

ELMHURST HISTORY HIGHLIGHT: Elmhurst Electric Light & Power Company

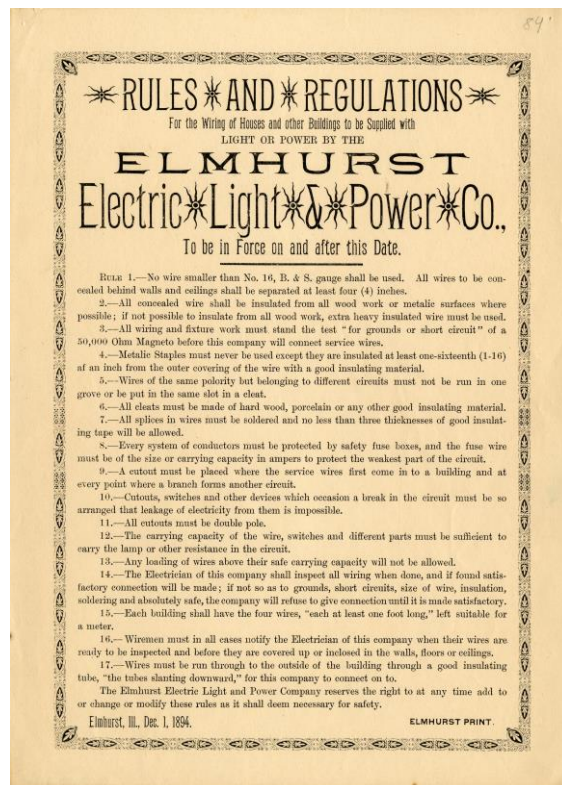
It is difficult to imagine life before the proliferation of electricity. Elmhurst and the world at large carried on until the late 19th century when electric current achieved widespread use, initially to replace gas-lit street lamps. Nearby Aurora, Illinois was one of the first cities in the country to adopt electric street lighting in 1881, and municipalities across the country would adopt similar systems in the ensuing years.

The first power plant to bring electricity to Elmhurst was incorporated in 1891 as the Elmhurst Electric Light and Power Company. It existed for only fifteen years, but was an important step towards the modernization of a village that was not yet a decade old.

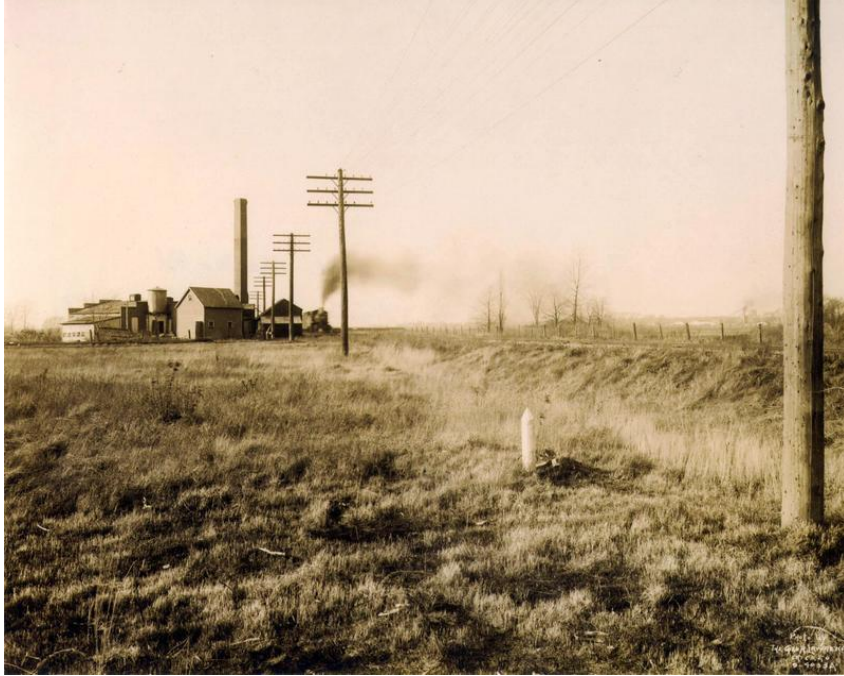
The Village of Elmhurst's board of trustees bestowed exclusive incorporation rights to William H. Emery, Frederick H. Bates, and Wilbur Hagans, all prominent businessmen in Elmhurst. Public stock was sold to fund the fledgling utility business, and Hagans donated a parcel of his own property to construct the coal-powered plant.

The plot was located along the Illinois Central Railroad near St. Charles Road, providing easy access to coal deliveries via rail. After the construction of a large brick building to house two engines and two dynamos, nine miles of power lines were strung on poles to various locations throughout the village. Public buildings, Elmhurst College, and most businesses were provided with electricity from the company, as well as a few private residences that could afford the cost.

The Elmhurst Electric Light and Power Company was acquired by the North Shore Electric Company in 1904—this was one small step in a region-wide utility consolidation effort by business magnate Samuel Insull that would lead to the closure of the Elmhurst plant just a few years later in 1907. The plant was dismantled and electricity in Elmhurst was thereafter supplied by a Commonwealth Edison plant in Maywood.



Rules and regulations enumerated for customers of the Elmhurst Electric Light & Power Co., December 1894 EHM Collection, M73.2.4



A view of the shuttered Elmhurst Electric Light & Power Co. plant alongside the Illinois Central Line, looking north from St. Charles Road, November 1909.
EHM Collection, M2007.32.6

By Daniel Lund, Elmhurst History Museum Staff, September 2022