May 1, 1902.

Until 1902 it appears that water rates were set by the village council on an individual basis. At first there was just a flat charge, payable when a water use permit was issued. Then the council seemed to have fixed the rates based upon the amount of water members felt the applicant would use in a year. Some of the early records show rates varying widely for what should have been similar usage. On July 2, 1902 new rates were established. They ranged from 5¢ per year per pupil in schools to \$20.00 a year for a saloon (with pump), with an annual minimum of \$2.50 per using unit. Users who were not satisfied with the general rates could have water meters installed, at their own expense and pay the meter rates, which were based on daily usage: Less than 10 cu. ft. per day was payable at the rate of 50¢ per 1,000 gallons, while people using 125 to 500 cu. ft. per day were charged at the rate of 20¢ per 1,000 gallons.

By September all the legal requirements entailed by the new charter had been met; the council had charged \$30,000.00 of the new city's bonded indebtedness to the utilities, and had appointed the first Water & Light Commission under the new charter: L. A. Vik, M. D.

Manning and William Gilger. Early the next year Lars Halvorson and A. J. Ekander were appointed to the commission, also.

The burning question of the hour was public vs. private ownership of utilities. Willmarites appeared in many communities, telling the story of Willmar's successful public ownership, before the residents of those communities made their decisions at the polls.

In spite of the establishment of fixed water rates, individual questions did come before the Commission. The firm of Heimdahl and Copeland was required to pay 35¢ per month for

CITY OF WILLMAR, MINNESOTA
WATER AND LIGHT COMMISSION
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

To Whom It May Concern:

The Water & Light Commission has in accordance with the city charter adopted a resolution in regard to the strict payment of water and light accounts. All light accounts are due on or before the 20th of each month, and all water accounts are due on or before the 20th of every third month. Beginning with May 1st, a 10% penalty will be added on the 21st day of the month to any accounts not paid as stated above, and such penalty so added must be paid without any exception. Consumers of water and light will please bear in mind that the only way to avoid the penalty is to pay on time.

Should any one forget or neglect to pay as stated he will have no one but himself to blame.

Failure to receive bills will excuse no one. Grievances about bills must be reported to the secretary at once so they may be adjusted before the 20th of the month. Such reports will be given speedy adjustment by the Board.

The new rate on Light and Power takes effect May 1st and is as follows:

11 cents per K. W. for Light, with a discount of 5% to 30% according to the amount used in any one month, and the Power rate is 7, 6, and 5¢ per K. W. according to the amount used in any one month.

The old rate was 12 1/2 cents per K. W. and with the same sliding scale as the new rate. A new minimum rate of 50 cents per month will be charged for each meter for either light or power.

Dated at Willmar, Minn., May 1st, 1911.

WATER & LIGHT COMMISSION
Lewis Fridlund, Sec.

water taken from water hydrants owned by W. F. Kent. They were limited to the use of no more than 5 pails of water a day. The same commission meeting granted them an electrical lead for "not less than two lights" at the rate of 75¢ per light.

When the Willmar Street Fair Association applied for free electricity during the fair, the request was denied on the grounds that the Commission couldn't give free water, current or labor.

A further Commission meeting approved the application of Nelson and Harold for all-night electrical service in their restaurant on a flat rate of \$1 per month for each 16 candlepower lamp. That meeting also ordered that the water meter in the Freese and Nelson Livery Stable be replaced, and the new one be "put in such shape and place that meter cannot freeze nor be tampered with."

Since the Water & Light Commission had no regular office at that time, meetings were held in convenient places around town. Minutes show meetings being held at the Kandiyohi County Bank, the Library and other places.



Power Plant Employees

One of those meetings directed the superintendent to be at the power house every day from 7-10 p.m. (the plant only operated at night) to be sure that "everything is working perfectly." It also directed that all repairs and wiring (the commission did all the electrical wiring in town) be done in the afternoons and all meter reading was to be done in the mornings.

Still another meeting recommended that a standard electric rate be set at \$1 per month for each 16 candlepower lamp.

As the community grew, the utilities system strove to keep up. June 13, 1904 the Commission recommended to the City Council that the electrical system be extended to include all parts of the city.

Within a year progress had outstripped production, so the power plant was enlarged by the installation of a new 200 hp engine and alternator, at a cost of \$5,300.00. At the time the decision to enlarge the plant was announced, the Tribune editorialized, "When this improvement has been made, Willmar will have as fine an electric plant as can be found anywhere."

By May 1, 1906 it was necessary to begin using standard electrical meters for all users, and a year later, people began demanding electrical service during daylight hours, too.

An article in the October 2, 1907 issue of the Willmar Tribune put it this way:

ELECTRIC POWER BADLY WANTED

Establishment of Day Current at the Power House will be Boon to Power Users

"There is considerable demand in the city for a day electric current from the city power house to furnish power for motors for small machinery, and a petition will be presented to the Water & Light Commission and the City Council to establish such service. There is no other power quite so convenient, safe and reliable as electrical energy and if the service is once established there is no doubt but that the number of consumers would grow rapidly.

"The use of electricity for domestic purposes as well as for business and manufacturing is growing rapidly. There are already a number of housewives in the city using electric irons for ironing clothes, but without day current their operations are necessarily

confined to the evenings. With a day current electric cooking, baking, etc. would no doubt be introduced in many homes. In many instances small electric motors would be used where foot power is now used and where machinery is prohibited for the lack of clean and convenient power. The probable immediate users of day current in the city would be the printing offices, elevators, jewelry stores and laundries and other places now using gasoline power. It is hoped that our city fathers will take kindly to the idea and inaugurate the service. With the continued growth of the city a day current is bound to come and the city plant should take the necessary steps to be able to supply the demand."

The City Council recognized the need for day current and authorized its inception about December 1, 1908.

It also directed the Water & Light Commission to have the street lights on until 1 a.m., rather than just until midnight, and from 3-5 a.m., except on moonlight nights.

The water meter system went into effect on August 1, 1907, when the Commission decided that "each patron will pay for the water that runs through his faucets, and he will be at liberty to give away as much as he chooses to his neighbors. About the same time, the

Commission established the 10% penalty on all water and light bills which were unpaid by the 20th of the month. That regulation also stated that all landlords would be held liable for the electricity furnished to their tenants.



Municipal Utilities Office and Service Building c. 1957

the city, the Commission finally abandoned rates by classification and based all charges upon meter readings.

Although a number of wells had apparently been dug, it is almost impossible to trace them at this late date. By 1907 one of those wells was still performing satisfactorily, but the Water & Light Commission requested permission to dig another well and to build a 60,000-gallon reservoir to meet increasing demand. In one of its last official actions of 1909, the City of Willmar purchased additional land in block 42 (part of what is now the First American Bank's parking lot) for the use of the Water and Light Plant, with the \$625.00 the land cost charged to the Water & Light Commission.

The next decade marked the acceleration of the construction and installation of improvements in both the water and light departments of Willmar's utilities system. The old wooden overhead water tank was replaced by a steel one of comparable size, new engines and dynamos appeared on the Commission's agendas regularly, with eight major pieces of

equipment being installed in the ten year period; several new wells were dug and others renovated; all the power poles and wiring in the entire system were overhauled and incandescent street lights were installed.

ELECTRIC LIGHTS.

City Council Accepts the System Last Night.

The city council held a meeting last night, at which the contractors of the Village Electric Light System, and Prof. Shepardson, specialist in electrical science, at the State University, were present. The plant was accepted, and with the exception of a few defects of minor importance which will be altered, it was found satisfactory.

Willmar Tribune, Jan. 28, 1896

Perhaps what was to prove the most significant change of all came in 1914 when the system was switched from its original 133-cycle direct current (DC) production to 60-cycle alternating current (AC), less than thirty years after the AC system was invented. With alternating current surging through its municipal power lines, Willmar's officials could politely reject the overtures of St. Cloud Public Service Company, when it tried to sell its power to the city in 1917.

The need for office space was definitely felt early in the decade, when the City Council proposed the rental of office space in the Ruble Block of Fifth Street, for the utilities Superintendent and Secretary, until offices in the fire station were completed.

The possibility of the establishment of a heating system, using the exhaust steam from the power plant, was first discussed at a special meeting of the Water & Light Commission November 6, 1912. The upshot of the meeting was the sending of C. C. Haskell and L. Fridlund to "The Cities" as a committee to get information, plans and specifications regarding the installation of a first-class heating system.

Two weeks later Chas. L. Pillsbury was retained to prepare plans and specifications for Willmar's heating system.

Events moved along rapidly enough so that before April 1, 1913, it had been decided to run an exhaust steam line, with return pipe, from the power plant, located on Litchfield Avenue between Fifth and Sixth Streets West, east along Litchfield Avenue to Fifth Street, then south on Fifth to Becker Avenue. Mayor E. C. Wellin appeared before the Commission May 1, 1914, to present a petition from a number of citizens requesting that a public heating system be installed so the Public Library and other nearby buildings could be served by it. Within a year such a system was in operation, with the Kandiyohi County Bank, the Willmar Public Library, the Masonic Temple and the Presbyterian Church being among the first to apply for service.

By mid-August, 1915, the Commission had approved a contract for heating buildings on

the west side of Fifth Street, from Litchfield Avenue to Becker Avenue.

The heating system became big business when in December of that year, the Secretary of the Water & Light Commission was directed to notify all heating customers that satisfactory meters had to be installed in their buildings by January 15, 1916, or service would be discontinued. The Commission, at the same meeting, also notified one of Willmar's businessmen that his heating service would be discontinued if he didn't pay his heating bill by the first of the year.

In March 1916, more heating rates were established when it was decided that the Kandiyohi County Bank would pay \$300.00 for the 1915-16 heating season, the Public Library would pay \$150 to cover the same period, and the Masonic Temple would pay meter rates at 50¢ per 1,000 pounds of return.

A special meeting of the Water & Light Commission, held August 14, 1916, formally established Willmar's heating system. The heat mains were extended somewhat, following the meeting. A subsequent meeting established a heat meter rate of 50¢ per 1,000 pounds of

return for all customers. The city agreed to purchase meters for or from all then-current customers of the system, with the meters remaining the property of the city.



Municipal Utilities Office and Power Plant, 1991

notice of the formation of a heating company, which would buy steam from the power plant to serve its customers, too. Willmar Heating Company representatives appeared before the Commission in June 1919, to present the plan for the layout of its system. The Commission approved the plan. On July 24, 1919, Russell Spicer and George H. Otterness, representing Willmar Heating Company, appeared before the Board with a contract under which Willmar's Water & Light Commission would furnish steam heat to Willmar Heating Company. The contract was signed the next day.

In April 1919, J. F. Nyquist, Ben Benson and P. C. Peterson, representing consumers of a proposed heating plant extension, appeared before the Commission to serve

In 1920 ten homes, businesses and churches in the downtown area were added as system customers. Some of these places were customers of the Water & Light Commission; the rest were served by Willmar Heating Company.

The heat rate, originally set at 50¢ in 1916, was increased to 65¢ and, in 1920, to 90¢ per 1,000 pounds of condensate return. Willmar Heating Company, the system's largest single customer, objected to the increase and, after a considerable amount of negotiation, a compromise rate of 75¢ was given to the Company for the period of November 30, 1920 through June 1, 1921, with the proviso that, should this compromise rate result in a net loss to the Water & Light Commission, Willmar Heating Company would make up the deficit and give the Commission a reasonable profit.

That summer the heat mains were extended by both the Commission and Willmar Heating Company, as they were in 1922 also. It was in 1922 that the Water & Light Commission refused to honor Willmar Heating Company stock which had been issued to persons who paid \$500.00 to connect to its system. Apparently it was possible for individuals to install their own heat mains (connected to the Water & Light Commission mains), with permission, and at their own expense, a course which several firms followed.

