

History Of Ocala Utilities

(EDITOR'S NOTE — This is the fourth in a series on the Ocala's electrical system, its uses, abuses, costs, revenues and history.)

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IT MIGHT BE WELL AT THIS TIME to review the history of Ocala's municipally-owned electric utility, and show its contribution to the growth of the city, both in terms of supplying industry and homeowners alike with power requirements, as well as its value in keeping ad valorem taxes at a reasonable level.

The actual beginnings of Ocala's electrical distribution system is shrouded in mystery, although hours of digging into old city council minutes, and talking with several old-timers who worked for, or recalled the early utility, uncovered many salient facts.

Apparently some time before 1910 a local person or firm was persuaded to hook up a generator to a few street lights, and possibly some homes, and provide light.

ACCORDING TO LLOYD LUTZ, a former electric light plant employe and one-time superintendent, the first city generating plant was set up before 1910 and was in an old ice plant somewhere in the vicinity of Magnolia Street north of the railroad tracks.

Lutz said this was a direct current generator, supplying a few homes and street lights.

Around 1910 General Electric put in a 2,300 volt alternating current generating plant run by steam, and distribution system, using carbon arc lights on the streets downtown. The installation was owned and operated by Ocala, and it was operated by L. B. McKenzie, who later became superintendent.

In 1915, or 1916, the city built a new plant, on Osceola at Fourth Street and installed two generators with a Skinner uniflow steam engine, along with a diesel engine which caused so many problems it was later dispensed with and finally sold or sent to Cuba.

After this one of the old engines from the first plant was moved down and placed in service at this first Ocala Light Plant.

In 1921 or 1922 a De Laval turbine engine was installed, said Lutz, and as the years passed the load exceeded the rate of what the steam turbine could turn out. By this time people had begun to use electric ranges in greater numbers as well as other electrical appliances, and electrical use was becoming more commonplace.

LUTZ SAID THAT IN ABOUT 1923 the city contracted with R. C. Camp, who had a 5,000 KW plant on the Withlacoochee River run by hydro, to buy Camp's surplus power.

A substation was installed by the Ocala electric plant and a power line run in from Inglis to three 250 KVA transformers.

Lutz said his recollection is that this Camp generating plant was bought out by Florida Power Corporation. The contract for the surplus power was continued, and the old steam plant on Osceola discontinued operations.

Most of the recollections of Lutz are born out in the sketchy records at city hall, although one not mentioned was the city buying up everything belonging to the Pennsylvania Florida Development Company in January, 1928, which included transmission facilities, transformers, fuse boxes and easement privileges.

THIS FACILITY, IN THE HIGHLANDS, supplied homes there. The area had not yet been annexed to the city. Part of the deal was that the city could charge a premium one cent per kilowatt more from Highland's

customers than it was charging Ocala customers.

Although Lutz mentions a contract with Camp sometime in 1923, one of the first contracts referred to in council minutes was in a resolution by council to accept a proposition by Florida Power Corp., and it was to be executed when council had obtained a transformer site.

This resolution was given impetus by a January 1923 report in which council was given a rundown on the cost of power at the Ocala Light Plant, and later on Feb. 5 in comparison a Florida Power report said Ocala could save \$3,500 annually buying its power from FPC.

Even before this, in October, 1922, council had moved to upgrade the Ocala Light Plant because of advice that the plant was dangerously near its top capacity at peak loads. A study by a hired engineer revealed that new machinery to bring increase the capacity would cost an estimated \$40,000, and council thereupon called a special election to authorize \$75,000 for new machinery.

BEFORE THIS COULD TAKE PLACE, however, it was discovered that the plant meters were all wrong and when they were corrected it was found the plant was nowhere near its rated capacity. The election was called off.

The following year, though, council was told the machinery was all too old and needed replacing, although one generator had been in service since 1920, at a cost of \$11,300, with a 400 to 600 KWH rating.

Five years later the FPC contract was renewed for five years. This one showed that council apparently was anxious to get it on paper because it was signed in August, 1927, and was not due until May 1948.

