

Pre 1920

in the beginning - electricity comes to New Brunswick

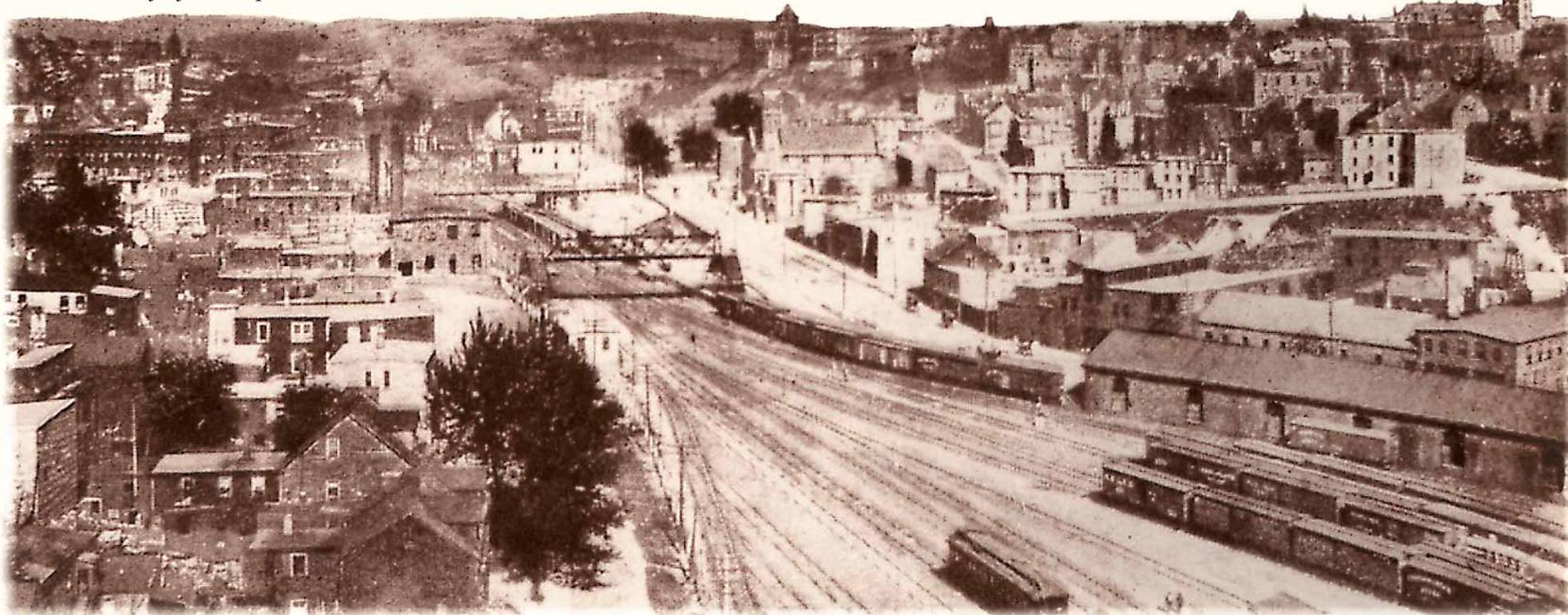
On the afternoon of September 4, 1882, Thomas Edison turned a switch at the Pearl Street generating station in New York City and energized the world's first large scale electrical distribution system. The Edison system operated at about 110 volts direct current on a two wire plan and it provided enough energy for 800 lights. Few could

foresee the immense social and economic impact that Edison's new distribution system was to have on the industrialized world.

Private interests in New Brunswick were not long in realizing the potential of this new and revolutionary technology. Less than two years after Edison turned the switch in New York, the city of

Saint John became the first place in New Brunswick to have commercially available electric power. In 1884, the Saint John Electric Light Company built a plant on Paradise Row and began producing and distributing electricity. Two years later, the Saint John Gas & Light Company bought the Saint John Electric Light Company and

Bird's-eye view of Saint John - New Brunswick's first generating station shown to the left of the overpass