By 1923 it had become apparent that there wasn't room in the city for both Willmar Heating Company and the Water & Light Commission's heating system. Accordingly, the Commission began a consistent program of stock purchases which resulted, four years later, in its sole ownership of Willmar Heating Company. Final settlement was made late in the summer of 1927.

The City Council and Water & Light Commission had been looking for some time for property on which to locate a new power plant, since the need for a major expansion was becoming very obvious. Block 20 was chosen as the site, and a local realtor was retained to buy up options on all parcels in the block, without revealing the

Board Changes Domestic Rates

Water and Light Commission Holds Annual Meeting Wednesday Evening

The water and light board of this city held its annual meeting Wednesday evening, at which time E. F. Berquist was re-elected president and V. E. Fridlund re-elected secretary.

The board made a reduction in the domestic lighting rate for the city, this new rate to become effective May 1 and be billed for the first time with the June statements.

Under the new rates, the first 30 kilowatts will cost 7 cents per kw.; the next 120 kilowatts 3¢ per kw.; excess of that 2¢ per kw., with a minimum charge of \$1 per month.

Under the present rates, the first 15 kilowatt charge is 8 cents per kw, and on the next 15 the charge is 7 cents per kw.

Another announcement made by the board is the adoption of an off-peak water heating rate of 1 cent per kilowatt with a minimum charge of \$1 per month.

The heat for the tank is supplied only between the hours of midnight and six o'clock in the morning when the load is lightest at the plant. As an example of what can be done with this type of heating, it is cited that a 50-gallon tank heated to 170 degrees, will maintain a temperature of not less than 128 degrees for 72 hours if the water is not used.

Willmar Tribune, April 29, 1937

ultimate purchaser. It was felt that such a procedure would result in considerable savings to the city.

At the City Council meeting on October 27, 1921, Mayor Victor E. Lawson announced that options had been secured on all the property in block 20, and recommended that the Council proceed immediately with the completion of the purchase. The total price paid for the entire block, including buildings, was \$31,200.00.

A special election, held June 19, 1922, authorized the issuance of \$85,000.00 in bonds to pay for an underground wiring system in downtown Willmar, the installation of ornamental street lamp posts and the purchase of block 20. According to the plan, the new power plant was to be built on the west half of the block, with the east half to be used for a "hitching and parking place for out of town visitors, city scale and marketing facilities."

WILLMAR PLANT DID THE UNUSUAL BACK IN 1914

February 9, 1914 marked a milestone of the Willmar Meter & Light Department. On that date the decision was made to change the characteristics of the current generated from the old 133 cycle standard to the present 60 cycle alternating value.

This decision was carried out by the installation of one 100 KVA and one 150 KVA generator to generate at 2300 volts. This primary voltage is still standard on the Willmar system. It is interesting to note that at the time this change was made generating capacity of the Willmar Power Plant was exactly 3% of its present capacity. It is also unusual to find a power system that adopted the modern 60 cycle standard frequency at such an early date.

Willmar Tribune, October 14, 1949

other than the surface pumping which was then in use.

In a companion report, Larson also emphasized the need for a new power plant to meet the rapidly growing demand for service. On March 15, 1925 there were 1,024 water meters

A 1923 special election for the issuance of \$175,000.00 in bonds for construction of a new power plant carried handily, with a vote of 1,926 for and only 573 against the issue.

The contract for the construction of a 500,000-gallon water tank, with a 500-gallon/minute domestic pump and a 1,000-gallon/minute fire pump, was let in July 1923 and changed the plans for block 20 considerably. The original plan called for the power plant to be built in the west half of the block. The storage tank contract called for it to be constructed in the southwest corner.

All this concern came about because of the Stacy Fruit Company fire. The entire building burned to the ground because the fire department ran out of water. A long report, by then Superintendent N. W. Larson, outlined the history of the water system, and the steps which had been taken from time to time to keep the city adequately supplied with water. Larson's report indicated that water levels were dropping each year, and that new methods had to be used to provide the city with water,

and 1,649 electric meters operating in the city. In addition, there were a number of special meters for special purposes: 24 for steam heat, 106 for electric heating, 81 for electric power over and above lighting and 9 for X-Ray machines.

The power plant, at Sixth and Litchfield, was a popular place for youngsters, who liked to stop in and warm up on cold winter days, or just to watch the machinery in operation the rest of the year. The boilers were popular places, too, but for another reason. Dead pets were brought to the power plant, where they were tossed into the fire boxes of the boilers and cremated.

The first phase of the power plant construction was completed in 1925 and the new plant began providing power to the city at midnight May 16. A contemporary newspaper report said, "Folks didn't notice any difference in the color or quality of the electricity, so most everyone was unaware of the change." Victor Lawson, in a Tribune editorial proposed that Willmar "electrify the county! It's new power plant is a guarantee that power will always be available."

In September of that year the Village of Kandiyohi voted \$8,500.00 in bonds to pay for the construction of a power line from Willmar and for wiring within the village. Svea, Spicer and Tripolis all expressed interest in purchasing power from Willmar, making their connections in Kandiyohi, but nothing ever came of those possibilities.

By the end of 1925 Willmar's water needs were well covered. Three wells were operational and capable of pumping 600 gallons per minute with air compressors. At the new plant a 16" well, run by an electric motor, could produce 1,200 gallons a minute. There was



Customer Service Department

BOARD OF WATER COMMISSIONERS

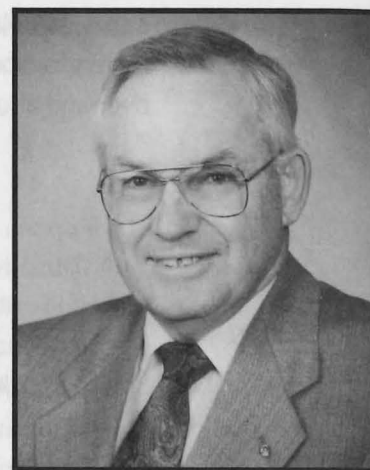
- 1891 H. S. Peterson, H. J. Ramsett, G. W. Tyler, C. Hennings, F. H. Wold
- 1892 J. F. Hilscher, H. J. Ramsette, F. C. Handy, Peter Gjernes, L. O. Thorpe
- 1893 John Williams, H. J. Ramsett, August Hoaglund, L. O. Thorpe, F. H. Wold
- 1894 F. H. Wold, Samuel Osmundson, L. A. Wold, L. O. Thorpe, Olof Olsen
- 1895 John Williams, Samuel Osmundson, F. H. Wold, A. J. Ekander
- 1896 Benjamin Williams, Samuel Osmundson, S. S. Glarum, C. O. Olson, C. Hennings
- 1897-1898 F. H. Wold, Jno. Otos, H. J. Ramsett, D. N. Tallman, Swan Nelson
- 1899 Ene Holt, Samuel Osmundson, John Williams, G. W. Tyler, F. O. Peterson
- 1900-1901 John Williams, Samuel Osmundson, Sandboe, G. W. Tyler, Branton

WATER & LIGHT BOARD

- 1902 William Gilger, L. A. Vik, M. D. Manning
- 1903 Lars Halvorson, L. A. Vik, A. J. Ekander
- 1904 Lars Halvorson, N.O. Nelson, A. J. Ekander
- 1905 N. O. Nelson, E. M. Stanford, Lars Halvorson
- 1906-1910 N. O. Nelson, Lewis Fridlund, E. M. Stanford
- 1911-1912 H. S. Peterson, Lewis Fridlund, N. O. Nelson
- 1913 H. S. Peterson, Lewis Fridlund, O. R. Berkness
- 1914 C. S. Olson, Lewis Fridlund, R. M. Hicks
- 1915-1916 C. S. Olson, Lewis Fridlund, Ben Benson
- 1917-1918 C. S. Olson, Lewis Fridlund, Charles Wallin
- 1919-1924 Charles Wallin, Lewis Fridlund, F. G. Handy
- 1925 Charles Wallin, Lewis Fridlund, C. S. Olson
- 1926-1927 C. S. Olson, Lewis Fridlund, E. F. Berquist



Linda McCormack
President



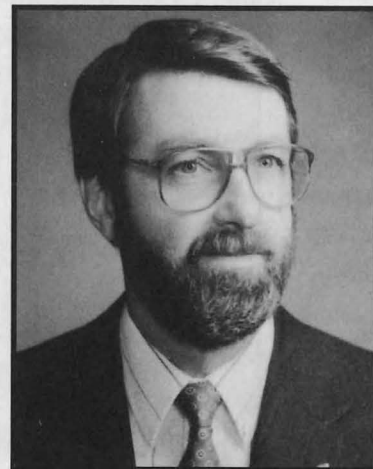
Mike Cullen
Vice-President



Donald Svien
Secretary



Richard Conway
Treasurer



Pat Day
Commissioner



Gerald Latterall
Commissioner



Marguerite Swenson
Commissioner



C. Ted Nelson
General Manager

- 1928-1930 E. F. Berquist, Lewis Fridlund, J. W. Lundberg
- 1931 E. F. Berquist, Lewis Fridlund (to 11/19), V. E. Fridlund, A. C. Carlson
- 1932-1937 E. F. Berquist, V. E. Fridlund, A. C. Carlson
- 1938-1941 A. C. Carlson, V. E. Fridlund, Paul M. Olson
- 1942 A. C. Carlson, V. E. Fridlund (to 8/20) L. E. Hed, Paul M. Olson
- 1943-1946 A. C. Carlson, L. E. Hed, Paul M. Olson
- 1947-1948 A. C. Carlson (to 9/21/48), Oscar M. Erickson, L. E. Hed, George Reichert

- 1949-1950 L. G. Reichert (to 10/19/50) Drew M. Heath, L. E. Hed, Oscar M. Erickson
- 1951 Joseph Heiberg, E. F. Wacker, Oscar M. Erickson
- 1952 J. F. Heiberg, E. F. Wacker, O. M. Erickson (to 6/7) Clifford Westgard
- 1953 Ray Eggers, E. F. Wacker, Clifford Westgard

MUNICIPAL UTILITIES COMMISSION

- 1954-1957 Ray Eggers, E. L. Hauge, Clifford Westgard, W. G. Ferguson, Henry M. Swanson

- 1958 Ray Eggers, E. F. Wacker, W. G. Ferguson, Henry M. Swanson, Harold Bonde
- 1959-1964 E. F. Wacker, W. G. Ferguson, Henry Swanson, Harold Bonde, Ray Eggers (to 6/62) Dr. C. M. Kleinhuizen
- 1965-1967 W. G. Ferguson, Henry Swanson, Harold Bonde, Dr. C. M. Kleinhuizen, Doug Noyes
- 1968-1969 Dr. C. M. Kleinhuizen, Doug Noyes, W. G. Ferguson, Henry M. Swanson, Sy Grossman

