


# Commercial Electricity in Gilboa

***Richard Lewis***

In past years, light was as important to our well-being as it is today. As there was no electricity, kerosene was the most common fuel used to produce light. The village of Gilboa had street lights—kerosene lamps mounted on poles and serviced by the "old lamplighter from long ago." His name was Willard Schermerhorn (although I don't know how old he was). He pushed a wheelbarrow to carry his oil and supplies, and he made daily rounds to tend the lamps.

Then came 1909 and the "Gilboa Electric Light Heat & Power Company" (the Articles of Incorporation are on page 6 of this Newsletter). In 1912, Judge John K. Grant of Stamford purchased the gristmill on the east side of the village, the cotton mill on the other side of the creek, and the water rights of the creek passing the land surrounding these businesses. He located the power house on the east side of Schoharie Creek in the village of Gilboa.

I can't find an exact date for the start of this construction, but the result was an approximately 5 to 6 foot high dam of concrete, 175 feet long, which created a reservoir for hydro-electric power. The water was sent downstream though a 6-foot diameter pipe called a penstock. The penstock was about 150 feet long, made of boiler plate riveted together, and enclosed in concrete.

The power house was small (about 10' • 12'), built over the penstock, and on a 7 to 8 foot high concrete foundation that was supposed to be above the high-water mark. It was a wood frame building with a painted metal roof and sealed on the inside. Years of floods and battering by driftwood and other debris have removed much evidence of its existence. The concrete dam and the foundation of the power house can still be seen downriver from the dam forming Gilboa Reservoir.

The east end of the dam, the connecting penstock, and the power plant in Gilboa. The gristmill towers over the power plant.

The cost of the generation plant and equipment (excluding transmission lines and distribution) was $42,141. This included all of the work that was done for the generation of electricity: excavation, concrete work, building of the dam and power house, waterwheels, and generators, plus other items needed to deliver power to the bus bars.

Within the power house, there were three 250-horsepower generators that created the power that was then distributed to the villages of Gilboa, Stamford, Prattsville, and Grand Gorge.

The distribution system in the villages consisted of poles, cross-arms, insulators, wire, and various other equipment.

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Richard Lewis is the Town of Gilboa Historian, and adds “I haven’t found any information concerning the fate of the power plant while dam construction was going on. It would seem logical that it was used by the contractors. There was also a piece of information that mentioned a power line running to the top of Clay Hill and of a line connecting to a steam plant in Stamford where Demerest’s used to be.”

Incorporation Papers of Gilboa Electric Light, Heat, and Power Company

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