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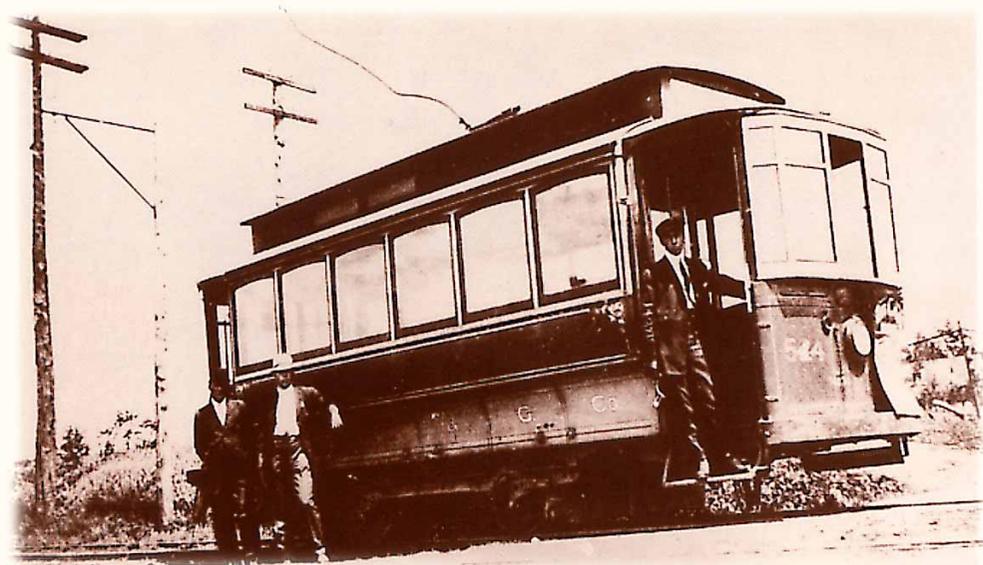
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became the sole distributor of gas and electricity in the city. This monopoly lasted until 1890 when the New Brunswick Electric Company began producing power in its new plant on Princess Street and the Eastern Electric Company opened its new facility on Water Street.

Electricity was not used exclusively for lighting streets and houses in Saint

John. The 1890s also ushered in the era of electric-powered public transit systems. The Consolidated Electric Company, incorporated in 1892, announced plans to electrify and extend the existing horsepowered street railway system in Saint John. Six electrified horse cars were purchased in Boston and poles and wires were erected. The

system required more electricity than the existing plants could supply so a new powerhouse with a 133 horsepower generator was constructed on the corner of Union and Dock Streets. The first electric trolley cars appeared on the streets of Saint John on March 31, 1893. The streetcars proved to be a viable public transportation system providing



Electric trolley car

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reliable service to citizens of the port city for the next 55 years.

By 1917, the different Saint John electric companies had merged and were renamed the New Brunswick Power Company. The company modified and upgraded the original plants from time to time but eventually abandoned

them for more modern facilities. The Dock Street plant was an exception. It expanded as new equipment was added to meet growing requirements. The New Brunswick Electric Power Commission purchased the assets of the New Brunswick Power Company in 1948 and continued to operate

the Dock Street plant until August 23, 1976.

The Moncton Gas, Light and Water Company supplied coal gas to the city of Moncton in the early 1880s. In 1886, the company ventured into the electrical generation business with the installation of a 2000 candle-power dynamo in the J.C.



Employees of the Moncton Gas, Light and Water Co., circa 1917

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Harris sugar refinery. This plant provided arc lighting for the refinery as well as electricity to nearby churches and stores. The demand for electricity became so great, however, that a new plant with a 1000 light dynamo was built on Mechanic Street in 1887. The development of locally generated power was also spurred

on by the requirements of the railroad which was establishing itself as a major industry in Moncton.