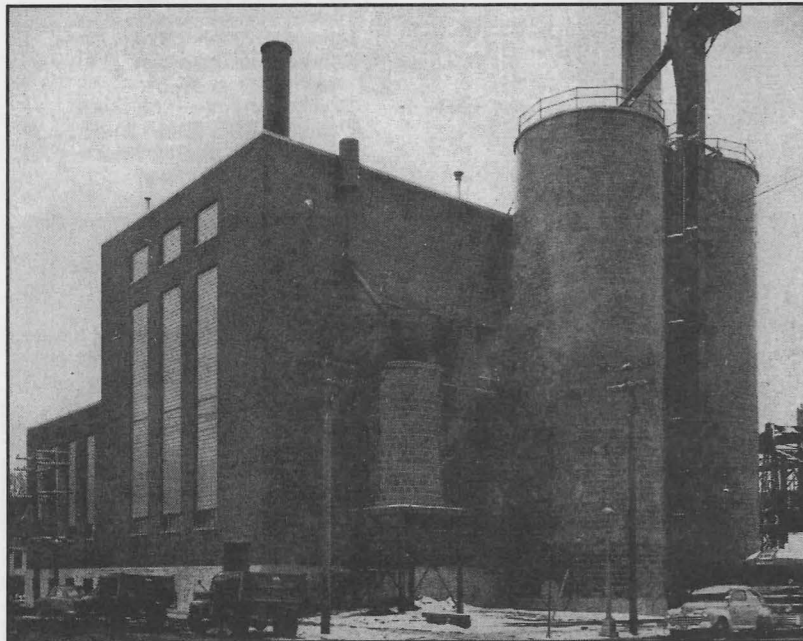
- 1970 W. G. Ferguson, Henry Swanson, Ivan Kvam, Dr. C. M. Kleinhuizen, Doug Noyes
- 1971 Henry Swanson, Ivan Kvam, Dr. C. M. Kleinhuizen, Doug Noyes, Robert Olson
- 1972-1973 Ivan Kvam, Dr. C. M. Kleinhuizen, Doug Noyes, Robert Olson, Walter Johnson
- 1974 Doug Noyes, Robert Olson, Orville Larson, Ivan Kvam, Ralph Demgen

- 1975 Orville Larson, Lester Molenaar, Carl Deisting, Elmo Chapin, Roland Swenson
- 1976 Oliver Larson, Lester Molenaar, Roland Swenson, Elmo Chapin, Betty Schneider
- 1977 Betty Schneider, Elmo Chapin, Donald Olson, Dwayne Rumney, Lester Molenaar
- 1978 Donald Olson, Betty Schneider, Lester Molenaar, Elmo Chapin, Dr. Herman Ahrenholz
- 1979-1980 Lester Molenaar, Dr. Herman Ahrenholz, James Conway, Betty Schneider, Elmo Chapin
- 1981 Dr. Herman Ahrenholz, James Conway, Elmo Chapin, Betty Schneider, Joe Thompson, Bruce DeBlicke, Jack Hickey
- 1982 Dr. Herman Ahrenholz, Jack Hickey, Bruce DeBlicke, Betty Schneider, Ralph Stahnke, James Conway, Joe Thompson
- 1983 Dr. Herman Ahrenholz, Bruce DeBlicke, Jack Hickey, Betty Schneider, Ralph Stahnke, Joe Thompson, Jim Conway
- 1984 Bruce DeBlicke, Ralph Stahnke, Jim Conway, Bev Dougherty, Dr. Herman Ahrenholz, Jack Hickey, Jonette Engan
- 1985 Jack Hickey, Bev Dougherty, Jonette Engan, Dr. Herman Ahrenholz, Val Young, Bruce DeBlicke, Ralph Stahnke
- 1986 Bev Dougherty, Jonette Engan, Val Young, Bruce DeBlicke, Gerald Latterell, Ralph Stahnke, Jack Hickey
- 1987 Jonette Engan, Val Young, Bev Dougherty, Gerald Latterell, Robert Neesen, Ralph Stahnke, Linda McCormack
- 1988 Jonette Engan, Gerald Latterell, Linda McCormack, Bev Dougherty, Mike Cullen, Richard Conway, Val Young
- 1989 Gerald Latterell, Val Young, Rick Conway, Linda McCormack, Mike Cullen, Pat Day, Jonette Engan
- 1990 Val Young, Linda McCormack, Pat Day, Rick Conway, Mike Cullen, Don Svien, Gerald Latterell
- 1991 Linda McCormack, Mike Cullen, Don Svien, Rick Conway, Pat Day, Gerald Latterell, Marguerite Swenson

no cause to believe that another Stacy's Fruit Company fire could occur. Storage tanks having a total capacity of 750,000 gallons were on line in the system and two pumps would supply sufficient water to fight any fire.

In 1926, with space in the old fire house no longer needed, a remodeling job produced what was to be the police station for many years, and public restrooms. Commission offices were established on the Litchfield Avenue side of the building in 1927.

Some time the following year, the question of efficiency of the power plant was again brought into question. In reply to the charges that new equipment needed to be installed immediately, the firm of Tolz, King and Day, which had designed the plant and specified the



Power Plant, c. 1950

equipment to be installed, offered to run the operation for two months, provided the Superintendent and the Clerk of the Board took vacations at the same time, and that the designers would have hire/fire authority. They would, according to Mr. Tolz, have the present plant operating in top form before the time was up. The offer was not accepted, but changes in operation were made, which brought the efficiency of the equipment up to operating standards.

For the balance of the decade, new equipment was purchased and installed as needed to meet ever-increasing demands for power and water.

Until 1929 all wiring in the city had been done by Water & Light Commission employees. During that year, the Commission decided that it was time to get out of the wiring business, so it stopped doing any wiring other than that directly connected with power generation and

distribution, putting wiring on private property into the hands of private contractors and electricians.

In 1930, Willmar and the rest of the world, moved into a world-wide depression. Unemployment exceeded 4,000,000 and 1,300 banks closed. The planet Pluto was discovered, and a "differential analyzer" (early computer) began operation. Five airlines were born, and the first stewardess went to work for United, which began using Ford Tri-motor planes and cut flying time from New York to Los Angeles to 28 hours. There were more than

23,000,000 automobiles in the United States which had 694,000 miles of hard surfaced highways and 2,310,000 miles of dirt roads. Lowell Thomas began his radio broadcasts and "Blondie" first appeared in the papers. "Destry Rides Again," "Cimarron" and "The Maltese Falcon" made their appearance in the bookstores. "Green Pastures" began a record run on Broadway and "The Lone Ranger" and "Death Valley Days" became radio regulars. "Dawn Patrol," "All Quiet on the Western Front" and "Hell's Angels" were featured on the silver screen and "Sleepy Lagoon," "Three Little Words" and "Walkin' My Baby Back Home" would have been on Your Hit Parade had it been in existence. Schick brought out electric shavers, Breck Shampoo came on the market and, for the first time, Dutch Elm disease raised its ugly head.



Electric Meter Test Bench

Willmarites became very much aware of economies. Mayor A. C. Carlson insisted that a water meter be installed at the power plant to measure plant use. The next year, then-Mayor Peter Bonde asked that the power plant's old boiler be removed and the space it occupied be turned into storage. The Water & Light Commission agreed, provided the city pay the costs.

The Commission reduced the power rate for street lights from 4.5¢ KWH to 4¢ KWH, which resulted in a saving to the city of about \$1700.00 a year. It also reduced the water

hydrant rental rates to the city by \$1380.00 a year. Shortly afterward, the Commission inaugurated a discount, designed to offset a 3% federal use tax which had gone into effect. It also closed the Municipal Watering Trough!



Municipal Utilities Service Center

Board of Tax Levy meeting, in 1935. His letter said, in part, *"If the present tax rate is not to be increased, we feel sure that it will be necessary, as in the past, to receive considerable aid from the Water and Light Commission."*

This was entirely in keeping with the condition of the country and the city. Years of drought, combined with world-wide business conditions, had created an economic stranglehold on the entire nation. Locally, more people were out of work than ever before. Federal aid programs were just beginning to have an effect on local economies, so stringent measures still had to be taken to present any kind of economic sanity at the time.

There were homeless people wandering the roads and on the rails. The situation grew so bad that the City Council asked for the use of the Commission's old pump house for use as transient shelter.

In spite of the stringent economics of the time, demand for increased utilities service was growing, and the Commission responded with a call for bids for an enlargement of the power plant.

The city needed financial help, and 1932 marked the beginning of a long list of contributions to the city, in lieu of taxes, by the Water & Light Commission. Payments were made to the Poor Fund, to the Fire Department, to the Permanent Improvement Fund, the hospital, even the tile bill for city hall. Mayor Edwin Selvig requested that the Water & Light Commission be represented at a

Maybe it was a sign of improving economic conditions, but the Commission purchased a typewriter in 1936, and from that time on the minutes of Commission meetings were typed, instead of being kept in some very elegant Spencerian handwriting.

Mayor Selvig asked the Commission to make city heat a year-'round service, since many households and businesses were beginning to use it for water heating.

A number of cases in which home owners had done their own wiring, and had managed to connect service ahead of the electric meters came before the Commission about this time, and the explanations offered were truly ingenious!

In March of 1937 the Commission forwarded an independent engineer's report favoring enlargement of the power plant, to the City Council. This expansion would increase plant capacity from 1,200 KW to 2,000 KW, at an estimated cost of \$156,000.00.

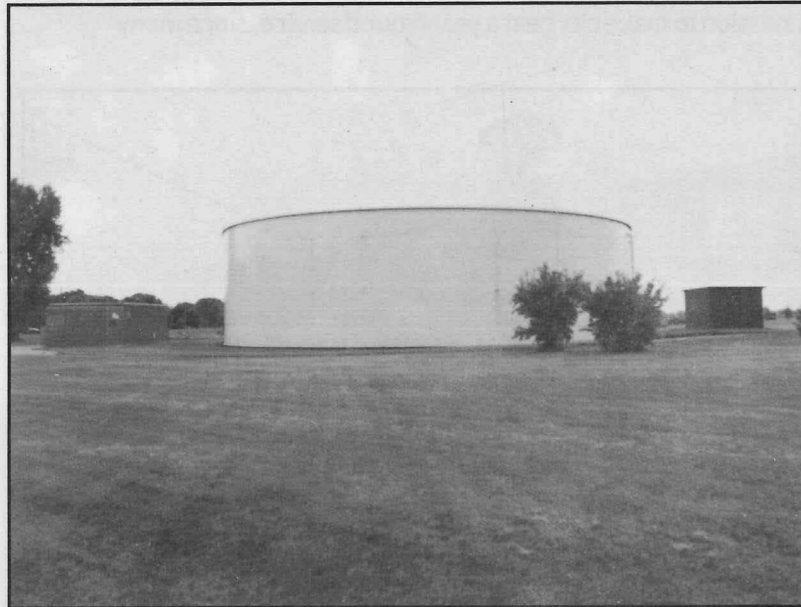
The estimates weren't far off. When the plant was completed, in 1938, the total cost came to \$174,000.00.

A Tribune story, by V.E.L., made this report: *"The Municipal Light and Power Plant of the City of Willmar is an outstanding source of pride and profit to the citizens. The latest improvements which the Daily Tribune is calling attention to today, adds another very substantial portion to the plant. A new 2,000 kilowatt turbine engine and improvements to the cooling tower system and turbine condenser and combustion control with necessary piping, has been installed at a total cost of \$174,000.00."* He goes on to mention that the total generating capacity had reached 4,030 KW, then reviewed the fiscal background of the system and concludes with: *"A MILLION DOLLAR INDUSTRY OWNED BY THE PEOPLE OF THE*



Downtown Water Tower, built 1934

CITY OF WILLMAR PRACTICALLY FREE OF ALL ENCUMBRANCE! Paid for by the service it has rendered the citizens of the city. No bond-holders to reckon with! No dividends to pay stockholders! No outside financiers to wrangle with! A big growing industry free to advance and given vital service to the people of the community!"



3,000,000-gallon water storage tank, Swansson Field

Someone in high places had discovered just how great a boost electricity could give to farming. Financial problems were beginning to ease a bit and a new federal agency had been created in Washington, D.C. . . . the Rural Electrification Administration.

