

# Longmont

## POWER & COMMUNICATIONS



### The History of Becoming a Public Power Utility

Electricity first arrived in Longmont in 1886 from a generator placed in a business owned by N.H. Crocker near Third Avenue and Main Street. This small generator powered three lamps in the Bank of Longmont and five lamps at Persian's store. Eventually, a steam-powered electric plant was built in 1889 and, a year later, lights were installed on street corners throughout the central business district.

In 1892, Longmont's electric supply fell short of the community's needs and the city granted a 20-year franchise to the Northern Colorado Power Company (NCP). When NCP asked to renew this franchise, citizens protested because they weren't satisfied with existing rates and service. Their access to electricity was so limited that they could only use their electric lights between 6 pm and 8 pm, and homeowners who needed extra light bulbs had to obtain permission from city council. They believed they could do better.



### Longmont Self Reliance: Municipal Power

In April of 1911, a proposal to form a city-owned utility in Longmont was put to a vote and passed by an overwhelming majority. Almost immediately, construction began on a hydroelectric power plant and transmission system to bring electricity from the plant and into Longmont. This plant is located just west of Lyons and is still in use today.

Longmont's vote was not well received by NCP which actively tried to stop the process. When NCP refused to sell its infrastructure, 63 of Longmont's citizens pledged \$1,000 each toward the project to complete the needed funding.

In November 1911, when work on the new plant was nearly complete, NCP obtained a temporary injunction to keep Longmont from issuing bonds to further pay for the new plant. A grassroots movement to protest NCP began. As part of this movement, many citizens stopped using NCP electricity and used only kerosene lights until the connection to their municipal utility became available.

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### Longmont: City of Lights

Despite these struggles, on January 5, 1912, Longmont received its first power from the new hydroelectric plant. NCP continued efforts to stop Longmont until March 7, 1912, when Longmont won a final district court injunction suit and was allowed to provide service. By the next day, approximately 125 new connections to the service were established. Within a week, that number increased to around 600 connections.

In appreciation of the sacrifice and support of the effort to municipalize, Longmont called itself "The City of Lights" and the city council declared that all customers would have a free, unmetered porch light. That tradition continues today, though many neighborhoods receive free pedestal lights or street lights instead of the porch lights their predecessors received.

### Increasing Electric Demands

Population growth made demands for more electric power inevitable. With monthly expenditures for power to supplement the Hydroelectric plant exceeding \$20,000, the City decided to build its own auxiliary power plant. In November 1930, City Council Authorized construction of a new diesel-powered generation plant.

The Longmont Municipal Light and Power Plant, located near the area of First and Main Street, began operation the next year and tripled generation capacity. About that time, the distribution system was also rebuilt with heavier transformers and trunk lines. Eventually, however, increasing diesel fuel prices made the diesel plant impractical to retain, even for emergency power. It was dismantled and sold in July 1967.

By the mid 1940's the City's growing electrical needs again exceeded existing capacity. To fill this extra demand, the Terry Street Substation was completed and, in 1946, the Bureau of Reclamation built transmission lines to carry electricity to Longmont from federal power sources

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### The New Era of Power Management

In the 1960's, the Bureau of Reclamation notified the City that it would no longer be building hydroelectric dams. The announcement and continued population growth in Longmont prompted city leaders to continue their search for new sources of electric power.

In 1973, the City joined three other front range communities (Fort Collins, Loveland and Estes Park) with municipally-owned utilities to create Platte River Power Authority (PRPA). Platte River would act on behalf of the communities to obtain additional electric power and to create its own power sources. This decision ushered in a new era in power management for Longmont, one that has become instrumental in providing for growth while retaining low rates.

PRPA explored ways to meet the continually growing power needs of its four member cities. It began building the coal-fired Rawhide Power Plant in the town of Wellington just north of Fort Collins in 1975. In 1983, the plant began providing power to the four cities. For more information about Platte River Power Authority: <http://www.prpa.org>

