

1920

the nineteen twenties - the early years

After the First world War there was a public perception in New Brunswick that light and power were necessities of life and were therefore the responsibility of the government. The government of Premier Walter E. Foster

also recognized the important role that electricity would play in the economic development of the province. It enacted the New Brunswick Electric Power Act on April 24, 1920, which established The New

Brunswick Electric Power Commission. The original Commission consisted of the Honourable C.W. Robinson, chairman; C.O. Foss, commissioner and chief engineer; and Reid McManus,



*C.O. Foss,
commissioner
and chief
engineer, 1920*



*The Commissioner's head office,
Saint John, 1927 to 1948*

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commissioner and secretary.

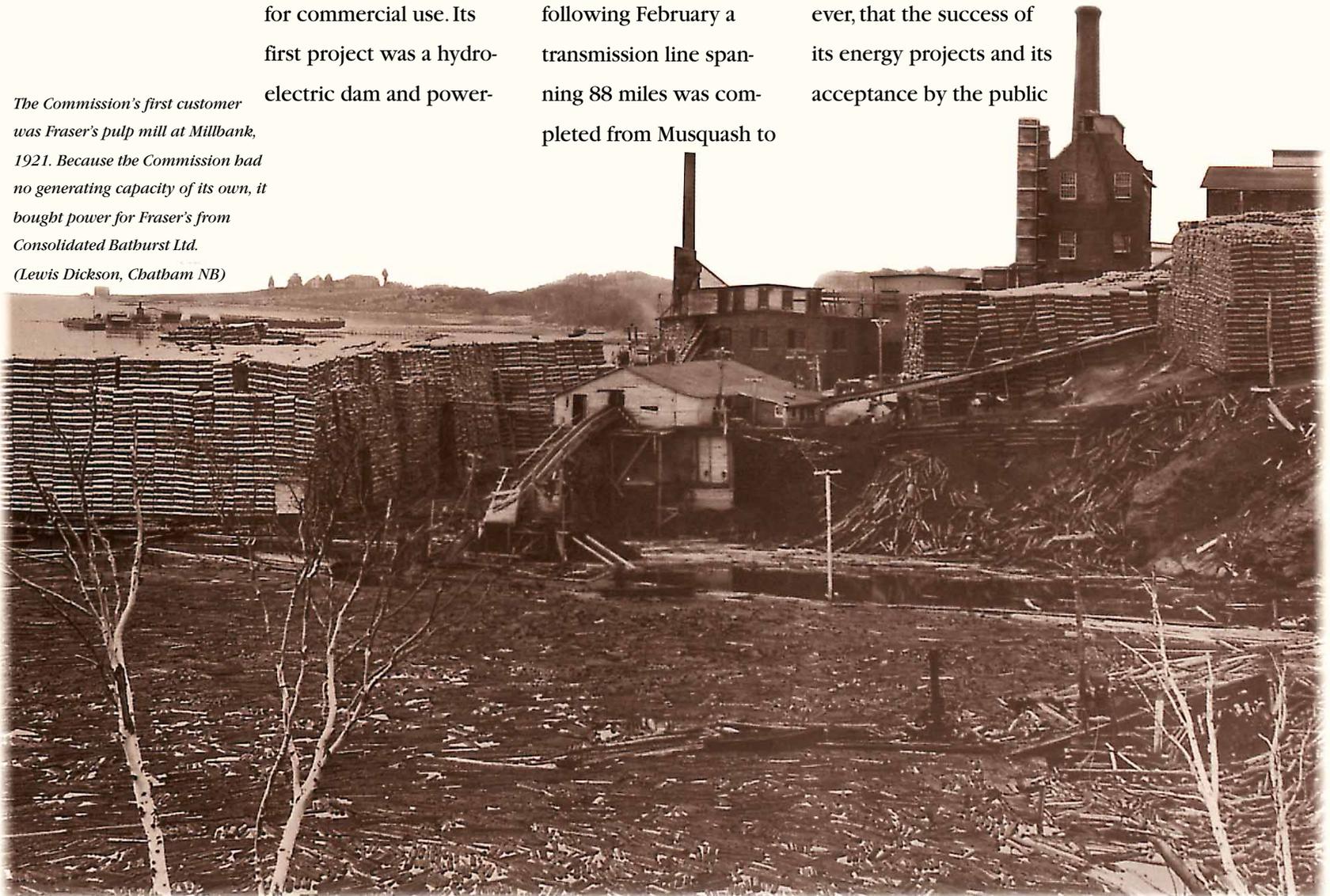
The Commission immediately began formulating plans to generate electrical energy for commercial use. Its first project was a hydro-electric dam and power-