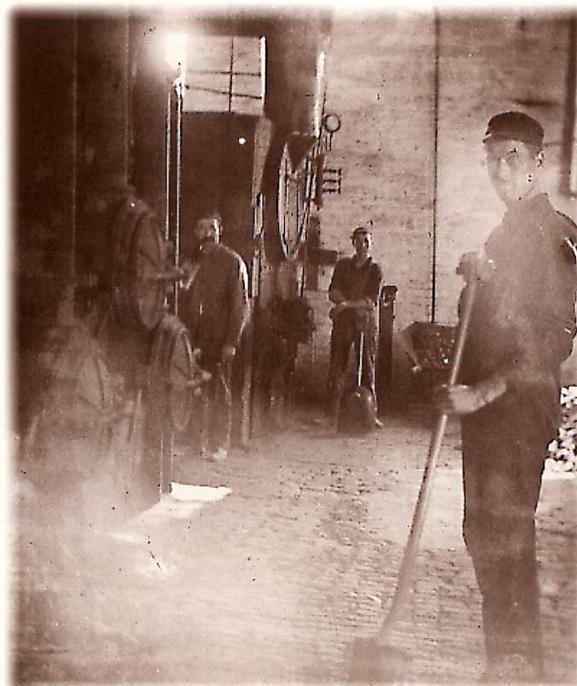
During the late 1880s, there was brisk competition between two companies in Fredericton to satisfy the increasing demand for electricity.

The Fredericton Electric Light Company supplied

the first commercially available electricity in the city on October 29, 1887.

Using the Waterhouse Arc System, they provided electric lights for the skating and curling rinks, seven businesses, and even a lamp at the gate of A.F. Randolph's residence on Regent Street.

The Fredericton Gas Company had been



Interior of the Fredericton Gas Company's Shore Street plant, 1903 (P.A.N.B. P19-100)

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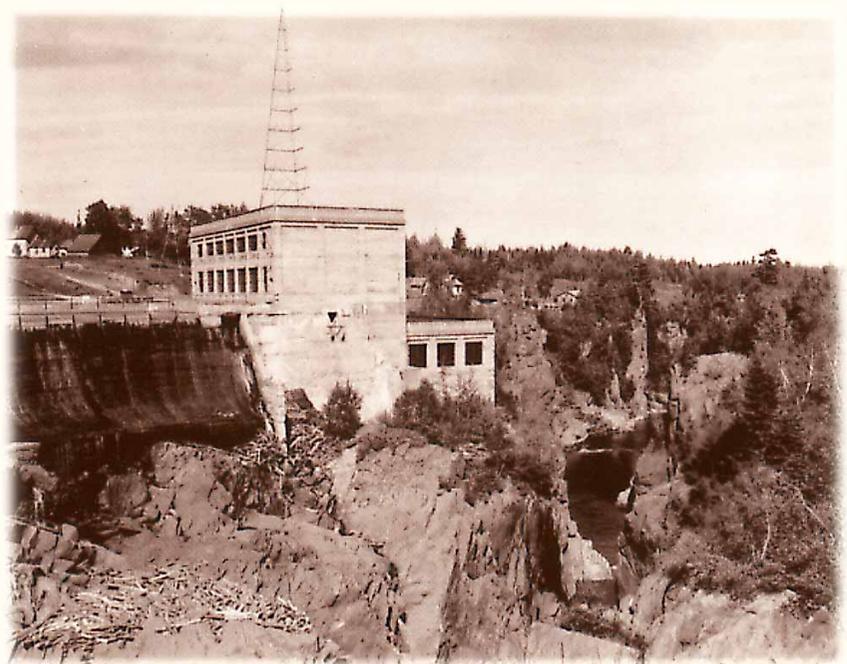
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providing coal gas for lighting businesses, homes and street lamps from their Shore Street plant since 1850. The company realized that electric lighting was going to involve tough competition and began producing electricity in their gas plant in 1888. City council granted the Fredericton Electric Light Company permission to install poles

on the south side of Queen Street while the Fredericton Gas Company was granted permission to set poles on the north side of Queen Street. In addition, the telephone company already had poles in place along the street. This unsightly maze of poles and wires caused a public outcry. In 1889, the two companies merged and their equipment was

installed in a building at 120 Carleton Street. Today this building houses City Sales & Service Ltd., the Peugeot dealership.

The rapid spread of electrification in New Brunswick was not confined to the cities. However, the development of generation facilities in smaller jurisdictions was irregular. The town of Woodstock



Nepisiguit Falls hydro plant, Consolidated Bathurst Ltd., 1920

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had two small electric light companies by the 1880s which operated in conjunction with the Small & Fisher and Connell Brothers iron foundries. Both were later superseded by the Woodstock Electric Railway Light and Power Company which built a dam and a powerhouse on the Meduxnekeag River in 1905-1906. In July

1906 the company began distributing hydro-generated power to homes and businesses in the town.

