

Powering Northport, 1893-1942

Sources:

Northport News, Mar. 15, May 24, May 31, June 7, 1899; Jan. 7, Feb. 4, May 6, 1903; Nov. 1, 1904; Dec. 11, 1907; Jan. 1, 1908; April 13, Aug. 10, 1910; Oct. 29, 1913; Mar. 22, 1916; July 6, Sept. 7, Nov. 9/23, 1917; Jan. 11, 1918; Feb. 15, May 10/24, Aug. 23, Sept. 6, Oct. 11, Nov. 22, Dec. 13, 1918; Feb. 7, Mar. 21, April 11, May 16, Sept. 5, Nov. 21, 1919; Jan. 2, Mar. 26, Nov. 19, 1920; Mar. 4, 1921

“The pyritic smelter located,” *The Tribune* (Nelson), April 27, 1893

“Electric lights,” *Northport News*, Nov. 2, 1898

“For arc lights in Northport,” *Spokesman Review*, Mar. 9, 1899

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“May move the big flume,” *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, Mar. 24, 1902

“Will not furnish light,” *Spokesman Review*, Sept. 26, 1905

Spokesman Review, Oct. 20, 1905

“Charley Allison visits old home,” *Northport News*, Dec. 11, 1907

“Republic to get Canadian power,” *Spokesman Review*, Dec. 28, 1911

“North Washington Power and Reduction Company’s plant,” *Spokesman Review*, May 5, 1912

“Soon have power at Republic camp,” *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, Sept. 17, 1912

BY GREG NESTEROFF

It’s not unusual for Canadian power producers to export electricity to the United States. However, directly serving American residential consumers — building cross-border transmission lines and looking after connections, maintenance, and billing — is unheard of.* Yet for almost 25 years, that’s exactly what West Kootenay Power did in Northport, Wash.

Despite its novelty, the story of the Northport Power and Light Co. is not well known today either in Northport or West Kootenay.

Northport’s early experience with electricity was fitful, with several temporary providers.

The town was founded in 1892, anticipating the extension of **D.C. Corbin’s** Spokane Falls and Northern Railway. The first reference to potential power production in Northport was the following year, when a San Francisco company proposed building a pyritic smelter there.

The *Nelson Tribune* reported: “Water power will be used in the smelter and for this purpose a water right was filed last week. The power will be taken from Deep creek, one and one-half miles from Northport, and affording a fall of 200 feet in that distance ...”

However, the smelter was never built and Northport remained in the dark.

More than five years later, **Robert Morrill, W.R. Lee**, and a group of Montana capitalists approached the recently-incorporated city for a franchise to install an electric light system, once again using Deep Creek falls.

By March 1899, the Northport Electric Light Co. let a contract for its plant and building and the city ordered 15 arc street lights for its principal intersections (although only 10 were actually installed). Morrill, the secretary/treasurer and a longtime Northport resident, appointed **W.B. Cone** as superintendent.

The lights were finally turned on June 3, and the *Northport News* boasted that “we never saw a steadier or clearer light” while the *Spokesman Review* noted that “most of stores and residents are wired and the city takes on in the evenings a truly metropolitan appearance.”

By this time, Northport finally had a smelter, which provided its own power using a flume on Deep Creek. Oddly, the flume ran through Robert Morrill’s farm. Although he apparently gave tacit approval when it was built, the smelter never obtained title to the right of way, and the matter wound up in court in 1902, where a judge ruled the company had to move its flume.

By then, something had happened to Morrill’s company; it was still providing electricity to resi-

dential customers, but not to the city, which had switched to steam power.

Sensing an opportunity, in 1901 a consortium including **W.S. Norman** and Spokane mayor **Patrick S. Byrne** founded the Sheep Creek Light and Power Co. to build a power plant on the Sheep Creek falls. In addition to the city, they hoped to serve nearby mines. Although Norman had previously helped organize the Washington Water Power Co. to harness the Spokane River, the company doesn’t seem to have gotten far.

In early 1903, the Northport Electric Light Co. raised its rates, and according to the *News*, “quite a number have refused to continue the service.”

The Kendrick Mercantile Co. installed its own power plant in the basement of its store at the corner of Fourth and Columbia (the building still stands), consisting of a Pelton motor and Westinghouse direct current dynamo. It was expected to also serve the company’s furniture department at the corner of Fifth and Columbia, its warehouse, and the Northport State Bank.

By spring, town council granted another firm, the Northwest Light and Power Co. a 30-year franchise to provide electricity. The company built a dam and powerhouse at Meyers Falls and began stringing a line to Northport, today a driving distance of 33 miles (53 km). It also reached a five-year contract with the Northport smelter. While the company successfully electrified Meyers Falls and Colville, it’s not clear how far it got in Northport, for by the fall of 1904, the city was again seeking bids for lighting.

