

FIRST ELECTRIC POWER

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This photo taken in 1888 shows a number of men raising a power pole on East Park Street in Albion. The first electric power for Albion was generated at Waterport using the water of Oak Orchard River. The transmission line came up Route 279 through Gaines into Albion.

I find people are often amazed that electricity was being generated at that time. In fact, by April 1890 the Village of Albion had electric street lights.

Our picture shows men using pike poles to raise a power pole for electric wires. The man to the far left who is well dressed must have been the superintendent overseeing the job. Note the pergola on the side of the house behind him.

Although people in the village could have electric lights in the late 1880s it wouldn't be until after World War II that all the rural areas in the county had electric power.

The first use of electricity was for light bulbs. They were dim compared to what is available today.

The Pullman Church in Albion built in 1894 was intended to be illuminated with electricity. The original electrolier for 43 bulbs is still in place. Naturally with



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dim bulbs it took quite a few to light a large interior space.

Often back then light fixtures were made as combination gas and electric because the power was frequently off. In fact, the power house at Waterport closed at midnight until 6 a.m. so no electricity was generated during those hours. Hence, gas was needed as auxiliary lighting.

During the 1880s and 1890s power was connected to homes through the attic not the cellar. In other words, the main power box was in the attic with switches in it but no fuses.

Wiring was referred to as knob and tube because porcelain insulators for

double wires ran from fixture to fixture. Most lights turned on at the fixture although turn button switches were sometimes used on side walls before the push button kind.

As people started to get electrical appliances in the 1890s such as flat irons, wall outlets became necessary. Before these became commonplace, however, adapters were made that could be screwed into light sockets to plug into.

Dangerous to say the least! Some of the very first light sockets took bulbs that snapped into place. This was before laws came into effect that made things standardized no matter who manufactured the items.

Today because we need and depend so much on electric power we never seem to have enough wall outlets. Over the past 120 years the silent servant has served us well.