IT LISTED THE BUYING PRICE FOR POWER as the first 25,000 KWH for three cents, the next 50,000 for two cents, the next 100,000 for 1.75 cents, the next 200,000 for 1.65 cents, and all over 375,000 KWH at 1.5 cents. In addition, if the bill was paid within 10 days of billing, it was discounted by 10 per cent. A minimum of 175,000 KWH hours usage was demanded.

In this contract, ice plants received special rates ranging from four cents to 1.5 cents for a minimum of 4,000 KWH to over 10,000 KWH.

Over these years, too, the municipal utility was returning dollars to the city, for it was making a profit.

Consider the rates charged in January 1922: The first 400 KWH at 10 cents per KWH; the next 50 KWH were at eight cents; all above 500 at seven cents. These prices are nearly double today's rates.

In 1935 an agreement was made with the federal government to supply power to the Cross Florida Ship Canal and with about 3,000 workers at Camp Franklin D. Roosevelt on the outskirts of Ocala, power was to be supplied at the rate of 1.5 cents per KWH.

Through these years, many organizations, churches and other groups were getting free lights. Apparently a letter to a council asking for free lights did the trick.

And as the 1930's progressed Ocala's growth could be traced by the KWH sold; the same has been true right up through the present day as Ocala's utility marks the growth and progress of the city in kilowatt hours for industry and residents, with large amounts returned to city coffers to offset taxes.

Constitution Week

(Photo by Roy Preen)

These members of the Ocala Chapter of the DAR view a window display at 17 S. Main St. that their club has set up in observance of Constitution Week. They are, from left, Mrs. George Zane, Mrs. Albert Abreu, regent, Mrs. R. H. Ferris, Mrs. L. N. Green and Mrs. C. D. Davis.

City Still Stuck With Utility Debts

Uncollected city utilities bills are still coming up, but not in the amounts that were indicated at the beginning of this year when city council attempted to write off nearly \$55,000 in bad debts caused by delinquent utility payments.

The council has two reports in its possession at the present time showing a total of \$17,710.06 through December of last year on bills that the City Utilities Department has been unable to collect.

"This is just some of our old dirty laundry catching up with us," Council President Jack Clark said about the most recent list of delinquent accounts.

"Steps have been taken and we have a man working three days a week just cutting off power to people who have delinquent accounts. I don't see how this can happen again under our new setup," he added.

City Finance Officer George Wenzel said all persons on the delinquent list had been notified of the status of their accounts, and definite steps had been taken within the city government to see that there is no repeat of the long list of delinquent utility payments.

A report from the city utilities collection office shows that a total of \$183.97 has been collected at the office on delinquent accounts that were turned over to Ocala attorney Aaron Goldman for collection through Sept. 8. Goldman, who gets a 31.35 per cent commission on all accounts assigned to him, received \$143.29 in commissions on these accounts.

Goldman also turned in a report and a check to the city this week for accounts he collected at his office totaling \$335.43. The city's share of this was \$376.93 and Goldman's commission was \$181.50.

Attorney's Expense Report Record Low

City Atty. Wallace Sturgis turned in a record low expense report for the month of August to the Ocala City Council this week, showing total expenses for the month of \$41.25.

The only item Sturgis listed for expenses during August was a trip to Jacksonville for the Florida League of Municipalities conference at a cost of \$41.25.

Health Department

Selling snowballs to raise money for needed school equipments is a worthy endeavor, but the sale must take place inside a screened enclosure. That's the word the Oakeress Elementary PTA got from the County Health Dept. So industrious PTA members plan a do-it-yourself project to screen in a patio at the school so that snowball sales can continue.

In order that the project can be started the Oakeress principal, this week, asked approval of the Marion County School Board to construct the concession stand on school

property. The board agreed to the screening.

Now that the school board has agreed to provide uniforms for the school's custodial employees, it has found that nobody is very anxious to do the laundry. Assistant Supt. Will Harrison told the board, at his meeting this week, that only one bid had been submitted for uniform service — Marion Laundry in Ocala. Harrison said other laundry services in the area apparently had no interest in bidding and the bid received from Marion Lau-