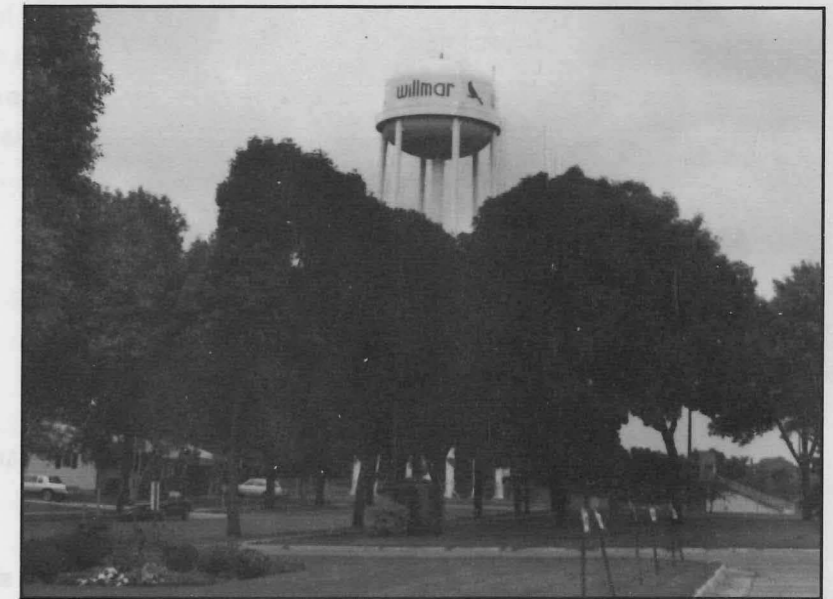
The REA, as it was known, was established to help bring electricity to the farms of America. Local cooperative power associations (usually county-wide) were formed and began developing power distribution systems. Here, in Kandiyohi County, local organization began in October of 1935 with the formation of committees for each township in the county. A month later, after the township committees had spread the story of the possibility of electricity for farms to all parts of the county, an organization meeting was held at the courthouse to formally organize and elect officers. The new entity was named Kandiyohi Co-operative Electric Power Association. The only activity apparent in its first few years was developmental background effort. In May 1939, authority to begin construction was received. A part of that development was the determination of a source from which the co-op could purchase power for distribution to its members. One potential source was the Willmar power plant. Negotiations between the two companies began soon after the power Association was organized. There were a great many meetings, over a period of several years, with both parties working to establish an equitable rate basis and working relationship.

Despite all the hours spent by both sides in the search for a working agreement, none could be reached, and the REA did not purchase power from Willmar's Water & Light Commission at any time.

With much of the world at war by the time 1940 rolled around, and prospects for continuing peace for the United States growing smaller by the day, the Water & Light Commission did the prudent thing and tightened its belt for the anticipated long pull ahead. There would be little done by way of extensive expansion and improvement in the years ahead. Despite the Commission's hold-the-line stance, Willmar continued to grow and the need for more power and water grew with it. All that could be done under the circumstances was done, with extensive development being tabled until the war's end.

Domestic problems occupied the Commission early in 1940, and the following are good examples of the type of thing the board faced during that period:

One gentleman constructed a new home beyond the water lines. He applied to the Commission for permission to connect his water line to that of a neighbor who, in turn, was being served by a private line. Permission was granted, provided the owner of the home to which he proposed connecting his water line to, agreed to the arrangement, that the connection was made ahead of the other home's meter, and that he realized that, should the Commission be forced at some future time to cut off water service to the neighbor, his own water supply would be cut off, too. Apparently these conditions were agreeable to the new home builder. The astonishing thing is that such arrangements had to be made for homes well within the city limits and just prior to World War II.



Willmar Avenue "Cardinal" Water Tower

In another action the City Council authorized "the Water and Light Department to offer rewards for the capture and conviction of the parties responsible for the damage to and destruction of street lights and equipment in various parts of the City."

Dr. Magnus Peterson, then Superintendent of the Willmar State Hospital (now Willmar Regional Treatment Center), approached the Commission about the possibility of running a power line to the Hospital to operate the X-Ray machines. The Hospital had its own Direct Current power plant, but the new X-Ray equipment had been designed and built to operate on Alternating Current.

In still another action the Commission notified the Willmar Chamber of Commerce that it had to vacate its office, located in the Commission's building, because the Police Department needed to expand into that space.



South Sub-Station, 19th Av. SW and 9th St.

and Council proceeded on that basis and let contracts and began purchasing equipment for an addition which would double the power plant's output.

A Tribune story, in September 1947, states that materials shortages, still related to the country's recovery from war-time conditions, would delay the completion of the plant, but would not stop its construction. A. C. Carlson, President of the Board, gave as his opinion that the plant completion would be delayed at least ten months. L. E. Hed, Secretary of the Board, did not think "any of the new equipment will be in operation until a year from now."

The story goes on to say, "The necessity for the expansion has developed out of Willmar's population and industrial growth and anticipated growth. In order to attract new industries to the city, the city must be able to supply sufficient power for their operations, according to Mr. Hed. 'We are building this in anticipation of increased industrial and population expansion in Willmar,' Mr. Carlson said.

A wartime measure was 1942's purchase of an air raid siren.

By the time the war ended, it was very apparent that massive improvements and additions needed to be made to the power plant's existing facilities. The Commission accepted a report which gave 1949 as the time when demand would significantly exceed the capacity of the existing plant. The Commission

"The enlarged plant will double power capacity. It will jump from producing 2,000 kilowatts to 4,000. This will enable Willmar to invite more industry into the city."

Another expansion was the drilling of an additional well in 1948, with a rated capacity of 1,000 gallons of water a minute. The 23-year-old reservoir was demolished, since it was too small and debilitated for continued use. The cost of the new well was about one-third that of building a new storage tank. Either a new tank or a new well was needed, and the well was the obvious best solution.

When the new well was tested in August 1948, it became a bigger event than planned. The well was expected to produce 1,000 gallons of water per minute normally, and it exceeded that rate by 80% during the test, and put 14" of water on the intersection of Eighth and Pacific.

While lack of materials was holding up construction and completion of the addition to Willmar's new power plant, no one ever thought it would be delayed so long. In 1947 L. E. Hed, Secretary of the Water & Light Commission, estimated that the opening of the plant would be delayed a year because of shortages. It was, in fact, just about two years from the time construction started until the new 4,000-watt turbine went into production June 13, 1949. After all the work, frustration and delays, a very simple ceremony at the power plant marked the completion of the improvements. Mayor B. J. Branton threw the switch and A. C. Carlson, long-time Water & Light Commission member, pressed the button which put the first 1,000 kilowatt load on the new unit.

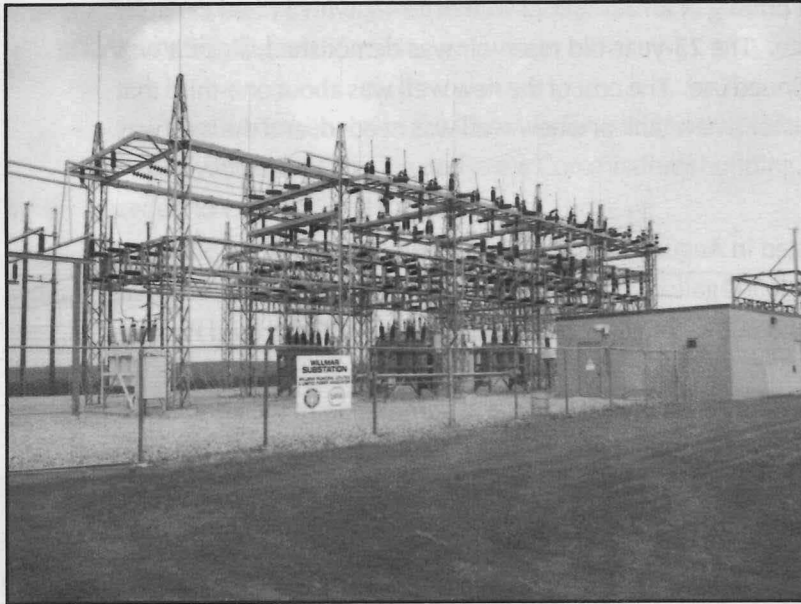
The total improvement carried a price tag of \$1,400,000.00, including provision for the installation of an additional boiler and turbine which increased the plant's capacity to 18,200 kilowatts.



Transmission Line Construction

When the project got under way, the Water & Light Commission had cash assets of over \$403,000.00 and issued revenue certificates totalling \$700,000.00 for basic funding. The remaining \$300,000.00 was to be financed through earnings.

For many years the Water & Light Commission had shouldered a part of the city's indebtedness, either directly as when \$33,000 was assigned to the Commission by the



Willmar Sub-Station, 1 mile south of the city

the plant modernization. Shortly after the plant was completed, the Council asked the Commission for more money. The Commission's reply was in the form of a confidential letter to the Mayor and City Council, in which the Commission agreed to accede to the request, but did so under protest because of the heavy expense involved in the plant improvement and equipment upgrade. The letter was accompanied by a report on the state of the utility, which showed that, in spite of the improvements, a great deal remained to be done, which had not been included in the planning or funding for the plant expansion. The war was still taking its toll. The old section of the plant was being modernized by Commission personnel, and would cost less than \$4,000.00 "in spite of the severe overload and deficient maintenance that was previously (during the war) imposed on the old equipment."

The utility's improvement and development program, so far as the electrical distribution system was concerned, would require another \$70,000.00. This was after the utility had spent over \$50,000.00 in two years just to reduce low voltage and outage complaints by half.

Each month in 1949, the report continued, there was a 19% electrical load increase over the same month in 1948.

The report indicated that the power demand for December 1949 would be nearly double

Council, or by paying specific obligations of the city or by annual contributions to the city's General Fund.

While plans for the power plant improvement were under discussion, the Commission assured the City Council that it would continue to contribute \$35,000.00 to the General Fund annually, in spite of the financial load it was assuming for

that of 1946 and that the 1949 demand would be doubled again within three years.

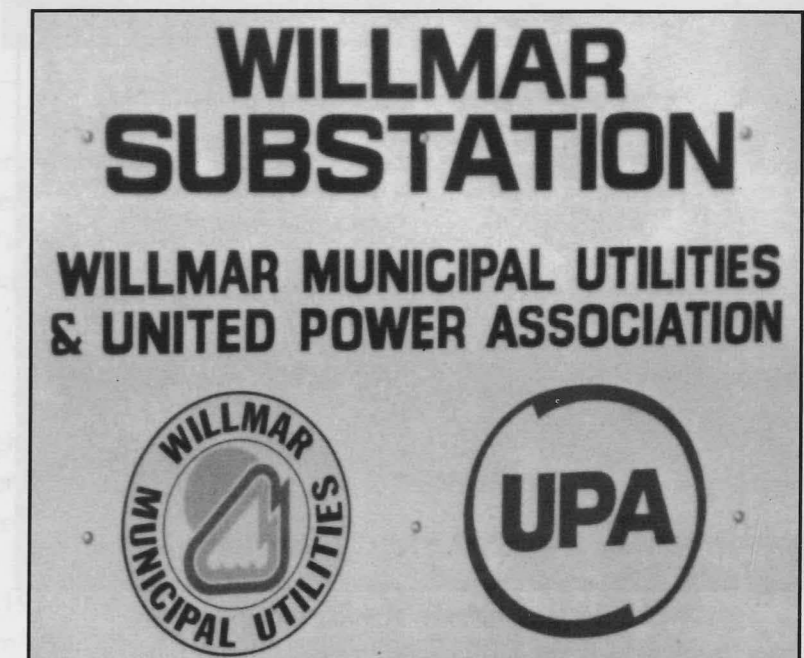
Steam heat use, according to the report, was increasing and necessary extensions to the heating system would cost about \$30,000.00 in the next two years.