The smelter, which had installed a water wheel and power plant (although the source of its water is unknown) agreed to sell the city power for \$100 a month.

However, this too was short-lived. When the owners of Rosslund’s Le Roi mine decided in 1905 to start shipping ore to the Trail smelter instead of Northport, the city was given notice that it would not be provided with power for street lighting after November 1. As the *Spokesman Review* put it, “consequently the city will again be in darkness.”

In 1907, Robert Morrill reportedly ordered another power plant for Deep Creek falls, and soon afterward, Northport’s mayor said he hoped to arrange for electric lights. Nothing appears to have come of it.

Three years later, rumors circulated that the smelter had been leased to a syndicate, and that West Kootenay Power would build a dam at Waneta to provide it with electricity. That didn’t happen either.

* Well, almost unheard of: Hyder, Alaska, which is on the border with Stewart, BC, gets its power from BC Hydro.



The smelter at Northport, Wash. was the catalyst for — and sometimes provider of — power to the town.

— C.S. REEVES PHOTO/AUTHOR’S COLLECTION

The Northport Commercial Club then tried to find a new power provider and was apparently successful, for a 1911 civic directory stated Northport had “electric light and power plant” although through what means is unclear.

In the fall of 1913, the proprietors of the New Zealand Hotel, **Magnus and Helma Wulff**, installed a power plant with a gas engine and dynamo. “Lights are in every room in the building and clusters in globes in front, making it as light as day all around the premises,” the *Northport News* crowed.*

Soon after, Northport made arrangements with the smelter to once again provide electric street lights.

In 1915, unidentified parties were said to be building a power plant on Deep Creek to serve both town and smelter. A doctor planned to move to Northport “as soon as he can get a day electric current to run his machinery.”

Finally, in 1917 came the stable supply the town had so long desired.

West Kootenay Power had agreed to provide electricity directly to an American customer at least once before. A 1911 contract with the North Washington Power and Reduction Co. called for a 36 mile (58 km) 20,000 volt line to be built from Danville, south of Grand Forks, along the Kettle River and San Poil valleys to Republic. The rate was undisclosed but said to be as cheap or cheaper than that enjoyed by mining companies in the Couer d’Alene district of Idaho.

When North Washington’s new reduction works opened in 1912, it was steam-powered

pending “completion of the company’s high potential line from Danville.” Pole placement began on the Republic end and was reported to have reached eight miles by September. “At this rate of construction it is calculated that Danville, the objective, will be reached in a few weeks,” the *Spokane Daily Chronicle* reported.

The arrangement seemed less certain a few weeks later when officials of the Washington Water Power Co. of Spokane visited to discuss extending one of one of their lines to Republic.

But as late as May 1913, **J.L. Harper** with North Washington insisted he would provide the capital to finish the transmission line from Republic to Danville. Those plans were dealt a fatal blow a few months later when Harper was charged with grand larceny, accused of illegally transferring \$900 between companies. The charge was dismissed at a preliminary hearing, where the judge declared the prosecution malicious and ordered the complaining witness to pay costs. The charge was formally dismissed in 1915, but by then it was too late for the Danville-Republic power line.

On at least two other occasions, Washington state firms wrote to Bonnington Falls Light and Power, a West Kootenay subsidiary, seeking Canadian-generated electricity: in 1910, the Alice Mining and Milling Co. of Orient inquired, and in 1920 the Molson Electric Light and Water Co. asked to tap into the company’s Bridesville line. Neither request amounted to anything.

* The Wulffs, and the hotel, were Northport Power and Light customers by 1919.

“Electric power in Republic mines,” *Spokesman Review*, Oct. 5, 1912

“Eastern men to inspect Republic,” *Spokesman Review*, May 5, 1913

“Mining promoter faces larceny,” *Spokesman Review*, Sept. 20, 1913

“Street lights at Northport,” *Spokesman Review*, Dec. 15, 1913

“Drop Harper larceny charge,” Jan. 10, 1915

“Get into producing class,” *Spokesman Review*, Oct. 2, 1915

“Invest \$150,000 in power line,” *Spokesman Review*, July 18, 1917

Victoria Daily Colonist, Sept. 19, 1917

“H.A. Jones electrocuted at Northport on Sunday,” *Nelson Daily News*, Mar. 31, 1919

“H.A. Jones is laid to rest,” *Nelson Daily News*, April 2, 1919

“Electrician meets violent death,” *Northport News*, April 4, 1919

“Power Co. here to supply Marble lands with water,” *Northport News*, Feb. 16, 1923

