



Greatly Enlarged Since the First Unit Was Built in 1931, the Municipal Utility Building is a City Landmark.

Irate Citizens Voted for Municipal Light Plant

By 1930 Blooming Prairie residents had reached the end of their patience. Years of putting up with the brand of inefficient, sporadic electrical service provided by the Interstate Power Company had frayed their tempers. Lights would dim and sometimes wink out for periods ranging from a few minutes to an hour or more.

The company fed electricity to the village through a single highline. Consequently, when a strong wind or ice storm lashed the area, consumers could count upon power failures. The highline would snap. Darkness would descend on the village if the failure occurred at night.

The editor of the *Blooming Prairie Times* in 1929 was Geraldine Rasmussen. She had purchased the newspaper that year and, in the course of rebuilding the publication, had met many difficult and aggravating problems. One of the worst, however, was having the electricity fail on press day.

Mrs. Rasmussen took up the cudgel and in a series of editorials blasted the power company for not providing better service.

Some people give the fiery woman editor credit for providing the spark that ignited an explosion of anger and, finally, action.

Possibly as a result of the editorials, Mayor Sam Hanson held a meeting early in the spring of 1930 to discuss possible steps to alleviate the power situation. Present at the meeting was H. E. Brown representing Fairbanks, Morse & Company. Brown was on familiar grounds for he had once played on a Blooming Prairie baseball team.

Brown sketched a proposal he said would remedy the power situation. "A municipal power plant costing

about \$75,000 will pay for itself in about 12 years," he said.

Brown's words fell on receptive ears. So impressed were several members of the village council that they journeyed down to the Iowa cities of Clarion and Emmetsburg to inspect their municipal light plants. They returned to Blooming Prairie with glowing accounts of the successful operations of those municipal plants.

"We'll tell you about it at a meeting late this summer," the councilmen promised.

A picnic meeting was attended by about 75 members of the Commercial Club on July 21, 1930. Brown again was present and explained his proposition. A key point in his presentation was that the plant would be owned by the municipality. This made a strong impression on the group.

Brown said his company would install diesel engines on a net earning payment plan. He estimated the town would require two power units developing between 360 to 370 horsepower at a cost of about \$45,000.

"My company is willing to invest this amount because it has faith in Blooming Prairie," Brown said. "We'll receive our payments from the plant's net earnings during the first five or six years of its operation. In addition to paying for the diesel engines during the period, the plant will pay the interest on the bonds."

Brown estimated the cost of the building and distribution system at about \$32,000. This also would be paid out in about five or six years.

So favorable was the reaction to Brown's presen-

tation that the council adopted a resolution favoring putting the program up to the voters on Nov. 12 of that year. A \$35,000 bond issue was proposed to finance the project.

The resolution authorized K. D. Wold, village recorder that year, to announce the election and prepare ballots. The resolution was proposed by A. W. Simpson and seconded by A. L. Srsen. Mayor Hanson called for a vote and Councilman Wold, Simpson, Srsen and C. G. Jolson voted for the project.

Al C. Smith and Hugo Wojahn were appointed judges of election and William Carroll clerk.

By an overwhelming margin of five to one, the voters gave their approval to construction of the municipal power plant. The ballot on issuance of village bonds to the State of Minnesota in the amount of \$35,000 carried 430 to 93 and the ballot calling for construction of the plant was approved 435 to 88.

The municipal light plant project had passed an important hurdle and Blooming Prairie was looking forward to the day when it would be served by its own light plant. Irving Mack of Austin, Minn., was chosen from a field of 25 candidates to become superintendent of the plant. His credentials were excellent. He had completed more than 20 years of service with the Municipal Water & Light Plant in Austin. A contract for construction of the new building was awarded and on the surface it appeared it would be only a matter of months before the switch would be thrown and only memories would remain of the erratic service provided by the company.

But the company was not about to give up its lucrative franchise without a fight. It secured a temporary injunction alleging that letting of contracts for the plant was illegal and the type of payments for the diesel engines was not permissible under the law.

This injunction later was modified to allow construction of the building in preparation for construction of the building in preparation for installation of equipment.

The legal battles reached its climax when Judge W. F. Senn issued a memorable decision in February, 1931 in favor of the municipality. The ruling set a precedent for similar cases throughout the state. The power company had asserted that contracting with Fairbanks, Morse & Company for paying for equipment out of the plant's earning was the same as bonding the city. Judge Senn, however, dissented and ruled voters had approved the council's action. Therefore, he said, the city had a legal right to proceed with its plans.

The ruling gave the green light to the project and construction was resumed of the distribution system and the power house. On April 23, 1931, the diesel engines began generating electricity with over 30 local firms receiving energy from the municipal plant. The new structure added to the appearance of the city for it was a substantial building constructed of brick.

During the first year of the plant's operation over 90

First Utility Chief Victim of Accident

Irving E. Mack was the first superintendent of the Municipal Utilities plant and held this position from 1931 until he was fatally injured in an on-the-job mishap Sept. 17, 1953.

Mr. Mack had come to Blooming Prairie from Austin in 1931 and quickly demonstrated an ability to handle various duties in an efficient manner. He preferred to do the majority of the "hot line" work and this was to cost him his life.

A crew working with large earth-moving equipment struck and snapped a pole in a field west of Victory Field. The highline carrying 2,300 volts was snapped. He and George Curtin were repairing this line when a strong wind blew the damaged line against Mr. Mack's body. He was jolted from the ladder and fell on the truck base holding the extension ladder. He died within a few minutes from the combination of the electric shock and skull injuries.

Mr. Mack was born Nov. 10, 1897, at New Hartford, Iowa. He was the son of Irvin E. and Emma Mack. He attended the New Hartford schools and later became a lineman for the Cedar Valley Electric Cooperative of St. Ansgar, Iowa. He was then employed by the Municipal Light & Power Plant of Austin, Minn., for 20 years.

percent of the home owners and business places began receiving electricity. For the fiscal year ending April 30, 1932, the first year of operation for the plant, a total of \$9,533.35 was earned. It began operations with 327 customers. By 1935 the plant was servicing 400 customers. Six years later the figure had reached 505 patrons. Today, nearly 50 years after the enterprise became a reality, the total number of customers has climbed to more than 900 accounts.

Best of all, the frequent interruptions of service that bothered customers during the period when it was operated by the power company were things of the past. Continuous service was maintained by the new plant.

During its infancy the plant was generating and selling slightly over 200,000 kilowatts annually.

In 1938 the village created a special Water, Light, Power and Building Commission comprised of three men appointed by the council for three-year terms. It was vested with control and supervision of the operation and finances of the power plant in addition to the city water service and plant.

The first members of this commission were A. L. Srsen, L. E. Lysne and Dr. T. P. Golberg with K. D. Wold as secretary.