A new well, in the south part of the city, would be needed, the report stated, at a cost of about \$57,000.00 in the next few years.

"In conclusion," the report stated, "the unusual rapid city growth is creating problems worthy of serious study if the growth is to continue with adequate utility service. The problems can be solved but present and future revenues can not provide funds for expansion and debt retirement unless carefully administered to the continuous improvement of Department interest."

As the world entered the 1950's it was apparent that everything was growing. The planet's population had risen to 2,520,000,000, while that of the United States had doubled from 1900 to 160,000,000, and Willmar had grown to a population of just under 9,000. The fear of Communism cast its shadow on nearly everything we did in this country. Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin had started his fanatical "witch hunts" which were to prove baseless under investigation; the infamous "Blacklist" which removed many of America's great entertainers from public view because of suspected Communist sympathies, had been distributed, ruining hundreds of lives; the FBI started listing its

"Ten Most Wanted Criminals"; President Truman ordered American forces into Korea, with General Douglas MacArthur in command; tranquilizers, the first copy machines, artificial sweeteners and the Jolly Green Giant all made their initial appearances; the comic strip "Peanuts" made its debut; "Member of the Wedding" and "Come Back, Little Sheba" were



Broadway hits; "What's My Line?" and "Show of Shows" were TV favorites; "Call Me Madam" and "Guys and Dolls" were the top musicals; and the Otis Elevator Co. produced the first elevator with self-opening doors.

Willmar was keeping up with the rest of the world in most respects, but especially in population. The growth which the city had experienced and anticipated made the Water & Light Commission's 1949 report almost prophetic, because power consumption had grown to 1,089 KWH per capita during the previous year, the heating system sold 62,500,000 pounds of steam and the city's residents had consumed 250,000,000 gallons of water over the same time. This growth made it necessary for the Council to call for bids on a new steam boiler in just over a year after the previous power plant expansion had been completed and a contract for the installation of a new generator was also awarded.

By the end of 1950, Willmar dentists were urging the Water & Light Commission and the City Council to fluoridate the city's drinking water. The estimated cost of this service was 5¢

per person per year. Fluoridation was agreed upon early in 1951, starting a long-term controversy which was only settled when the Minnesota Legislature passed a law requiring fluoridization in all public water systems.

A second Explosion involving utilities commission property occurred on the night of August 13-14, 1951, when one wall of the Commission office

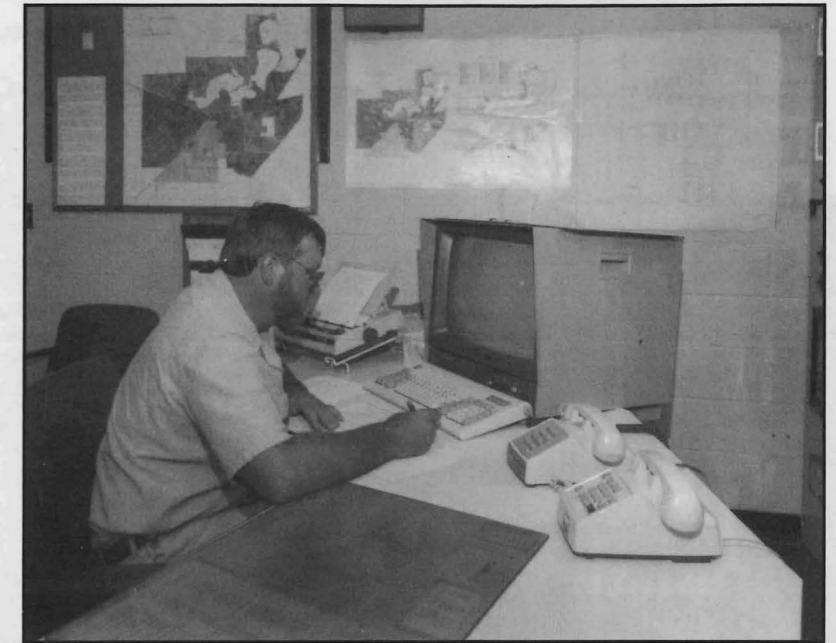
was blown out in the course of a robbery. By the end of the month, the police investigation into the matter revealed that the explosion had been intended to just blow the safe, but got out of hand. It had been carried out by L. E. Hed, Secretary of the Commission, to make it appear that the money he and a former employee of the commission had embezzled had been stolen by person or persons unknown.



Line Department employees at work, with bucket truck

The ensuing police investigation revealed not only the clumsy safe-blowing attempt, but the full extent of the embezzlement. The Secretary was relieved of his duties November 1, 1951. At his subsequent trial, he was convicted and sentenced to a term in Stillwater.

Television was coming to Willmar by 1953. There were a few TV sets in use, but the hill between Willmar and Kandiyohi effectively blacked out most signals, and TV engineers surveyed the community only to be amazed that there was any reception here at all, even with extra-high antennas and rotors. Lloyd Stenberg, long-time radio man in the city, proposed the development of a TV cable system, and approached the Water & Light Commission with the idea of mounting his cables on the city's power poles. Stenberg's plans did not work out, but several years later Willmar Video, Inc., did bring cable TV to Willmar and still utilize utility poles and joint wiring where utilities have gone underground.



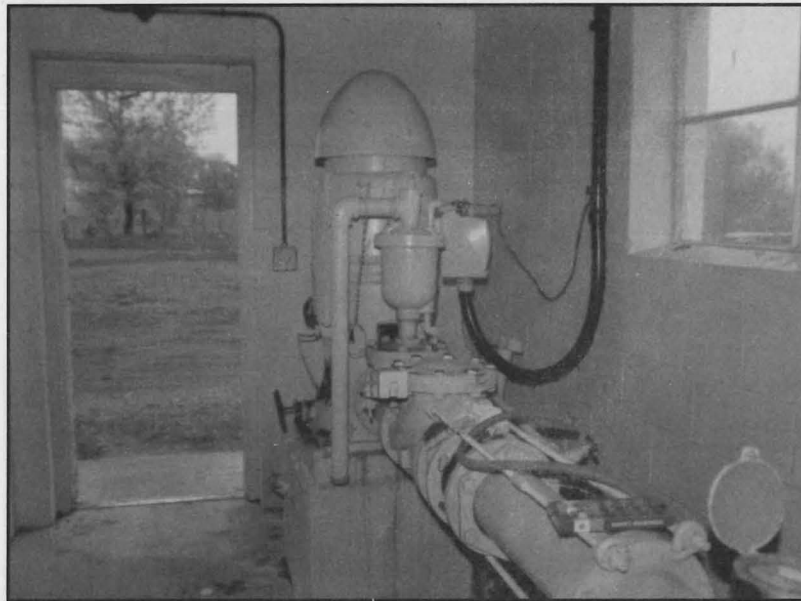
Power Plant Control Center

In 1954 the Water & Light Commission made an agreement to purchase St. Mary's Church and Rectory, on the corner of Seventh St. and Litchfield Avenue, the property to be used for the Commission's offices and headquarters.

An election on April 20, 1954 amended Willmar's City Charter. Under the amended charter the Water & Light Commission, which had managed Willmar's growing utility system since 1902, was replaced by a 5-member Municipal Utilities Commission. President Ray Eggers, Secretary Elverd Hauge and Commissioners Clifford Westgard, W. G. Ferguson and Henry M. Swanson became the first Commissioners. Since two of the five members of the new Commission had served on the last Water & Light Commission, it seemed only natural that improvements which had been initiated by that commission be carried out by the new one.

Another expansion program, based upon the 1949 report, was initiated by the new Municipal Utilities Commission very shortly after it was installed. This expansion covered both the electric and water utilities.

The question of fluoridation was raised again. This time the Council ordered it into effect. That decision set off a major protest within the city. A number of citizens felt very strongly



Interior of one of Willmar's Pump Houses

about the matter, and the arguments raged hot and heavy for several years. One faction was positive that fluoride was a poison, and should not be placed in the water supply. When that claim was disproved, the cry arose, "If they can add fluoride to our water, what will they add next?", developing the argument that allowing one "drug" to be placed in the water system opened the door to the introduction of any number of other substances. "Mind control" was one hobgoblin which was raised often as the arguments proceeded. Eventually the Council acceded to the wave of public opinion and rescinded its action.

April 25, 1956 was an important day in the history of the Municipal Utilities Commission. At 3:30 p.m. that day, the cornerstone of the new Municipal Utilities Office and Service Building was laid. The cornerstone contained a copy of the new City Charter, the Municipal Utilities Financial Statement for 1955, documents relating to the growth and development of the utilities, pictures of the power plant, a rate card and a copy of the April 24 issue of the West Central Minnesota Daily Tribune. This was part of a \$2,000,000.00 improvement package which was completed in 1957. Other improvements included in the package were enlargement and general improvements in the electrical and water distribution systems, two new wells and water tanks. All of these projects were paid through the sale of public utility revenue certificates. Those certificates were paid from departmental earnings.

Moving into the new Office and Service Building opened some space for City department use. The Police Department moved part of its operations into space formerly occupied by Municipal Utilities, in the offices it vacated at 525 W. Litchfield Avenue, and the Minnesota Highway Department also leased space in the building on Tenth Street and Pacific Avenue. Later that year, the then Bank of Willmar purchased all the utilities department property on the south side of Litchfield Avenue between Fifth and Sixth Streets. This property is now the First American Bank parking lot.

In one of its less popular actions, Willmar's City Council again voted to fluoridate water in 1959. A petition, signed by 700 citizens, requesting the repeal of the Council action, was presented at the next Council meeting.



Fully equipped Bucket Truck

During 1959 the power plant switched to natural gas, on an interruptible service rate, which saved the Utilities Commission about \$35,000.00 a year. That must have been a life-saver, since the winter of 1958-59 was an exceptionally cold one. A story in the Tribune that year warned that water was freezing in the mains and asked all homes and businesses to keep some water running from at least one faucet at all times.

Commission Chairman Ervin F. Wacker, in a report on the Commission's activities during 1959, listed the installation of a sub-station and switching gear for an REA tie-line, which would give Willmar additional power in emergencies; contracting for additional power from the Missouri Basin; increased voltage throughout Willmar's electrical system; construction of a 160,000 pounds-per-hour steam boiler to replace three smaller ones; re-development of three wells. In addition, the Commission established an "uncontrolled water heating rate." For many years water heaters in the city were on a circuit which only operated at off-peak hours. This was economical if not convenient, for if a user ran out of hot water, it meant a wait of up to twelve or fifteen hours before the water heating circuit was activated again. Under the new rate, home and business owners so choosing could have continuous water heating electricity for the very first time.

His report also stated, "With 'New Industries' very much in the air, we would like to express our feeling that the Utilities Commission of the City of Willmar provides this community with one of the finest businesses, and employment for around 30 families, which business deserves the continued support of its many customers, and for which the Utilities and the City of Willmar are thankful. The only thing that we have to offer is service, and it is our aim to furnish the best of service at a reasonable cost."

The "uncontrolled water heating" electrical service proved to be so popular that the Commission decided to expand its promotional and service efforts by starting a three-month trial promotion, allowing special credits on power charges to consumers purchasing large electrical appliances. Three months later, the promotion was extended for another three months and, later that year a campaign to promote electrical home heating was introduced.

While electrical services were being actively promoted to the community, the Water Department remained very quiet. The petition, which a large number of citizens had presented to the City Council on the matter of fluoridation of Willmar's water, resulted in an election on the question, which fluoridation lost by a vote of 2,767 to 1,948. There was a very vocal element in the city which did not believe in the use of drugs of any kind and, in their view, fluoride was a drug.