“Sink 100 feet on Black Rock,” *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, Aug. 9, 1928

“New franchise at Northport,” *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, Oct. 20, 1928

“Council suffers change of heart,” *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, Nov. 23, 1928

“Northport smelter property is sold,” *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, Dec. 8, 1928

“Electric Point mine property is sold,” *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, Dec. 12, 1928

“Belief grows that smelter will be built at Northport,” *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, Dec. 26, 1928

“Power men sue to stop state,” *Spokesman Review*, Sept. 12, 1929

“Hear Northport case,” *Spokesman Review*, Sept. 17, 1929

“Province of British Columbia,” *Canadian Mining Journal*, Oct. 11, 1929

“State wins power case,” *Spokesman Review*, Oct. 16, 1929

“Province of British Columbia,” *Canadian Mining Journal*, Nov. 15, 1929

“To argue Northport case,” *Spokesman Review*, Jan. 13, 1931

“Northport power company loses injunction plea,” *Nelson Daily News*, Jan. 24, 1931

“Mining men urge law adjustment,” *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, Feb. 18, 1931

Los Angeles Times, May 26, 1931

Financial Post, April 27, 1935

“Stevens Co-op explains stand in WWP dispute,” *Spokane Chronicle*, Dec. 8, 1951

“Stevens County co-op votes to sell to PUD,” *Walla Walla Union Bulletin*, June 6, 1952

An Illustrated History of Stevens, Ferry, Okanogan, and Chelan Counties, State of Washington, 1904, p. 136-37

R.K. Polk & Co.'s Directory of Stevens, Pend Oreille and Ferry Counties, 1911-12, p. 97

Canadian Mining Journal, 1917, p. 387

It's not clear who approached who about West Kootenay Power supplying electricity from its Kootenay River dams to the Northport smelter, but negotiations began in 1916 after Washington Water Power decided that serving Northport would be impractical.

Into the breach stepped West Kootenay Power and Light president **Lorne A. Campbell**, who on July 2, 1917 incorporated a subsidiary, the Northport Power and Light Co., to supply the city and smelter, which the **Day** brothers were buying in order to smelt ore from the Coeur d'Alenes.

Articles of incorporation filed at Olympia showed the company was capitalized at \$200,000 (\$2.8 million Cdn in 2014 currency). In addition to Campbell, the provisional board consisted of vice-president **H.R. Williams** of Colville and **O.C. Moore**, a Spokane attorney. **Claude Belmont Smith**, West Kootenay Power's secretary-treasurer, was given the same job with the new company. Of the stock, only \$133,600 was actually issued and Campbell held most of it in trust for West Kootenay Power.

Campbell pledged to invest \$125,000 to \$150,000 (\$1.7 million to \$2.1 million in today's currency) to build a 10.8 mile (17.3 km) transmission line from Silica Junction southwest of Rossland to Northport and install equipment to power the city and smelter, which had most recently used steam.

With their franchise in place from the Stevens County board of commissioners, a contract was awarded to a **Mr. Burgess** to excavate the basement of a brick substation on smelter property, while **Joseph F. Reed** was hired to brush and clear four miles (6.4 km) of right of way. **W.L. Withhuhn** provided cedar poles, which began to be placed in early December under the supervision of **Jack Leaden** and **Harry Butler**.

The 60,000 volt line included a 1,700 foot (518 m) crossing of the Columbia River at Northport. The line cost \$30,000 (\$639,000 Cdn today), a larger-than-expected sum, for labour was scarce and wages high.

In May 1918, **John D. McDonald**, the company's superintendent, arrived from Rossland to finish the electric plant at the smelter. A ten-year contract was fixed at about \$1 million, regardless of whether any power was actually used.

Construction on the transmission line was nearly finished in August. The *Northport News* reported: “The high tension hydroelectric power line being built by the West Kootenay Power and Light company to Northport has been practically completed, the wires being strong to the crossing of the Columbia river opposite the smelter. The power was expected to have been delivered to the smelter several months ago, but delays in the delivery from Schenectady, N.Y. of trans-

NORTHPORT POWER & LIGHT COMPANY		
Northport, Wash. Aug 27 1924		
1859	STOCK REQUISITION	
Charge	Connecting Field Instruments Nelson - Services Connection	
Credit	Services	
	Cost	Sale
120/11-10 M.P. Lines	192	
3 Service Insulators	72	
2 Service Lines		
	260	
Signed L.A. Campbell		

Stock requisition, 1924
— ROSSLAND MUSEUM & ARCHIVES

forming and generation equipment, due to war conditions, have prevented [it]. Two cars of machinery have been used and another is expected. It will probably be two or three months yet before the line is in operation.”

