

Steam Heat Firm in Bloomsburg Petitioning to Halt Service June 1

There apparently will be few objections raised when a hearing is held shortly on the Bloomsburg Heating Co. petition to the Public Utilities Commission to discontinue central heating as of June 1.

Announcement of its petition to discontinue service to its 200 remaining customers has resulted in great activity on the part of dealers in electric, oil and gas heating equipment. The Pennsylvania Power and Light Co. opened its model electric home at the Bloomsburg Fair ground last weekend to boost that type of heat.

The local heating company, owned for 15 years by W. Clair Hidlay, had more than 300 buildings on its steam lines earlier in its history. Rising costs of fuel and operation, plus the fact some of its lines need replacing, brought about Hidlay's decision.

Started In 1885

The firm had its start in 1885 when it was organized as the Bloomsburg Steam and Electric Co. The original idea had been to produce electricity for Bloomsburg and to make use of the "waste steam" for heating a few buildings near the plant.

Those who organized the company had no idea how popular the idea of automatic heat would be. Being able to heat a building without carrying wood or coal to stoves and furnaces was unheard of in those days.

Housewives were thrilled at the idea of "clean heat" and no dust from ashes. Husbands were happy to get out of shoveling coal and taking out ashes.

The immediate result was that far more people applied for the heating contracts than could be serviced with the waste steam. As an early officer commented, "the tail wagged the dog."

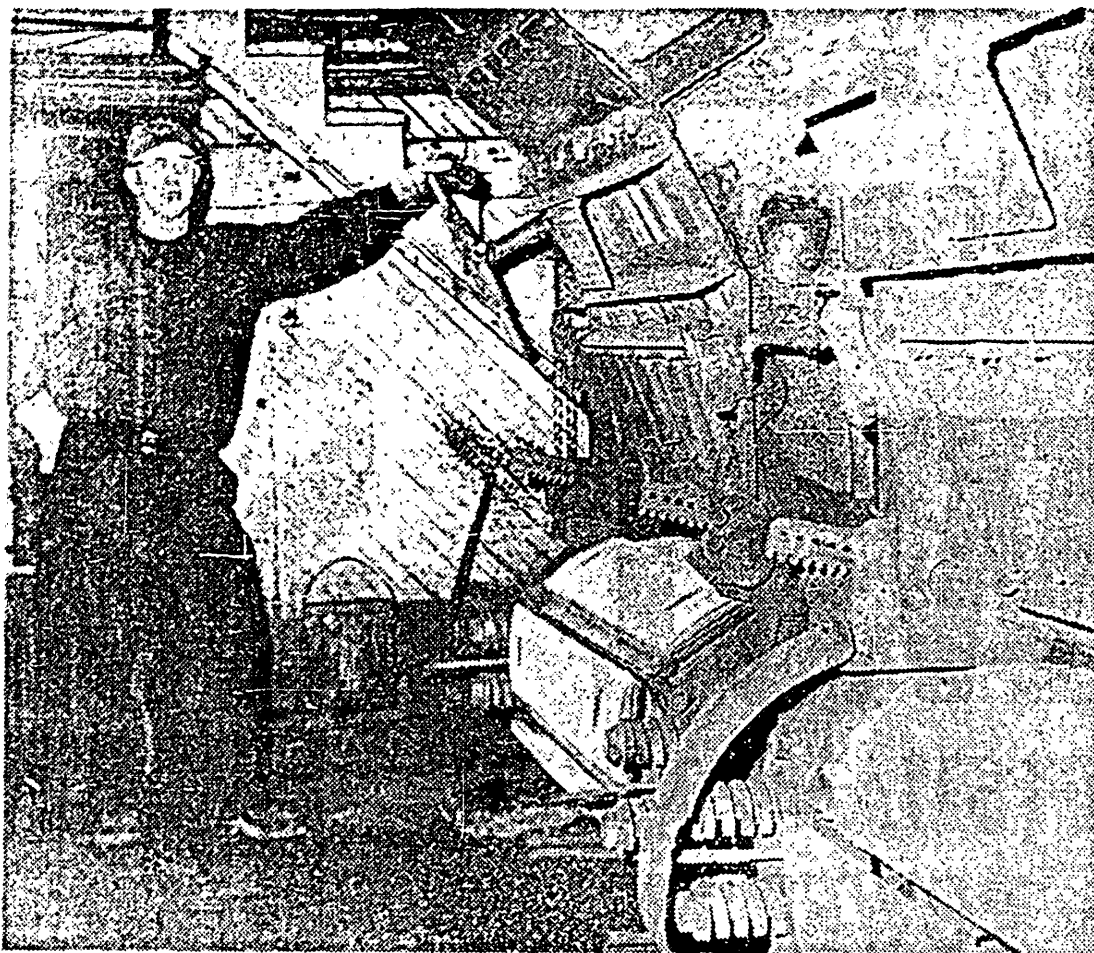
Big boilers — big even by today's standards — were put into use. Fuel was needed in giant quantities and the Susquehanna River provided the answer.