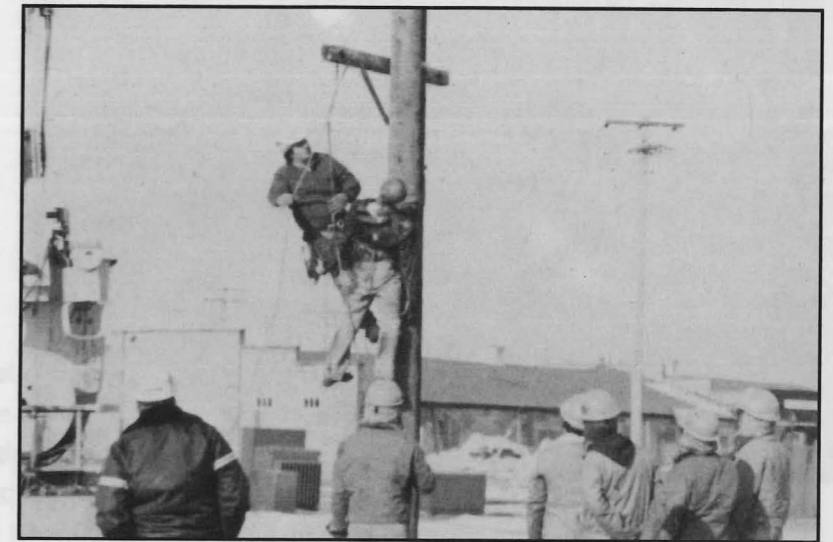
Hauling coal to the stockpiles

come under the rigged bids. The Commission's attorney, Tom E. Davis, was retained, in a separate agreement, to represent the Commission and the City in negotiations for the collection of damages under the suit.

About the middle of 1961, the Utilities Commission was made aware of an Anti-Trust suit which had been filed in Philadelphia, accusing several electrical equipment manufacturers of rigging bids on contracts. Willmar's Municipal Utilities had been involved in purchases which the Anti-Trust people deemed to have

While the legal action was going on in Philadelphia, things were happening at home. REA customers on south Highway 23 asked to have the Municipal Utilities serve them. This was one of the first, if not the first time when the question of "who will serve whom" arose. It was to become an ever-recurring problem for a number of years.

In addition, the Commission had been carrying on a dispute with Rural Co-op Power Association regarding the rates which Willmar paid for the power it purchased from the association. Things reached such a point, late in the year, that the Association cut off electrical service to Willmar as of midnight October 31, 1961. The matter was settled amicably shortly thereafter.



One of the Commission's regular safety classes

Perhaps the single most interesting event in the utilities business in Willmar, during the next couple of years, was the City Council's decision to have the Municipal Utilities Commission be responsible for the maintenance of all traffic lights in the city. The Commission agreed to hire and have a traffic signal maintenance man trained to keep the lights in good condition, with the costs being billed to the City.

Negotiations on the bid-rigging suit had progressed to the point that Westinghouse, one of the defendants, offered Willmar a settlement of \$552.00 to close the city's claim. This was, naturally enough, not accepted. As negotiations continued, the offers increased until, finally, more than three years after the case had been filed, Willmar Municipal Utilities received a settlement of more than \$67,000.00.

In what appears to have become a "same song, second verse" sort of action, the City Council once again ordered Willmarites water fluoridated. The anti-fluoride faction in the city promptly presented another petition and, once again, the Council rescinded its action.

The Commission, from time to time, seemed to become bogged down in details which,

although rather insignificant, had to be considered. Its meetings were filled with questions such as, "Who owns the water meter if a house is moved?" and "When will the Municipal

Utilities Commission meet during Lent?" and Good Friday office hours and whether the \$20.00 power credit for the purchase of new appliances should be extended to purchasers of used ones.



Power Plant, c. 1985

A major point of discussion between the Commission and the City Council involved the payments which the Commission had been making regularly to the City. The Council took the position that, since those payments were supposed to be made in lieu of taxes, they should

be used to "hold down the tax levy." The Commission backed Superintendent William Latham's contention that the profits of a utility should be used only to improve the service or to reduce the rates. It was an argument which was to go on for a number of years. A West Central Tribune story, published June 25, 1965, stated that the Council wanted the Commission's contributions to the city to equal one-third of its profits. The Commission's 1964 fiscal year showed that it had paid the City \$110,000.00 in lieu of taxes, but the Council believed that it should receive another \$34,274.33, which represented one-third of the Municipal Utilities profit for that year. A June 24, 1965 "conference" between the two bodies resulted in a Commission counter-proposal that it pay the City \$20,000.00 a year out of its profits. The basic question was not quite as simple as it appeared at first blush. Since the Council wanted to use the money to help pay for a new city garage, the question of garage ownership arose, as did the matter of interest payments, if the money were to be borrowed from the Commission, the fear of binding future Councils and Commissions and the possibility of doing away with the annual "hassle" about profits. The upshot of all the discussion was that the Commission agreed to give the City \$35,000.00 of the previous year's profits, and set aside an additional \$15,000.00 which the City could borrow, if needed.

The next few years were a relatively quiet period in the annals of the Commission. There were more requests for service changes from REA to MUC and vice versa; there were contracts made for the purchase of additional power, when needed, with the Rural Co-op Power Association and the federal Bureau of Reclamation, which brought power from the dams in North Dakota; the City purchased a 40-acre tract from Clarence Hubbard for a new well field in the northeast part of town and fluoridation raised its head once more.



New heat lines, ready for installation

In the matter of fluoridating the city's water, the Commission asked the City Council which body would pay for the equipment needed, and its installation (about \$5,000.00) and for the fluoride to be used (estimated at \$1,200.00 a year). The Council must have agreed to pay these expenses, since the question was only raised that one time. The entire question was simplified when, in 1966, the Council again passed a fluoridation ordinance and, in spite of a 1,200-signature anti-fluoridation petition, ordered Municipal Utilities to install the necessary equipment and prepare to put fluoride in the water. The anti-fluoridaters presented a petition to the District Court, requesting that a restraining order be issued, preventing the city from carrying out the new fluoridation policy. District Judge Sam Gandrud upheld the city's position and, on March 1, 1967, Willmar's water was fluoridated. Another suit was filed with the District Court in another attempt to stop the water treatment, but this time the hearing was held in abeyance until the recent state legislation on the matter could be tested before Minnesota's Supreme Court. For all intents and purposes, Willmar's water was fluoridated, and it has been ever since.

The state's Attorney-General threw a monkey wrench into the Utilities Commission's promotions which offered power-credit to customers who purchased major electrical appliances, air conditioners or installed electrical home heat. He said it couldn't be done.

Willmar continued to grow and, as it grew, more and more questions arose about

whether or not the city's Municipal Utilities would serve a given recently-annexed area or if the people in that area were to remain REA patrons. It would be several years before that question would finally be settled.

At its January 22, 1969, meeting the Council asked the Commission for an annual contribution of 10% of the operation's gross revenues. Six months later, it asked the Commission to increase that to 12%.

One can imagine that some of the lighter moments in Commission proceedings came from complaints by homemakers that the Commission's meter readers would enter homes without being invited, track up floor coverings and inadvertently create other problems. On a more somber note – some of this concern had been caused by the murder of a Willmar homemaker, a crime which has yet to be solved. The solution: Outside-registering water meters. These were sold to meter users on an extended payment basis, with monthly charges on the consumer's utilities bill.



Installing power transformer near Power Plant

By the time 1970 rolled around, man had walked on the moon, the Concorde had gone into regular trans-oceanic service from Britain and France and had flown at twice the speed of sound, the average car in the United States was sold at wholesale for about \$2,300.00, panty hose sales were soaring, anti-war demonstrations sprang up across the country, 747's went into trans-Atlantic service, aerial hi-jackings began, mergers created the Burlington Northern Railway, "Jonathan Livingston Seagull" was the top-selling book, "All In The Family" made its TV debut, "Patton," "Mash" and "Hello, Dolly" were the year's most popular movies and the world's population had exceeded 3,600,000,000, with 205,000,000 of all those people living in the United States and, of those more than 12,000 were living in Willmar.

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Willmar's continuing growth was creating problems. At one time it was considered to be the fastest growing non-metro community in Minnesota. This growth, emphasized by ever-expanding city limits, triggered nearly a decade of negotiations with the Kandiyohi Cooperative Electric Power Association. These discussions primarily involved the questions of which power supplier, KCEPA or MUC, was to provide electricity to customers in newly annexed areas. At first blush that might appear to be a simple matter, but a number of legal questions, based upon the backgrounds of both concerns, legislation and legal decisions created a Gordian Knot of large proportions. It would take a number of years before agreements in this matter would be reached.

The city's annexation of the Iverson Park area and the, then, Willmar State Hospital were the actions which finally brought matters to a head. The Iverson Park annexation included a number of homes and businesses, which even included the REA's headquarters.



Downtown Re-Development Project

The REA felt that, since it had developed the customers and, in many instances, borrowed the money to provide poles, lines and other equipment to bring power to those customers, it should be entitled to continue to serve them. When its application for a franchise to supply electrical energy to certain customers within the city limits was rejected, the matter of the State Hospital was appealed to the State Executive Committee, which ruled that the REA should continue to carry out its contract to supply alternating current to the State Hospital. This contract, in effect for nearly three decades, had been reached when the hospital, which had its own direct current generating plant, needed alternating current to operate its X-Ray machines. The Municipal Utilities, at that time, had declined to build the necessary power line to the hospital, so the REA provided the power. When the entire facility was converted to alternating current, some years later, it was only natural that the REA continue as energy supplier.

Both the Municipal Utilities Commission and the KCEPA, appointed committees to work toward solutions to the many questions which the situation had created. By 1972, both organizations had put forth several proposals, none of which resulted in agreement by all parties.

While the questions were directly related to about 70 REA customers within the City of Willmar and about 90 MUC customers who were not, the consequences of their resolution would reach far into the future – as long as Willmar continued to grow and expand. It is evident that both parties were sincerely seeking solutions, or the negotiations would have ended shortly after they began. Instead, they went on for over seven years, through Public Service Commission hearings and State Executive Committee petitions, with agreements being reached one by one, in a long and painful process. All the hard work paid off when, at a dinner

City of Willmar, Minnesota

OFFICE OF
EDWIN SELVIG, MAYOR

WILLMAR, MINN.,

September 16, 1935

Mr. V. e. Fridlund, Secretary
Water and Light commission
City

Dear Mr. Fridlund:

The Board of Tax Levy of the City of Willmar is planning on having a meeting on Thursday September 19th at 4:30 P.M. at the City Hall, to make up the budget for the coming year.

If the present tax rate is not to be increased, we feel sure that it will be necessary, as in the past, to receive considerable aid from the Water and Light Commission.

If possible, we would be pleased to have the Water & Light Commission represented at our meeting.