In Campbellton, the town council assumed responsibility for the generation and distribution of electricity. A 50 kilowatt generator was installed on Prince William Street in 1898 and, as an inducement to

prospective customers, the town undertook to do all open wiring free. The program was very popular making it necessary for a 100 kilowatt unit to be installed by 1902 and another plant to be added in 1911. In 1942, the town council entered into an agreement with the Lower St. Lawrence Power Company to purchase from their hydro

*Connell Bros. Thermal plant,
Woodstock, 1905*



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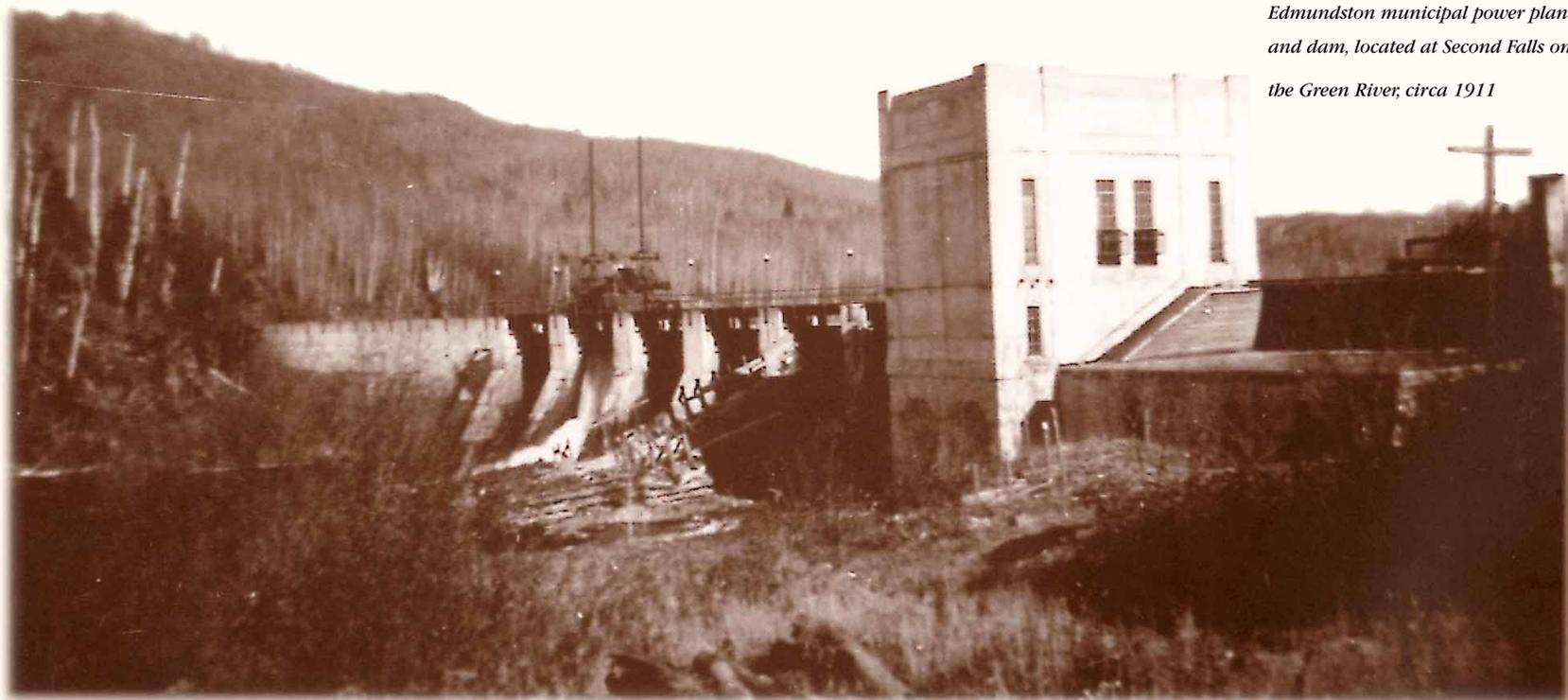
development at Métis Quebec. The town continued to operate its own electric light department until December 31, 1977, when all of the assets of the municipal system were purchased by The New Brunswick Electric Power Commission.

