

Electricity brought a better way of life

History of local light and power

The first lighting plant was set up in Steinbach in 1903 at the Steinbach Flour Mills and A. A. Reimer, now 88 years of age and a resident of the Resthaven Home was the town's first electrician.

At first only the flour mill and the homes of the mill owners were connected but later some other businesses were electrified and some street lamps put up.

The plant, using the direct current system, was not big enough to extend power further than Reimer Avenue but another plant began looking after that area a few years later. In 1909, Friesen Machine Shop purchased a dynamo for their own use and also supplied power to the J. R. Friesen implement shop and John D. Goossen's general store.

At first the light plant consisted of a six horsepower motor and a set of batteries but then, in 1911, the plant was moved to a Main Street location and a larger, eight horsepower engine installed with batteries and a switchboard. Shares in this venture were sold to other businessmen at this time.

Around 1916, Friesen's found that the small engine was inadequate so they bought a 15 horsepower diesel plus a small auxiliary engine which helped to bear the load during the evenings. At this time the electricity cost 32 cents per K.W.H. The people had to come across with a small fortune for the light bill at the end of every month and didn't like it.

In 1924, Steinbach Flour Mills took over again. They had a 35 h.p. high-speed steam engine by then and provided electricity and even street lights at about 25 cents per K.W.H.

As time went on, this plant again proved to be too small to supply the amount of electricity required by the growing town. Lines were also proving to be too long for D.C. current and while the lights were right close to the generator, they became redder and dimmer as the distance from the power plant increased. Not that this was a fault of the plant, but direct current simply would not carry for any distance.

By 1935 the inadequacy of the system became so apparent that the town board decided to take the matter in hand. The Steinbach Flour Mills hesitated to guarantee the building of a plant such as would be required by the town be-



Bringing a hit and miss gas engine to Friesen's light plant, probably in 1911. This engine proved to be inadequate within five years and was replaced by a 15 h.p. diesel.

—photo by J. D. Barkma