The city, meanwhile, bought eight new street lights, and poles were installed over the fall. The trunk line ran down Center Ave. to Fourth St.

The company's franchise with the city took effect October 3, 1918 and a tariff was filed later that month setting schedules for residential and commercial lighting, heating, and cooking, as well as street lighting.* Although the smelter apparently had power that fall, it took more than two years to connect the rest of the town.

In February 1919, the *News* observed: “The electric light system is gradually being completed. All the wires are up and several transformers installed. We hope to see the city with a few bright spots at least, before long. It is certainly needed. While walking around the town, one doesn't know whether he is going to collide with a young lady and cause considerable embarrassment, or run into the corner of a building and knock out an eye. We would suggest that the city

install lights as soon as possible, as various parts of the city are blue black, and we want to keep our bones and eyes free from injury.”

It's uncertain when homes were first lit — there doesn't seem to have been any ceremony — but the following month, customers were advised to report to **Charlie E. Allison**, the local agent, before the 15th of each month to receive a 10 per cent rebate on bills over \$1.25 where meters were installed.

Although a longtime Northport resident, Allison was actually Canadian-born, hailing from Newcastle, N.B.

“Charlie made his living by his wits,” recalls Colville resident **Patrick Graham**, who knew him in later years. Allison owned the post office building and also dealt in real estate, loans, and fire insurance. The power company's mailing address, however, was in Rossland.

At the company's first annual general meeting in Northport in 1918, Lorne Campbell, Charlie Allison, and **Clarence Ernest Lane**, the local manager, were named the new board of trustees. Campbell also served as president, Lane as vice-president, and C.B. Smith as secretary. This configuration remained unchanged for over 20 years.

Northport Power and Light's darkest hour — figuratively — occurred on March 30, 1919.

A switch at the substation wasn't working, so **Henry A. (Casey) Jones**, an electrician from Bonnington recently transferred to Northport, went to repair it. He had to stand on a ladder to get at the switch, above which were high voltage wires. He either touched one or got so close that he was instantly electrocuted.

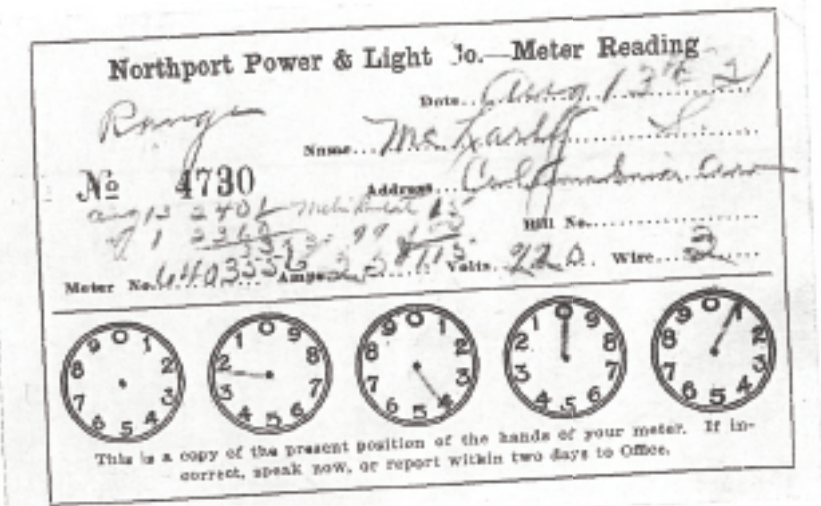
The substation roof caught fire. Smelter workers spotted the smoke and rushed to the scene, along with Clarence Lane, who arrived just in time to stop the men from turning water on the fire, which could have touched the wires with deadly consequences.

Jones, 41, was buried in Nelson, where he left a wife and three children. According to the *Northport News*, “He was of a very quiet disposition, and well liked by his employers and acquaintances in Northport.” He previously worked for the BC Telephone Co., City of Nelson, and BC Electric in Vancouver.

The late **Dave Macdonald** of Nelson recalled another tragedy later befell the family: one of Jones' sons died after falling from a crane during the extension of West Kootenay Power's No. 2 plant on the Kootenay River.

C.R. Elliott of Rossland assumed Jones' position in Northport and finished the residential connections, although he was flummoxed by the wiring in some of the old homes.

(Getting Canadian employees to work in Northport required special permission. In an affidavit sworn to allow for a relief operator, J.D. McDonald outlined the training required for the job, offered assurances no strike or lockout was



Meter receipt, 1921
— BC ARCHIVES, COMINCO PAPERS

threatened, and stated that ads for the job had been placed in the US and Canada. He also agreed to provide the name, age, and nationality of all relief workers sent to Northport.)