The Sussex Electric Light Company, organized in 1896, installed a

plant in a building on Church Avenue. The plant began producing electricity in November of that year but had few customers. Later, the plant was sold to the Sussex Manufacturing Company which supplied the town with electrical energy until 1923.

The rush to acquire electrification was influ-

enced by a number of different factors. In some towns it was achieved with relative ease while other towns had to wait. Loggieville and Newcastle had electricity in 1912 because of the generation possibilities created by factories in both towns, and Grand Falls had electricity by 1913 because of the development of the



Edmundston municipal power plant and dam, located at Second Falls on the Green River, circa 1911

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Aroostook Falls by American interests. The village of McAdam did not have electricity for its residents until 1923 when the local light commission purchased surplus power from the Canadian Pacific Railway shops.

By 1918, approximately 20 organizations were in the business of producing power in the province.

They were located in the larger urban centres and there were no standards to govern rates or services. In Saint John, for example, the price paid by a home-owner ranged from a low of 7.5 cents per kilowatt-hour to a high of 15 cents depending upon location and the amount of power consumed.

Following the First World

War, the development of hydroelectric power became a major policy initiative of the government. Inexpensive electricity promised to raise the quality of life for the average citizen and pave the way for industrial development and prosperity in a province where fortunes had been declining for almost 50 years.



*Pulp and paper company power plan, St. George, circa 1905
(National Archives of Canada, PA 41747)*

bio

Clifford W. Robinson

Clifford Robinson's success in law, business and public service was undoubtedly due to his quiet nature. A local historian has noted that "although he had a long career in public life, he often appeared to be a reluctant participant, sought after by others because he was a popular and credible candidate". It was precisely these qualities that made him the right man to guide

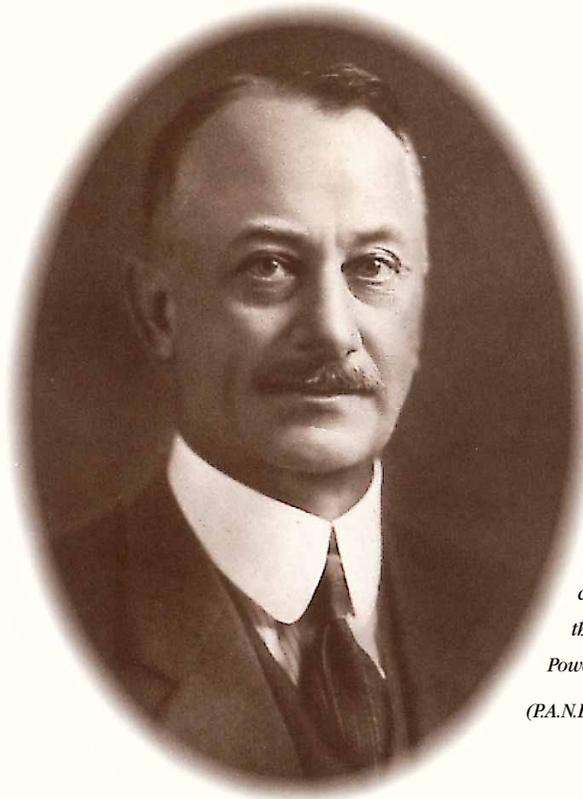
the Commission after its inception. A native of Moncton, Robinson was educated at Mount Allison University and was called to the bar in 1893. Robinson was active in Moncton civic politics before he won election by acclamation to the New Brunswick legislature in 1897. In a distinguished career in provincial affairs,

Robinson was Speaker of the House, a member of the Executive Council, Provincial Secretary and Attorney General. He succeeded William Pugsley as premier on May 31, 1907, in the 'year of the three premiers'. However, his tenure as premier lasted little more than one year as the Liberal

Party was defeated in the next provincial election. Robinson remained Leader of the Opposition until 1910 when he retired from politics. His retirement did not last long and, following the provincial election of 1917, he served as the minister of lands and mines before being called to the Senate. Robinson's background

in business and government made him the natural choice as the first chairman of The New Brunswick Electric Power Commission. He was instrumental in establishing the new utility and in resolving land and waterway disputes with private interests.

Clifford Robinson was appointed to the Senate on May 5, 1924. He died in Montreal in 1944.



C.W. Robinson,
chairman of
the New Brunswick Electric
Power Commission, 1920
(P.A.N.B., P37-119)