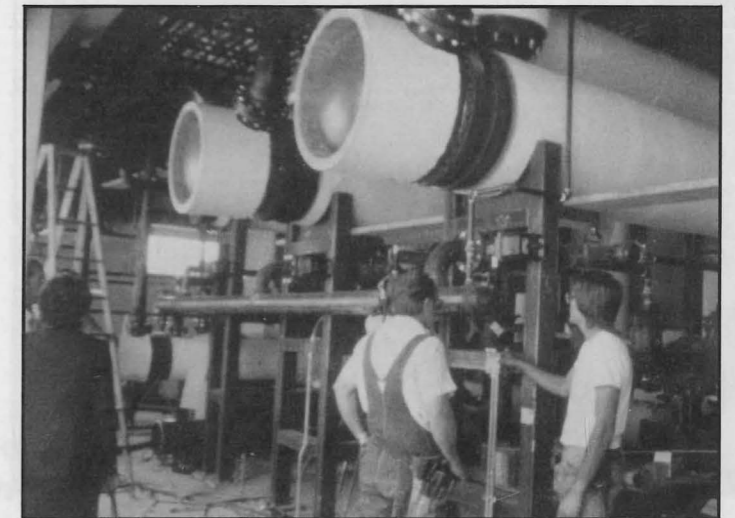
Yours very truly,

EDWIN SELVIG
Mayor

es:in

meeting December 28, 1977, checks were exchanged between KCEPA and MUC which finally put a working agreement into effect.

Even though major questions relating to which company was to serve which customers were always in the forefront of participants' thoughts, the business of Willmar's utilities had to go on as usual. Questions before the Municipal Utilities Commission, in that time span, ranged from continuing maintenance to continuous improvement and development, as well as day-to-day problems. Some of them involved fairly knotty questions, too, such as 'When the city asks property owners to keep some water running through the sewers, to keep them from freezing, who should pay for the water thus used?' Answer: The Commission decided that, in spite of the fact that Willmar's sewer system is not within the purview of the Utilities Commission, fairness decreed that water usage for the corresponding period of the previous year, or else the water usage of the previous month should determine the amount of the water bill.



Interior, Heat Conversion Building

Even within the past twenty years, the Commission has had to decide what to do about a business which was getting its water through an approved connection to a private home, when the home owner wanted to stop providing the water!; the rate for thawing out water mains; air pollution (mostly stirred up coal dust created by coal loading and unloading); the condition of certain individual power poles; the need for utilities in current and future construction; local businessmen who complained they didn't have the opportunity to bid on some Commission purchases; the remodeling of the Commission's business office and planning improvements in the water system.

Other matters helped make the lives of the Commissioners busy ones. At one time, in 1974, the City Council exercised its prerogative of vetoing the actions of the Municipal Utilities Commission, this time regarding the ever-recurring question of the amount the Commission was to transmit to the City of Willmar in lieu of taxes. At the time in question the Commission had notified the Council that it would not be able to make monthly transmittals of "lieu of taxes" funds as requested by the City. The Council, in consequence, vetoed three proposed

Commission expenditures. This triggered the resignations of five Commissioners and the Commission Superintendent. They were withdrawn when the Council withdrew its veto, and a meeting with the Mayor resulted in a better understanding of the positions of all parties.

A little later that year quite a few Commission and City employees went on "sick call", refusing to work until an employee's tenuous resignation had been withdrawn. It didn't work out the way the un-strike was intended, but the matter was settled and work went on in the City of Willmar.



District Heating Conversion Building

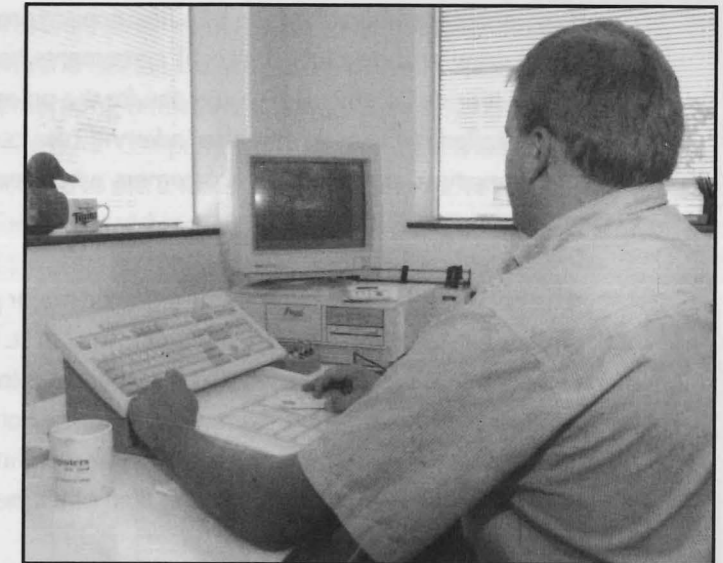
There have always been hazards involved in the type of work Commission employees must, at times, perform. Injuries have ranged from scrapes, sprains, breaks and internal injuries to people being hit by lightning and surviving, to one worker who drilled through a major power main with a jack hammer. He was literally thrown across Third Street and survived. Robert Kyseth was not so fortunate. His hand brushed a high-voltage main, when he was holding another line in his other hand, while working at Robbins Island June 9, 1976. He was dead before the aerial bucket in which he was working, could be brought to the ground; he was the only MUC lineman to lose his life while on duty.

The accident which caused the most damage to the Commission's physical plant, the power plant explosion aside, happened September 20, 1977, when one of two coal storage silos, which fed coal into the plant, collapsed. There were 600 tons of coal stored in the silo when seams in the structure apparently began giving way. It took more than a quarter-hour from the start of the collapse until it was over. The structure had to be torn down and rebuilt.

With the question of who serves whom in annexations resolved, the Commission went on to establish a 91-block underground wiring test area, to begin preparing plans for an

updating of the municipal heating system and the acquisition of more property for the future expansion of Commission operations. Buildings were purchased on both sides of Pacific Avenue, in the 800 and 900 blocks. These areas became storage yards and coal storage sites.

As Willmar's Municipal Utilities Commission entered its tenth decade, it also entered an era of unprecedented growth and development. One question became extremely important: Should the Commission consider installing a new hot water heating system, rather than rejuvenate the decaying steam system which was still in operation? The matter was to be considered at frequent intervals as time went on, and the need for bold decisions became more obvious.



CAD (Computer Aided Drafting) Department

A new City Charter went into effect January 1, 1981 which, to a certain extent, affected the Municipal Utilities Commission. It changed the size of the Board of Commissioners from five members to seven; there were a few other relatively minor changes, but the big change was that the new Charter did not specify any particular amount which should be paid to the City "in lieu of taxes". "Bold decisions" also included trying to purchase the Minnesota Department of Transportation building, at Tenth St. W. and Pacific Avenue, which housed the District Highway Engineer's office. A bid on the property, in 1981, was rejected as too low, and it was "back to the drawing boards" for both parties.

Conservation of energy and cash required bold decisions in the Commission's planning; at one time sunflower seeds were mixed with coal in a test which indicated that using such fuels could save up to \$30,000.00 worth of coal annually. There were other trials, too. A couple of test burns, using prepared solid waste mixed with coal, showed that it could be done. However, to convert to burning only solid waste fuels would require a \$2-\$3,000,000.00 revamping of the boilers to be used for such firing, making further developmental work inadvisable. Other decisions involved moving toward putting all power lines in Willmar underground, windpower electrical production was seriously discussed at one time, and the

Commission became deeply involved in Willmar's complete Downtown redevelopment program because disturbing the massive underground pipe system would require completely re-designing it.

Buying out the interests of the REA, in annexed areas, became a major item of business as the city grew and developed. Legal agreements had been reached through which the Municipal Utilities Commission would pay for the poles, lines and other facilities which the REA had installed in the area, and also indemnify the co-operative for certain revenue losses (in one annexation, paying for 35 customers who were switched to MUC power cost the Commission over \$36,000.00).

The hot water heating idea rapidly assumed major proportions in the Commission plans and, on October 13, 1981, it engaged Scantec, Inc., of St. Paul, to design the basic system. One of the reasons Scantec was chosen was that it had a joint-venture agreement with a research firm in Vasteras, Sweden, where district heating using hot water was already a reality. Working with those two firms, the Commission began sending personnel to Sweden, to attend conferences related to this type of heating, and other men to see systems in actual operation.

Willmar's new heating system was the first of its kind in the United States and attracted a great deal of attention from all parts of the world where heating is an important budgetary factor. Delegations from Sweden came here rather frequently, interspersed by groups from France, the Netherlands and other countries where Willmar-type systems could be used. Since this type of heating was new in the United States, almost all of the components of the new system came from Sweden. American cities sent observers, too, as Willmar's pioneering system was installed. One matter, which required careful consideration, was keeping downtown Willmar stores open while streets and sidewalks were completely torn up.

In mid-1984 an attempt was made to control the iron in the city's water, with Aqua-Mag equipment. This would later be replaced several times until 1991 when, on July 8, the Commission called for bids for construction and installation of two water purifying plants, which are intended to bring down the iron content of the water to more acceptable standards than the forty times recommended levels the system now must deliver.

The matter of the Municipal Utilities Commission setting up a cable TV system in its service area was discussed as early as 1984 and the question has risen from time to time, ever since. About this time the Commission began looking into the possibility of using Foot and Willmar Lakes as part of a system which would replace the cooling towers now in use. Lengthy

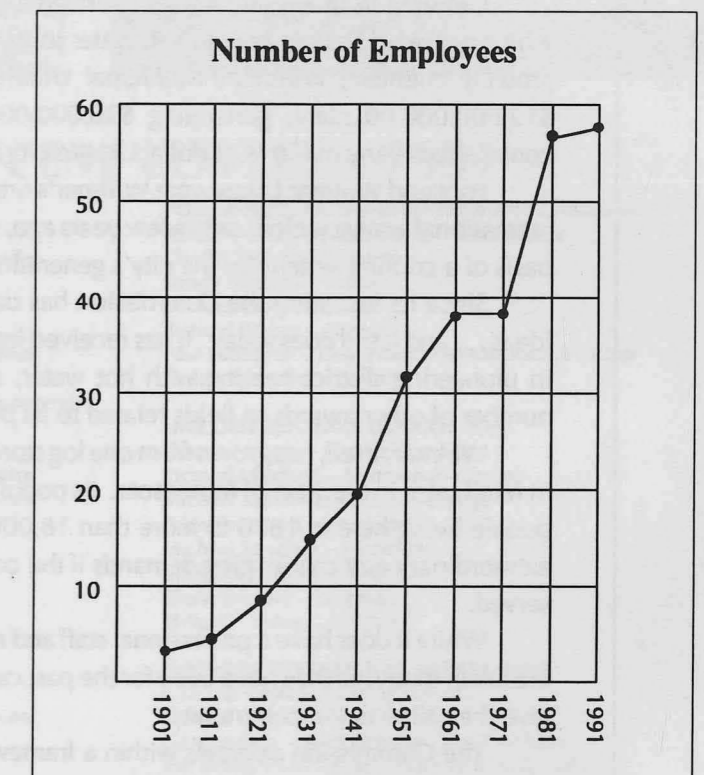
tests revealed that such a system would work well, without harming the lakes, but the cost of installation and operation made it prohibitive. It even installed an under-sidewalk heating device in a snow-melting experiment.

On July 5, 1984, the Commission reached an agreement with United Power Association, to purchase half of 30 miles of 230 KV line and half the capacity of the UPA sub-station located on the south edge of Willmar. The transporting of electrical energy over a system of wires sometimes involved using wires owned by a company from which the power was not purchased, much as one railroad might need to use another road's track to move its trains at times. Power companies charge users for the use of their lines. Since Willmar would now own one of those lines, "wheeling" charges would no longer apply, creating a very significant saving to the Commission.

Buying out service areas, as the city expanded its limits, continued, and the possible merger of the Commission and KCEPA was brought up again. A contract which the REA had with the State of Minnesota had kept the hospital question open. In 1990 the MUC and KCEPA did reach a territorial agreement, which will run some years into the next century, with the approval of Minnesota's Public Utilities Commission.

About the same time another agreement was reached with United Power Association, which will be effective until the year AD 2010. The electrical power division of the Municipal Utilities is now purchasing nearly 75% of the electrical energy used in the city, as compared to about 50% in 1975. Purchases are made from several companies with which MUC has made agreements.

