

# Bethinking of Old Orleans

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## A. L. SWETT ELECTRIC LIGHT AND POWER CO. Part I First Electric Attempts

"Is it a fact, or have I dreamt it, that by means of electricity the world of matter has become a great nerve, vibrating thousands of miles in a breathless point of time?"

—Hawthorne

Wherever there is water power, electricity can be produced. Many smaller streams such as the Oak Orchard Creek have been developed to furnish excellent and sufficient electrical power. The Medina Falls as seen here on Oak Orchard Creek first attracted the attention of Joseph Ellicott from the Holland Land Purchase. It was these waters around which the first settlement of Medina took place and where mills were established using its waterpower. The course of the Erie Canal was also influenced by Oak Orchard Creek which actually created and perpetuated Medina.

Talk of electric illumination for Medina began as far back as 1886. In February 1887 the Remington Company of Illion, N.Y. presented a proposition to the Medina Village Board of Trustees for supplying lights. It was at this time that several of the village's prominent men visited nearby cities to study electric light plants and derive some conclusion for its adoption in Medina.

The first actual electric power in Medina was generated by Charles Simmonds from a heading mill off East Center Street in the summer of 1887. It was used for electric lights which were installed at the corner of Main and Center, Center and West and in front of White's Hotel. These lights were said to have made the existing gas lights look like firebugs. Although these lights were much improved there was some dissatisfaction and the village board continued to explore other more efficient means.

In August of 1888 an explosion occurred at the Gas Works in which William Allport was severely hurt. His injuries required the amputation of a leg and when the court awarded damages for the injury the gas works went into bankruptcy. This was in January 1890 and immediately because of this, efforts were launched for providing Medina with more adequate lighting facilities. In February Charles Simmonds was granted the right to supply power for 300 lights from the East Center Street generator. In April 1890 the electric facility of Mr. Simmonds was consolidated with the Medina Gas Light Co. under the name of the Medina Gas and Electric Light Co. In August 1890 ground was broken on Mr. Simmonds land near the railroad on the race for a new electric plant. One incandescent generator, two arc light dynamos, two engines and two boilers of 100 horse power each were installed here. There were sixteen miles in the arc system which first served about 100 patrons with 800 lights beginning in April 1891. None of these however were in homes.

In September 1897 the President of the Village of Medina called upon A. L. Swett to consider the matter of lighting the streets as the company which was doing it was not giving satisfactory service. At this time Mr. Swett was lighting his foundry with electricity. He was by no means a newcomer upon the scene as he had been generating his own electricity from water power for his own industrial purposes since 1888. He consented to put in a bid which resulted in securing a contract for lighting the Village of Medina. On November 11, 1897 all the necessary wiring was installed and A. L. Swett illuminated Medina for the first time. From this point on the name A. L. Swett and electric generation in Medina became synonymous. Through his untiring efforts, great foresight and achievements Medina developed into a modern industrial center of the early 20th Century.