

Light Years:

A Brief History of
Seattle City Light
and Public Power



Seattle City Light

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Seattle City Light

Lighting Up the West

Seattle City Light has been lighting up lives since 1910, but our roots go back to the very beginning of electricity. The light bulb was just seven-years-old in 1886 when the Seattle Electric Light Company launched the first incandescent lighting system west of the Rockies.

For the next 13 years, the direct current could be transmitted only short distances and Seattle was served by a variety of neighborhood electric companies. New, alternating-current technology soon made it possible to serve larger areas, and by 1900, the small, competing companies were consolidated into the Seattle Electric Company. Rates were 20 cents per kilowatt-hour- higher than Seattle's current residential rate.



1990 Seattle City Light completes top-to-bottom review of the utility aimed at improving productivity.

1991 Historic agreement on \$100 million program to mitigate environmental impact of hydro facilities on the Skagit River.



1992 Federal Energy Power Act begins the era of electric utility deregulation and reconstruction.



2000 Seattle City Light accelerated its conservation strategy, calling for doubling the conservation savings each year over the next decade. The Seattle City Council directed

the utility to meet the electrical needs with no net greenhouse gas emissions or harm to natural habitats.

2000/2001 Energy market manipulation and the second worst draught in City Light's history sent wholesale energy prices soaring.

1931 Ross fired by Seattle mayor, who is later recalled by Seattle voters, and Ross is reinstated.



1939 J.D. Ross dies.

1940 Bonneville Power Administration becomes responsible for marketing power from Grand Coulee Dam.

1947 Seattle City Light funds Skagit Hatchery to preserve salmon and steelhead runs on the river.

1951 Seattle City Light buys all Seattle properties of Puget Sound Power & Light. Seattle now has unified power system.



1967 Boundary Dam and Powerhouse begin operation.

1973 A major drought hits Washington, "Kill-a-Watt" campaign promotes conservation.

1976 "Energy 1990" study urges aggressive conservation to reduce energy growth 20 percent by 1990.

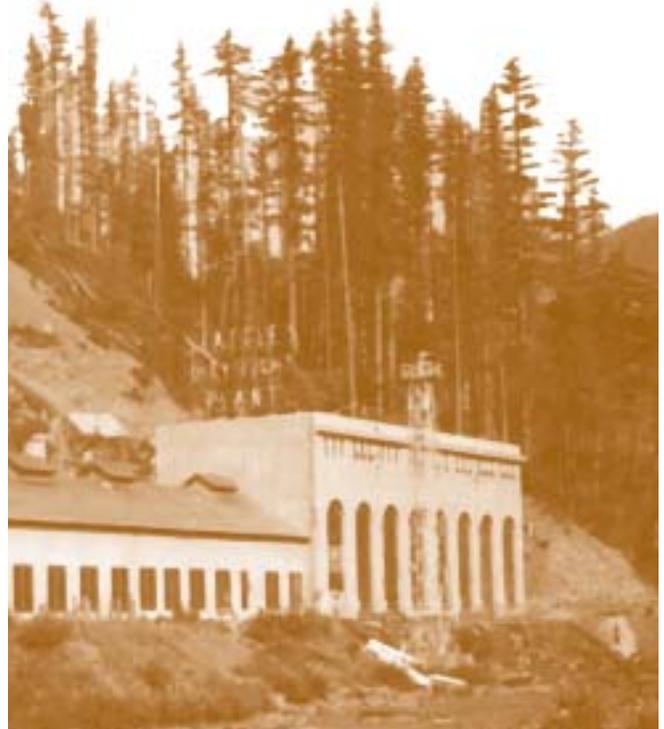
1984 Controversy over raising Ross Dam ends when British Columbia agrees to sell Seattle City Light an equivalent amount of power.

1988 Power from new Lucky Peak hydro facility in Idaho comes on line.

The Shape of The Future

In 1902, Seattle residents made an historic decision that would shape the future of power supply for the city: they approved a \$590,000 bond issue to develop a hydro-electric facility on the Cedar River. It was the beginning of public power in Seattle - and the nation's first municipally owned hydro project. Public and private systems would compete in the City until 1951.