Clarence Lane was called to Allenby, near Princeton, in September 1919 to oversee the company's construction of a power station. He was absent from the community for most of the next 15 months.

By April 1921, the company had extended its service to Northport's Hughes addition, and its distribution network was 3.8 miles (6.1 km) long.

The smelter closed that year, although under the terms of its contract with the power company, it still had to pay \$100,000 per year. It's unclear if that agreement was honoured or renegotiated. The smelter was sold the following year and dismantled.

Remarkably, although the company's primary customer and reason for being ceased to exist, it continued to serve the city and nearby mining properties, even though those revenues hardly justified the decision.

In 1923, the company diversified its business by reaching a deal with the Upper Columbia Co.

* A supplement that took effect in March 1919 reduced the cost of street lighting from 15 to 13 cents per kWh. A second supplement in 1925 addressed conditions under which the company would extend its services. A new tariff filed in October 1927 contained revised schedules for domestic lighting, cooking, water, heating, commercial and street lighting, power, electric refrigeration, and power for mining purposes. A third tariff was filed in December 1928 and took effect in February 1929, laying out a minimum charge of \$1 per month for all customers. Residential customers along with schools and churches paid eight cents per kWh for the first 34, and then three cents afterward — encouraging and rewarding higher consumption. Commercial lighting was eight cents per kWh for the first 100, after which the rate dropped at thresholds of 200, 300, 400, 1,000 and 2,000. Other special rates applied to motors, refrigerators, and power for mining purposes. The cost of street lighting was halved to 6.5 cents per kWh in mid-1933.

Appraisal, Rate, and Service Investigation of the Northport Power and Light Company, Northport, Wash., as of Oct. 31, 1933, 1934

Trail Smelter Question, Appendix A1, The Deans' Report, 1936, p. 12 and Economic Survey 1937, Appendix AA1, p. 178

Consolidated Mining and Smelting annual report 1942

Rossland Centennial Photo Album, 1996, p. 41, 122

The Business of Power, Jeremy Mouat, 1997, p. 99, 191

Email from Patrick Graham, May 22, 2011

Interview with Patrick Graham, August 2011

Interview with Dave Macdonald, September 2011

lib.uidaho.edu/special-collections/Manuscripts/dmginv/mg234.htm

historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=output.cfm&file_id=7995

spokesman.com/stories/2013/oct/26/small-hydroelectric-dams-bring-clean-power-to/

Northport Power and Light Co. sous fonds, West Kootenay Power fonds, Trail Historical Society archives

to supply water from the Columbia River for irrigation to orchard lands at nearby Marble.

That same year the operators of the Black Rock zinc mine on Deep Creek, about six miles (9.5 km) from Northport extended a power line to their property. Although built for 22,000 volt service, it was insulated and operated at 2,300 volts. The power company planned to extend the line and re-insulate it at the higher voltage, but the mining industry slumped, and the change was never carried out.

When the Black Rock closed in 1931, its owners transferred their interest in the line to the company for the \$9,600 cost of construction (\$132,000 Cdn today), after which it served only two homes, a small sawmill, farm, and community hall.

In 1928, a 2,300 volt line was also built to **Peter Janni's** lime quarry about two miles (3.2 km) from town. He furnished the poles, dug the holes, and helped set the poles. The utility provided the balance of the hardware at a cost of \$4,700 (\$65,600 Cdn).

Despite Northport Power and Light's success in providing reliable electricity to citizens, when the company's ten-year charter was about to expire in 1928, city council opted to go in a different direction.

The Stevens County Power and Light Co., which served Colville, Chewelah, Marcus, Kettle Falls, and Marble, among other places, was applying for water rights on Sheep Creek and wanted to do business in Northport.

Its prices were about the same as Northport Power and Light's, but it sought a 25-year franchise, whereas Northport Power only asked for a five-year extension.

Council would have granted the franchise to Stevens County without much fuss, but for "hints" that Northport Power and Light or its parent CM&S "might built industrial works of some kind, presumably a large smelter."

(Adding fuel to the rumors, the smelter site was sold to the Spokane and Eastern Trust Co., who most believed was acting on behalf of CM&S. Northport Power and Light also bought the Electric Point and Gladstone mines and took options on the Jumbo and Democrat claim groups. But any truth to the speculation was dashed the following year when the stock market collapsed.)

After discussing the matter at three meetings, council members **Harry Bass**, **C.E. Williams**, and **Dolph Siegloch** finally voted in favour of the Stevens County company with only **E.P. Travis** opposed. No representatives of the Northport company were present, but two from Stevens County were on hand. They promised to keep the town lighted continuously by buying equipment from the Northport company.

