

BOYNE RIVER HYDRO PROJECT

This is a synopsis of the information available in Consumers Energy archives regarding the Boyne River Hydro.

The plant was built about 1906. We have no record of who actually built the dam. Based on what we have; it was not Williams Fargo, the Jackson Civil Engineer who built nearly all of Consumers' dams and many others in the Great Lakes region. Like many plants built in the last decade of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th, the Boyne plant was built close to town. While producing electricity from hydraulic turbines was quickly mastered in the late 1800s, transmitting electricity more than a couple miles was not well understood. It was the development, between 1900 - 1910, of high voltage transmission capacity by J.B. Foote, younger brother of Consumers Energy founding father W.A. Foote, which made remote sites more practical and is the company's greatest claim to fame.

The Boyne River hydro is listed in Consumers records as having a capacity of 500 Kilowatts. Using conventional calculations, a plant that size would produce enough electricity on a yearly basis to serve today's annual power needs of about 200 to 250 residential customers. However, in terms of pre-1940 customers the plant would have been capable of serving 10 times that number or more. Electricity use back then was limited to a few lights and a small number of other electrical devices, and bears little comparison to our use today.

The Boyne River Power Company was one of many small west Michigan entities that were consolidated in 1927 into a company named the Michigan Public Service Company (a brief history of the company is provided on one of the attached pages). Consumers bought out that company in 1950, primarily to gain their service territory. The acquisition included the Boyne projects and other hydros on the Maple, Boardman, Black, Cheboygan and Carp Rivers. Consumers continued to operate most of these small hydros from the 1950 acquisition until the early 1960s. At that time the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) had begun to aggressively license hydro projects under the Federal Power Act. The cost of the licensing process was quite high and Consumers did not feel it could be justified for many of these small plants it had acquired. As a result they began to close down the plants, remove equipment and offer them for sale.

In the case of Boyne River Hydro, Consumers records state it was last operated on October 12, 1962. After that the generating equipment is removed and sold. The dam, buildings and associated property were then sold to Boyne Mountain Lodge by deed of June 12, 1963. Following changes in the law during the 1970s that eased some of the complications of obtaining an FERC license for a small hydro project, Boyne Mountain Resort received an original FERC license in 1982 to reinstall generation at the site. The project has operated since that time with a 250 Kilowatt capacity, using the existing dam and 80-acre reservoir. The FERC website lists the project contact as Mr. David Newman, Area Manager, Boyne Mountain Resort, 1 Boyne Mountain Road, Boyne Falls, MI 49713.



The preceding picture of the Boyne River Hydro was taken in 1923, as indicated. It is the only photo we have that I am aware of. There is a couple interesting things about the photo. First, note that it was taken December 19, yet there is no snow in Boyne City - 1923 must have been a warm winter. Second, the photo was actually taken by William Fargo, who I mentioned on the previous page - or one of his men. As I indicated, Fargo was a prolific dam builder from 1890 - 1930, who built all of Consumers' plants and many others in upper Michigan, Indiana, Illinois and Wisconsin during that time span.

The early history of the electric business was marked by, among other things, fierce competition to gain control over as much service territory as possible. This was the mantra of W.A. Foote and the early managers who followed him. In that vein, Fargo and his staff were sent out on several ventures in the late 19teens and early 1920s to gather as much information as they could about possible hydro sites and existing dams already in operation. They would sneak around taking photos and gathering as much information as they could about the plants and their capacity, along with any potential for additional development. This photo is from the original books that the Fargo people compiled.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MICHIGAN PUBLIC SERVICE COMPANY



The company was incorporated under Michigan laws in May 1927, as successor to company of same name. It was formed by consolidating the physical properties formerly owned by Boyne City Electric Co., Boyne River Power Co., White River Power and Light Co., Michigan United Light & Power Co., Michigan Public Service Co., Grayling Electric Co. and Elk Electric Co.

In 1928, they acquired properties of Northern Michigan Public Service Co. and in 1929 the entire capital stock of East Jordan Electric Light & Power Co. On June 30, 1939, company acquired the hydroelectric generating plant and other property of Inland Power & Light Corp. (former parent company) in and about Cheboygan, Mich., together with the entire capital stock of Cheboygan Slackwater Navigation Co.

In Oct., 1930, control of company was acquired from Inland Power & Light Corp. through purchase of all common stock by a syndicate headed by Otis & Co., Cleveland. Stock was subsequently offered to the public.

MANAGEMENT Officers A. S. Dewing, Chairman W. C. Blanchard, President L. E. Cotton, Vice-President O. H. Wing. Vice-President G. E. Olmsted, Secretary & Treasurer G. H. Ramsey, Asst. Treasurer

BUSINESS Furnishes, without competition, electric light and power to 100 communities in western Michigan (territory extends from Muskegon County near Whitehall northward on the east shore of Lake Michigan through Ludington and Traverse City to Mackinaw City and Cheboygan) with a combined estimated population of 62,000.

The principal industries of the territory served were agriculture, fruit growing, manufacturing, on a small scale, and summer vacation and tourist business.

The company also sold electricity at wholesale to 3 communities with an estimated population of 2,200. Water service was supplied at Gaylord. Among communities served were Cheboygan, Pellston, Gaylord, Grayling, Elk Rapids, Boyne City, Kalkaska, Ludington, Scottville, Pentwater, Hart, Shelby, Hesperia, Montague, Whitehall, Traverse City, Mancelona, Sutton Bay, Eastport, East Jordan, and Idlewild.

PROPERTY included 13 hydro-electric plants, 1 steam electric plant and 2 Diesel driven plants with a total installed capacity of 14,472 k.w. and 840 miles of high tension transmission lines. Water service supplied at Gaylord included 3.5 miles of main, 497 customers and a daily pumping capacity, 600,000 gallons.

In 1950 the business was acquired by Consumers Power Company, who gained both the service territory and the various generating plants.