house on the Musquash River. By the spring of 1922 the contract was completed on schedule at a cost of \$2 million. The following February a transmission line spanning 88 miles was completed from Musquash to

Fairville and then to Moncton, supplying power to Moncton, Sussex and Saint John.

The Commission would soon learn, however, that the success of its energy projects and its acceptance by the public

The Commission's first customer was Fraser's pulp mill at Millbank, 1921. Because the Commission had no generating capacity of its own, it bought power for Fraser's from Consolidated Batburst Ltd. (Lewis Dickson, Chatham NB)



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was by no means assured. Following the completion of the Musquash dam, the Commission began to develop plans for a plant at Grand Falls. Although it was considered the best hydro site on the Saint John River, there was

considerable debate over whether public or private interest should develop the falls. It appeared that development was going to proceed under Commission guidance but problems at Musquash in the spring of 1923 derailed

their plans. The earthfilled dam, unable to withstand the combination of heavy rains and melting snow, gave way. The resulting property damage, the loss of generating capacity, and the loss of public confidence threatened the



Line crew in Norton, 1921

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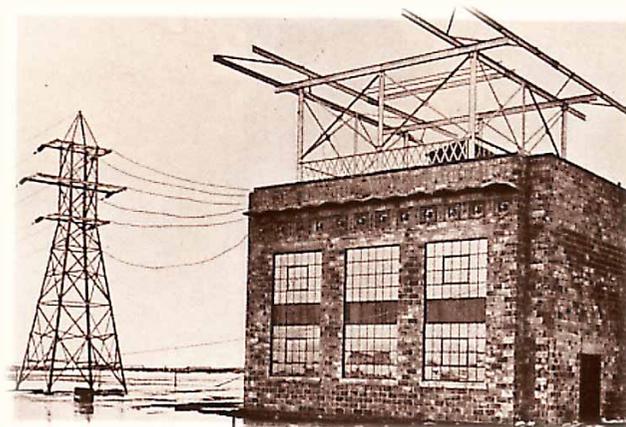
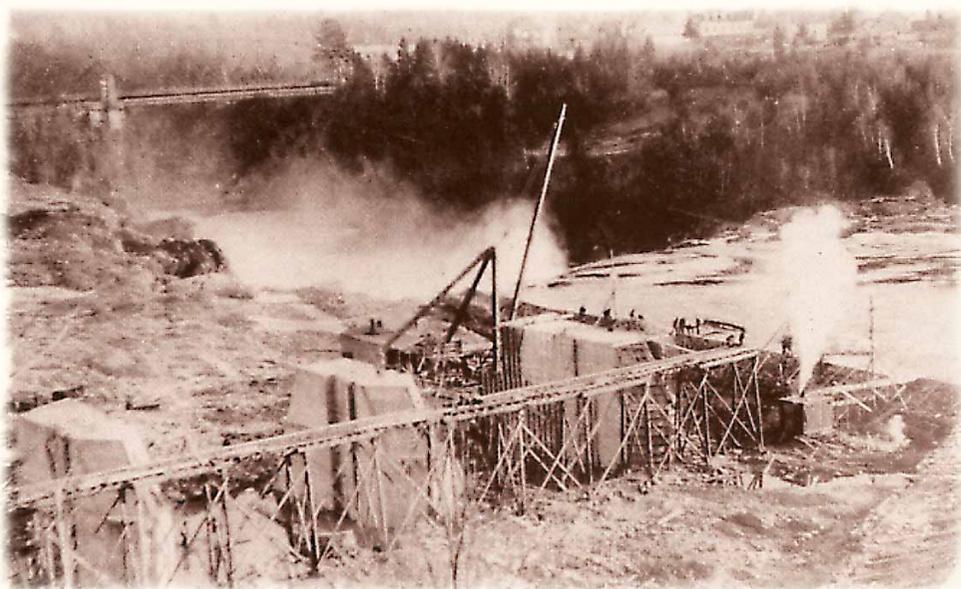
very survival of the fledgling Commission. Subsequently, the Saint John River Power Company, a subsidiary of the International Paper Company, was given the rights to develop the