A month later, however, council had a change of heart and unanimously voted to renew

Pay up, or lose the washing machine

The Trail Historical Society archives has all of the Northport Power and Light Co.'s stock certificates — the 17 actually issued, plus a book with another 83 that are blank. It also has the company's minute book and accounting ledgers.

Other material can be found amongst the Cominco papers at the BC Provincial Archives, as well as the Rossland Museum and Archives — a random collection of letters and billheads, including:

- An unsigned 1919 letter from the company asking C.E. Lane to ensure incandescent street lights are installed 20 feet (6 m) high.
- A 1920 letter from the Northport city band asking for free power. (Declined because it would break public service commission rules.)
- A 1920 letter from the company to Westinghouse that sniffs: "We are very much disappointed in the way the Westinghouse business in reference to ranges is handled in Northport. If we cannot get any better service in reference to these ranges we will have to discontinue their use entirely. These ranges have been nothing but a source of trouble to us."
- A 1921 letter from Charlie Allison contemplating action against delinquent customers:

"**A.S. Leonard** is OK but hard up and very little work to do."

"**A. Featherkile** ... we may have to take action against him, he owns some property in town."

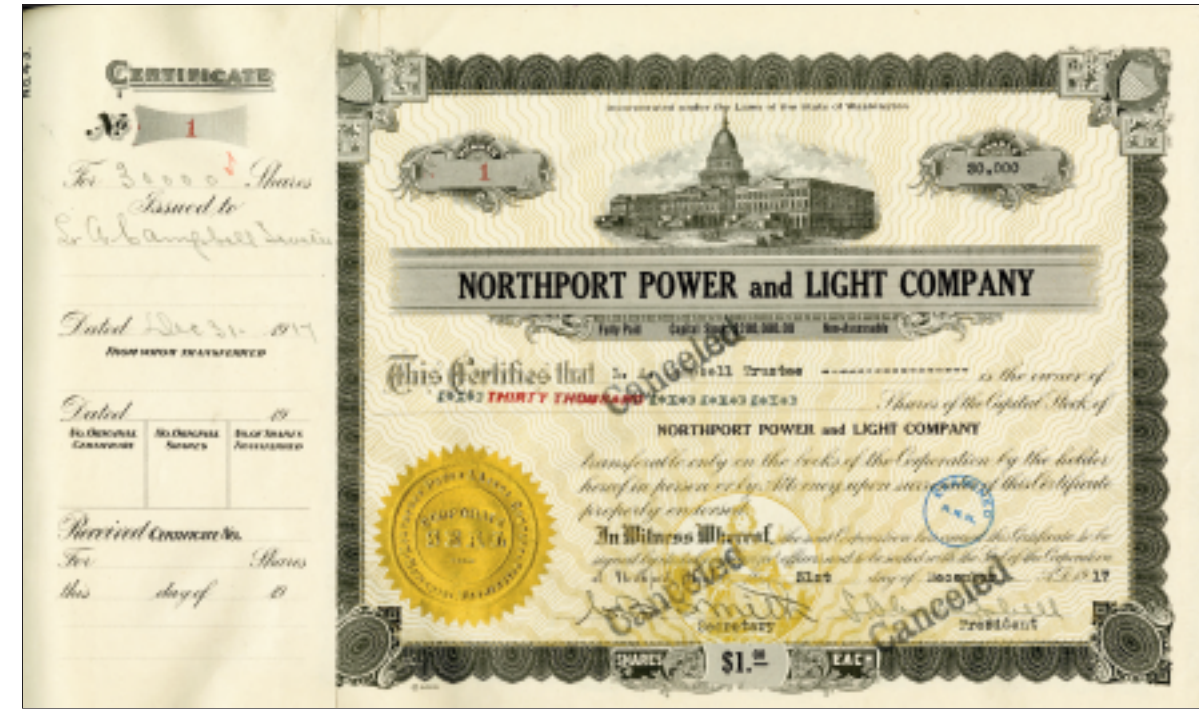
"**D. Downs:** I would suggest if another payment is not made by the 16th of this month to take the washing machine."

Northport Power and Light's franchise after it agreed to reduce its rates. The ten-year agreement also gave the city a two-thirds rebate on street lighting.

The Stevens County Power and Light Co. was evidently unimpressed with Northport council's decision and wasn't alone.

A report in the *Canadian Mining Journal* claimed "two eastern United States power concerns were anxious to oust the Northport company so that they might get control of the power concessions of the district."

They apparently had the ear of the Stevens County commissioners, who in early 1929 asked Washington's attorney general to look into the



Northport Power and Light Co. stock certificate No. 1 for 30,000 shares, held in trust by Lorne Campbell on behalf of West Kootenay Power.

company's status, contending its use of Canadian power hampered the development of power projects in the county. The commissioners further suggested the company should forfeit its easement for power lines, as well as poles and substation because it was an alien corporation that couldn't own property, based on a 1921 law targeting Chinese and Japanese immigrants.