Cedar Falls first generated power in 1905 under control of the City Water Department. The plant performed so well and demand for municipal power rose so dramatically, that the Seattle City Council soon created a separate lighting department. On April 1, 1910, Seattle City Light was born.



The Father of City Light

In 1911, the future of the new electric utility was found in the vision of its second superintendent, J.D.



Ross, often called the "Father of City Light." A self-taught engineer with boundless enthusiasm, Ross envisioned the day when the waters of the

Skagit River would be harnessed for Seattle by a series of three dams.

Ross worked tirelessly for years toward this goal before receiving the go-ahead from the federal government in 1918. Overcoming a host of problems - for example, the railroad first had to be built to get to the site - City Light dedicated the first dam in 1924. In the White House, President Coolidge pressed a gold key and the Gorge Dam generators began sending electricity to Seattle.



The Future: Repeating History

What about the future? Look for history to repeat itself. Count on the people of Seattle City Light for responsive customer service, low-cost, reliable electricity, and for environmental stewardship.

DATES

1886 Seattle has the first incandescent lighting system west of the Rockies.



1900 Many small neighborhood electric companies consolidated into the Seattle Electric Company.

1902 Seattle voters approve hydro facility on Cedar River.

1905 Cedar Falls begins generating power for Seattle's streetlights.



1910 New lighting department separated from Water Department - Seattle City Light is born.

1911 J.D. Ross, "The Father of Seattle City of Light," becomes second superintendent.

1918 Construction begins on Ross's dream - the Skagit Hydroelectric facility.



1924 The first of three Skagit dams begins generating power.

The 80s: Rate Stability And Diversity

Seattle has always enjoyed an abundance of power at some of the nation's lowest electrical rates. During the 80s, keeping rates stable and broadening our sources of supply became priorities.

Regional power contracts brought new power from British Columbia, the Columbia Basin Irrigation Districts and the Olympic Peninsula. In 1988, the new Lucky Peak hydro project in Idaho, producing about four percent of our load, came on line. Regional ventures such as these not only control costs, but also reduce our dependence on power purchased from the Bonneville Power Administration.

Environmental concerns have had a major impact on Seattle City Light operations. This was typified by an historic 1991 agreement for the federal relicensing of our Skagit River Hydroelectric Project. Following 14 years of studies and negotiations, Seattle City Light signed an agreement with state, federal, tribal and environmental groups for a \$100 million mitigation package. The mitigation measures will improve fisheries, wildlife, recreation, cultural resources and the visual environment near our Diablo, Gorge and Ross dams. We have a continuing commitment to meet both the environmental and energy needs of the Pacific Northwest.

Construction continued through three more decades to build the remainder of the dams. Diablo Dam was completed in 1936 and Ross Dam was completed in 1952. Although Seattle City Light has broadened and diversified its resources, these dams are still the heart of our water storage and generating facilities.

In 1951, Seattle voters approved another landmark in Seattle City Light's history - buy-out of the competitors' privately owned Seattle territory. Seattle at last had a unified public power system.



Go-Go Becomes Go-Slow

The '50s and '60s were a go-go era of modernization and expansion: more generating capacity at existing facilities, new substations and improvements to the power distribution system. The new Boundary Dam and powerhouse in Northeastern Washington began operation in 1967. In the late '60s and '70s, three factors began to chart new directions for Seattle City Light: unprecedented demand, environmental concern and drought.

A major drought hit the area in 1977 and again in the '80s. It seemed almost

overnight that conservation became a high-priority energy policy. With funding from the Bonneville Power Administration, Seattle City Light launched a series of programs that made the utility a national leader in conservation.

City Light provided free home-energy checks and financial incentives for installing energy-saving measures such as insulation and energy-efficient water heaters. Commercial and industrial conservation programs offered financial incentives for such measures as energy-efficient heating, lighting and air conditioning.

As the Pacific Northwest moved away from a period of energy surplus to energy

deficit, conservation was and continues to be Seattle City Light's first priority for developing new resources- with good reason. A kilowatt saved equaled (in some cases exceeded) a kilowatt generated. City Light's conservation accomplishments save ratepayers significant amounts of money representing expensive power that does not have to be purchased.



Hot water tank displays in the Seattle City Light Building lobby in March 1951.