generating station at Grand Falls and in 1930 the plant was officially opened.

Fortunately for the Commission, the accident did little to dampen the public's demand for

electricity. Most industries were seeking to modernize their operations and required reliable service while larger urban areas needed large blocks of power. The opportunity to develop electrical

Constructing the Grand Falls generating station, 1926



Cranston Avenue, Saint John, the Commission's first substation, 1921

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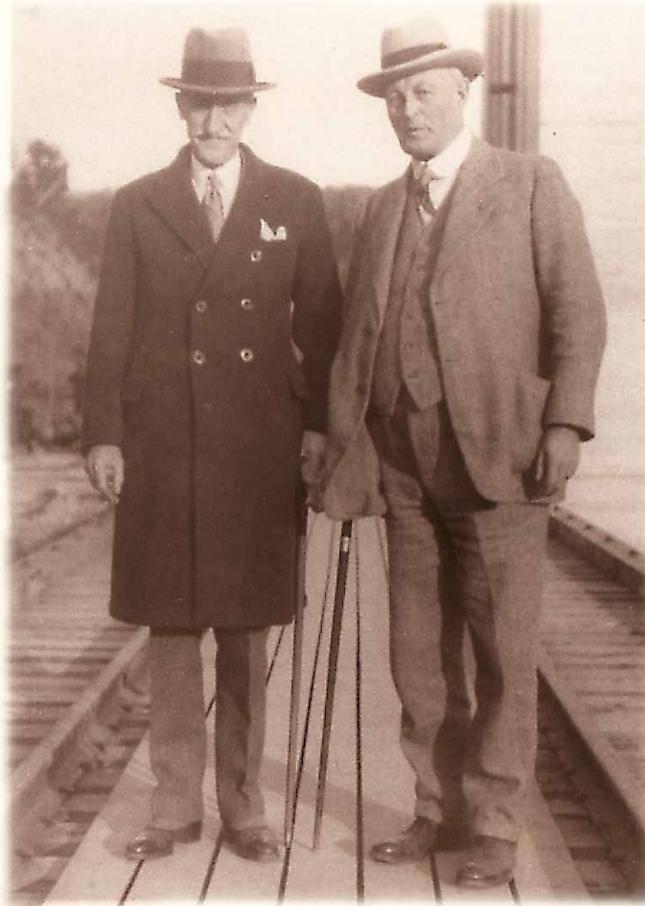
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generating and distribution systems to meet this demand did much to salvage the Commission's credibility.

The Commission could not fill all of these requirements immediately. In some municipali-

ties, industries bought blocks of power from private generating stations. There was even cooperation between municipal governments and private industry to build and maintain generating plants. During

the 1920s the spread of electrification was largely an urban phenomenon. Rural electrification was not economically feasible as demand was low and the capital cost of stringing lines was prohibitive.



*Lord Willingdon,
Governor General of Canada (left)
and Premier J. B. M. Baxter at the
Grand Falls opening, 1930*