As early as 1918, Northport Power and Light was concerned whether a Canadian corporation could legally hold stock in a Washington company. O.C. Moore, their own lawyer, suggested it was "exceedingly doubtful," although no one other than the state had any right to object. His advice was that Lorne Campbell continue to hold stock as a trustee for West Kootenay Power rather than put it in the company's name.

Although the details are hazy, in 1923, those shares were used to secure a mortgage with the Montreal Trust Co., which was cancelled at the end of 1928. By that time the company appears to have forgotten — or simply ignored — its lawyer's advice, for the shares were then transferred to West Kootenay Power, opening the door for the state to expropriate.

Hoping to forestall such action, the company filed suit in federal court at Tacoma, seeking an injunction to restrain the governor and attorney general. They argued Congress alone had the power to regulate commerce between any state and foreign nation, and that the company's holdings weren't real estate in the typical sense.

(Although it may have been unrelated, about the time the complaint was filed, Northport Power and Light bought the transmission line

from its parent company for \$10,650 [\$145,500 Cdn today] — approximately one-third what it cost to build.)

A three-judge panel heard the case in September. Representing the company were O.C. Moore and **W. Lon Johnson** of Colville, who until recently had been the state's lieutenant-governor, and would also serve as a senator and superior court judge.

It didn't take long for the company's application to be dismissed on the grounds the federal court didn't have jurisdiction.

The company appealed to the Washington Supreme Court, which heard the case in early 1931. Assistant attorney general **John A. Homer** was to appear for the state, but Moore was "questioned frequently" during his argument and once finished, the chief justice didn't bother to hear the state's case, signalling the appeal would be dismissed. The court made it official a few months later.

The company wasn't without sympathy in the United States, however. One mining industry leader said the prohibition of foreign ownership was detrimental to development.

"The Consolidated Mining and Smelting company, which operates right at our border, has been ready and willing to extend the benefits of its operations to our state, but is blocked because of our laws," said **A.W. Foster** of the Puget Sound and Alaska Power company. "In fact, they are likely to lose property acquired and installed by them in good faith."

The *Canadian Mining Journal* said the company shut down the Gladstone mine "not, it is

Northport Power & Light

Customers

1918:	1*
1919:	131
1920:	185
1921:	179
1922:	137
1923:	150
1924:	151
1925:	168
1926:	175
1927:	175
1928:	168
1929:	141
1930:	123
1931:	126
1932:	128
1933:	125
1934:	129
1935:	129

* From commencement in November 1918

Surplus/deficit

1918:	\$292
1919:	\$1,205
1920:	-\$2,584
1921:	-\$2,195
1922:	-\$1,173
1923:	\$744
1924:	-\$4,361
1925:	-\$4,103
1926:	-\$4,403
1927:	-\$3,651
1928:	-\$8,866
1929:	-\$15,927
1930:	-\$9,275
1931:	-\$14,981
1932:	-\$9,679
1933:	-\$11,863
1934:	-\$9,720
1935:	-\$9,008
Total:	-\$109,548

Operating revenue

1929:	\$6,345
1930:	\$5,877
1931:	\$5,896
1932:	\$5,373

Operating expenses

1931:	\$13,587
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Power purchased (in kWh)*

1918:	619,600
1919:	2,659,700
1920:	5,321,400
1921:	2,894,000
1922:	1,449,600
1923:	554,900
1924:	572,800
1925:	621,400
1926:	604,300
1927:	555,600
1928:	568,800
1929:	376,276
1930:	268,053
1931:	283,797
1932:	239,668
1933:	254,744

* From Northport Power and Light Co.

Power purchases*

1929:	\$2,831
1930:	\$1,749
1931:	\$1,906
1932:	\$1,465

* By Northport Power and Light from West Kootenay Power and Light.

Sources: Trail Smelter Question, Documents Series AA, Economic Survey 1937, Appendix AA1, p. 178 and Appraisal, Rate, and Service Investigation of the Northport Power and Light Company, Northport, Wash., as of Oct. 31, 1933

System snapshot

As of Oct. 31, 1933:

Number of services: **204**

Number of customers: **139**

Miles of transmission lines: **10.8**

Miles of distribution line: **12.5**

Customers per mile of distribution line: **11**

Population tributary to utility, 1930 census: **390**

Population per customer: **3**

Indications of future growth: **Very little**

Average monthly revenue per residential customer: **\$2.56**

Average monthly consumption per residential and commercial customer: **39 kWh**

Number of vacant houses: **73**

Number of inactive services: **69**

Cost of plant per capita: **\$462**

Source: Appraisal, Rate, and Service Investigation of the Northport Power and Light Company, Northport, Wash. as of Oct. 31, 1933

understood, because it was disappointed with the results so far obtained from diamond drilling, but because the people of Stevens county ... objected to an alien company operating in the state.”