Dredging Profitable

In those days, so much coal was lost when it was washed in the breakers of the upriver Wyoming Valley mining section that dredging for river coal was a practical business. The heating firm went into the dredging on a big scale and they realized about 40,000 tons of small size coal per year. Almost that much was needed.

Merl Kline, a well known baseball player of the region in earlier years and an employe of the heating company for the past 26 years, recalls how wagons filled with coal used to line up at the heating building when he was a young boy. He said they drove the wagons right into the building and the coal was shoveled directly into the big furnaces.

Later, trucks replaced the



Merl Kline of Bloomsburg, an employe of the Bloomsburg Heating Co. for 26 years, is shown tending coal-fired boilers at the plant. The company has petitioned the Public Utilities Commission to discontinue operations June 1.

horses and wagons and then automatic feeders did away with the hand-shoveling.

As mine breaker equipment improved, less and less coal found its way into the river and the dredging returns fell off badly. It became necessary to buy the fuel and profits shrunk.

Four years ago, two oil-fired boilers were installed. Maintenance of the 25 city blocks of steam lines also had been costly. The heating company each

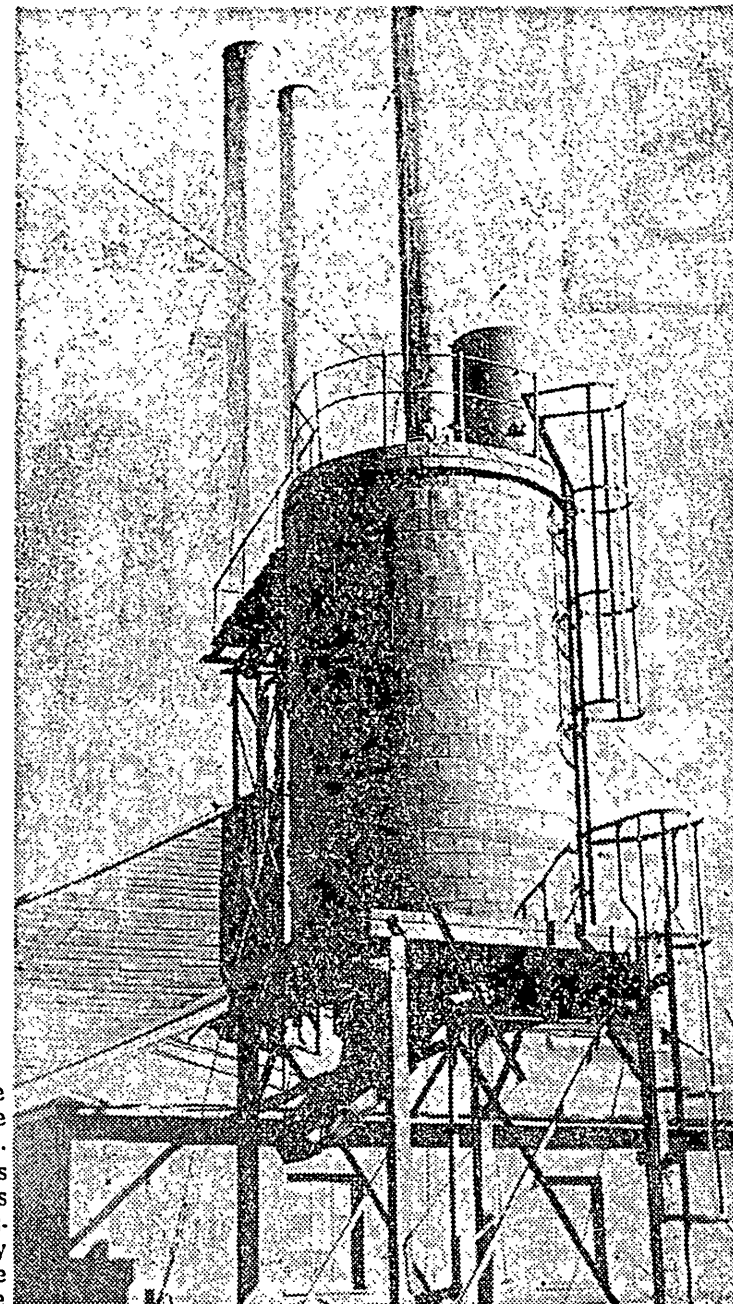
year has provided heat from the day after Labor Day until June 1. Occasional unseasonal cool periods between those dates caused some people to replace their company heat with automatic systems of their own. The number of customers shrunk and costs continued to rise. The decision to discontinue followed.

Hidlay has been aiding his seven employes in lining up in other positions and has been

successful in that. He said he would be glad to sell the large plant but has found no takers.

Among the many buildings which had the central heat lines and now will get its own system is the Columbia County Courthouse. County officials are finding the cost of installing the county's own system will be high.

As one official said, "We didn't realize how good we had it in this matter of heat."



The company's buildings and stacks are landmarks on W. 6th Street in Bloomsburg. The firm has been providing central heating for customers in downtown Bloomsburg for 83 years.

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