Now, one hundred years after its beginning as the Board of Water Commissioners, the Willmar Municipal Utilities Commission still provides sufficient potable water for the area it serves; in addition it manages an intricate electrical system which has just purchased a 69,000



volt line from United Power Association, to further reduce wheeling charges and make more power available if needed; it also operates two heating systems . . . the hot water system which has only recently been installed, and the old steam heat system for four customers. The Commission has tried to help them convert their heating plants to some other heating method, since the hot water system does not go into their area, and has now notified them that as of December 10, 1992, the steam heat system will be shut down completely. The hot water system has grown to meet the Commission's anticipation for this stage of its development, but further growth will be held in abeyance until current economic factors improve. ■

REPRISE

Growing from a Board which operated a single well to a City Commission which provides electric energy and water to its entire service area and heat to a growing clientele, Willmar's Municipal Utilities Commission now manages a \$12,000,000.00 plant, generating \$36,000,000 in annual revenues and has contributed many millions of dollars to the city's coffers "in lieu of taxes".

Foot and Willmar Lakes were Willmar's first source of water. These are now recreational waters which, only a few years ago, were seriously considered for the basis of a cooling system for the city's generating plant.

Since its inception the Commission has dared to pioneer, to consider new ideas . . . and it still does today. It has received international recognition for its role in pioneering district heating with hot water, and has been the recipient of a number of other awards in fields related to its purpose.

Willmar, itself, has grown from one log store to a community which is twelfth in retail sales in the State of Minnesota. Its population has risen from less than fifty people living here in 1870 to more than 18,000 in 1991. Such growth created extraordinary and challenging demands if the community was to be satisfactorily served.

While it does have a professional staff and management, the major decisions are taken today, as they have been for the past century, by a group of citizens who give their time to the community.

The Commission operates within a framework in which it makes decisions which may be vetoed by the City Council, with its broader responsibilities. Willmar Municipal Utilities Commission has, ever since the first Board of Water Commissioners was appointed, tried to work quietly in the background . . . to be remembered only when one of the systems has failed to function – the mark of a true utility!



COMMISSION EMPLOYEES – 1991

ADMINISTRATIVE AND SUPERVISORY

C. Ted Nelson – *General Manager*
 Michael Nitchals – *Assistant General Manager/Controller*
 Barton Murphy – *Superintendent Water & Heating*
 Wesley Hompe – *Staff Engineer*
 Ronald McLouth – *Supervisor Power Production*
 Donald Gartner – *Assistant Supervisor Power Production*
 Daniel Iverson – *Supervisor Electric Distribution*
 Larry Heinen – *Systems Manager/Customer Service Supervisor*
 John Brinkman – *Purchasing & Stores Agent*
 Teresita Stoffel – *Accountant*
 Jeffery Kimpling – *Transmission/Distribution Coordinator*
 William Schindele – *Safety Director/Operations Assistant*

CLERICAL AND SUPPORT STAFF

William Hawkinson – *Draftsperson/CADD Operator*
 Beth Mattheisen – *Administrative Secretary*
 Nancy Lohn – *Secretary/Receptionist*
 Gwen Lipinski – *Customer Service Representative*
 Jean Berghuis – *Accounting Clerk*
 Joan Smerling – *Customer Service Coordinator*
 Lois Nelson – *Customer Service Representative/Collector*
 Charlotte Wall – *Programmer*
 Sara Nielsen – *Programmer/Analyst*

POWER PRODUCTION DEPARTMENT

Kenneth Nash – *Operations Foreman*
 Edward Leason – *Maintenance Foreman*
 Donald Bruhn – *Operator*
 Jon Owen – *Operator*
 Gerald Reding – *Operator*
 Ricky Baker – *Operator*
 John Prairie – *Relief Operator/Maintenance*
 Odean Iverson – *Relief Operator/Maintenance*
 Craig Hanson – *Relief Fireman/Maintenance*

POWER PRODUCTION DEPARTMENT Continued

Robert Travis – *Relief Fireman/Maintenance*
 Charles Nelson – *Fireman*
 Randy Edberg – *Fireman*
 Michael Berg – *Fireman*
 Richard Barber – *Fireman*
 Paul Lundgren – *Coal Handler/Maintenance Helper*
 Orrian Syverson – *Janitor*

LINE DISTRIBUTION DEPARTMENT






Dennis Nesges – *General Foreman*
 Richard Maxfield – *Lineman-In-Charge*
 Michael Sasse – *Lineman-In-Charge*
 Brian Peters – *Lineman-In-Charge*
 Michael Sanchez – *Lineman*
 Maynard Derksen – *Lineman*
 Shane Sundby – *Lineman*
 Richard Thynes – *Lineman*

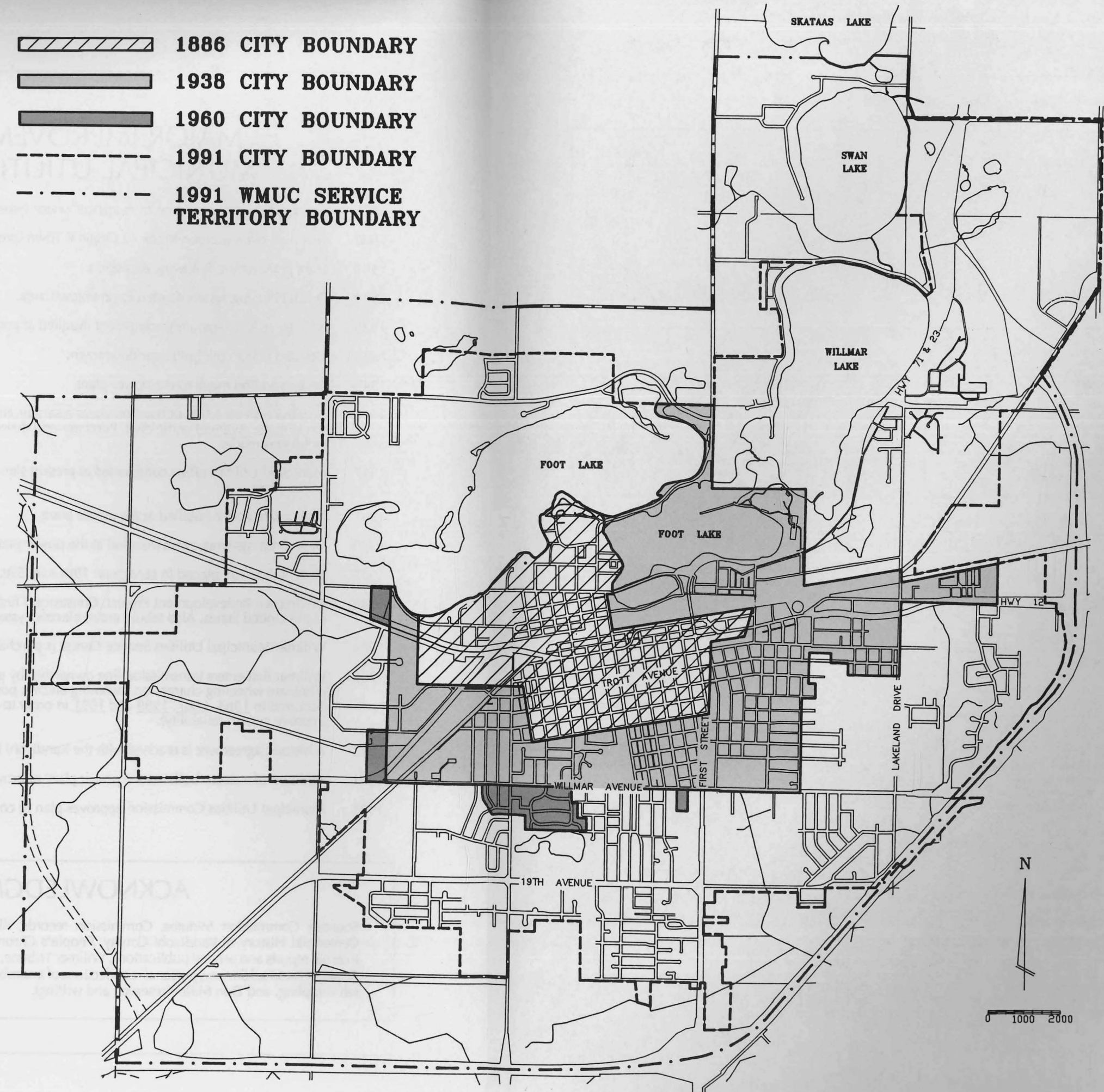
WATER/METER/HEATING DEPARTMENT

Lyle Stai – *Water/Heating Foreman*
 Richard Fader – *Meter Foreman*
 Gary Nelson – *Lead Heating Plant Mechanic*
 Joel Braegelman – *Lead Water Works Operator*
 Anthony Van Eps – *Lead Meter Reader*
 Gary Faber – *Lead Electric Meter Mechanic*
 Gary Krueger – *Electric Meter Mechanic*
 Glen Lotthammer – *Water Works Operator*
 Scott Shultz – *Water Meter Mechanic*
 Dale Segler – *Meter Reader*
 Jeff Behm – *Meter Reader*

GENERAL

Steven Wearda – *Stock Clerk*
 Joel Ruter – *Utilityman*

-  1886 CITY BOUNDARY
-  1938 CITY BOUNDARY
-  1960 CITY BOUNDARY
-  1991 CITY BOUNDARY
-  1991 WMUC SERVICE TERRITORY BOUNDARY



MAJOR IMPROVEMENTS TO MUNICIPAL UTILITIES SYSTEM

- 1891 Construction and operation of municipal water system begun.
- 1895 First light plant built on Block 42 Original Town (present First American Bank parking lot).
- 1901 Light plant rebuilt following explosion.
- 1914 District heating system formed in downtown area.
- 1925 New electrical generating equipment installed at present power plant site (Block 20).
- 1934 Elevated water tank built near downtown.
- 1949 Major addition made to the power plant.
- 1956 Construction on 3,000,000 gallon water reservoir and 300,000 gallon elevated storage tank (on Willmar Avenue) completed. Purchase and development of Southwest Wellfield (Swansson Field) was made.
- 1957 Municipal Utilities office constructed at present site. Also, another addition made to the power plant.
- 1961 New steam boiler installed at the power plant.
- 1970 New turbin generator unit installed at the power plant.
- 1975 South substation placed in service on 19th Ave. SW.
- 1982 Downtown Redevelopment Project. Constructed first modern hot water district heating system in the United States. Also rebuilt entire electric system in downtown area.
- 1984 Willmar Municipal Utilities Service Center is purchased from MnDot and renovated.
- 1985 Willmar first enters transmission line ownership by purchasing a 230,000 volt line in order to eliminate wheeling charges on incoming electric power. (Other transmission line projects occurred in 1984, 1987, 1989 and 1991 in order to complete a "loop" of the city and thereby improve system reliability).
- 1990 A historic agreement is reached with the Kandiyohi Electric Coop on electric service territory.
- 1991 Addition of a steam boiler at the power plant to provide energy to the district heating system.
- 1991 Municipal Utilities Commission approves plan to construct a Water Purification Plant in Willmar.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Sources: Commission Minutes, Commission records, Illustrated History of Kandiyohi County, Centennial History of Kandiyohi County, People's Chronology, Twentieth Century, Commission internal reports and general publications, Willmar Tribune, Willmar Republican-Gazette, Kandiyohi County Historical Society, personal recollections of a number of individuals, J. Michael Photography, Jeff Kimpling, and Don Miller (research and writing).



Willmar

Municipal Utilities