If the state was still interested in seizing the company’s assets, it didn’t happen. But on Oct. 24, 1933, the Washington Dept. of Public Utilities filed a complaint against the company, challenging its rates and service, and the wholesale prices it paid.

At that time, Washington had many small power companies, but at 3.5 cents per kilowatt hour, Northport Power and Light’s basic rate was among the highest in the state.

A highly critical report submitted to the board of public works by its chief engineer the following year concluded the plant was drastically overbuilt considering it no longer served the smelter, and could be replaced with something smaller and more efficient.

“The 60,000 volt transmission lines and the substation in Northport, under the present existing conditions, cannot be justified,” the report stated. “At present the system load can be readily supplied by a station of one-thirtieth of the present rating.”

The report noted the population of Northport had declined 40 per cent since 1920, following the smelter’s closure. The company’s workforce — Lane, the superintendent and Allison the agent, plus local contract labour — was deemed decadent.

“A small utility such as that at Northport which purchases all of its power and which has no substation equipment requiring the constant attendance of an operator cannot justify the employment of more than one man to superintend the operations and transact all the commercial business of the company.”

In 1932, Lane was paid \$1,995 and Allison \$253 (\$33,900 and \$4,300 Cdn, respectively today). The report proposed combining the two positions.

There was more: over half the total substation output for 1932 and about a quarter of the output for the 12 months ending October 1933 was consumed in lighting and heating the substation, the office and Lane’s home. Consumption at the latter averaged 1,200 kWh per month.

The report took a dim view of this, suggesting the superintendent’s salary was “ample” without an additional allowance for heat and light. The amount of power consumed by the substation was also “excessive.”

The report further noted the company’s battles against the state’s attorney general had cost \$4,150 in legal fees in 1929 and \$4,938 in 1931 (\$56,700 Cdn and \$76,600 Cdn in 2014 figures). Those sums weren’t much less than the company’s operating revenues for the same years and the chief engineer felt they couldn’t be justified.

The company’s whole balance sheet, he declared, made little sense. “A cursory inspection of the tabulation of the annual income and rate of return is sufficient to call attention to the fact that there is something radically out of line in a plant where not only the operating expenses but also the depreciation expense equals or exceeds the amount of the annual revenue.”

Indeed, between 1918 and 1935, the company only three times showed a modest surplus, while cumulative losses during those years came to \$109,550 (\$1.9 million Cdn today). Why West Kootenay Power continued to subsidize the operation is hard to understand.

What action the board of public works took as a result of the chief engineer’s report and how the company responded isn’t known, but in May 1942, the company reached a deal to sell its lines to the farmer-owned Stevens County Electrical Co-operative of Colville for \$12,000 (about \$169,000 Cdn today).

The agreement included the Black Rock and Janni quarry lines, but excluded the transmission line from the border to the substation and the substation itself. The deal closed in December, and earned the company a profit of \$7,616 (about \$109,000 Cdn today) after taxes and expenses.

Although it no longer had any reason to exist, the company did not immediately disappear. In 1942, **William Evans** was named secretary to replace C.B. Smith, who resigned. Charlie Allison and Lorne Campbell both died in 1947 and were replaced by **Ben J. Hofer**, a Northport merchant, and **R.G. Anderson**, Campbell’s successor as West Kootenay Power president

The substation and transmission line were finally sold in 1949, although it’s not clear who bought them. The company made \$8,449 on the sale (\$87,700 today), reduced to \$4,939 after expenses and taxes (\$51,300 today).

Northport Power and Light finally dissolved on July 6, 1951. Its few remaining assets and liabilities were assumed by West Kootenay Power.

The following year, Stevens County Electric Co-op members overwhelmingly voted to sell their properties to the Stevens County public utility district. In 1955, Stevens County voters in turn decided to sell their public electric system to the Washington Water Power Co., in a reversal of a trend elsewhere in the state where residents fed up with high rates charged by private companies formed public utilities districts.

Today, Washington Water Power, renamed Avista Utilities in 1998, still provides almost all of Stevens County’s power, including Northport’s.

There remains one throwback to the early days of Northport power production: since 1986, on the American side of Sheep Creek, **Glenn** and **Rosemarie Phillips** have operated a privately-owned generating plant. Their agreement to sell power to Avista runs through 2021.