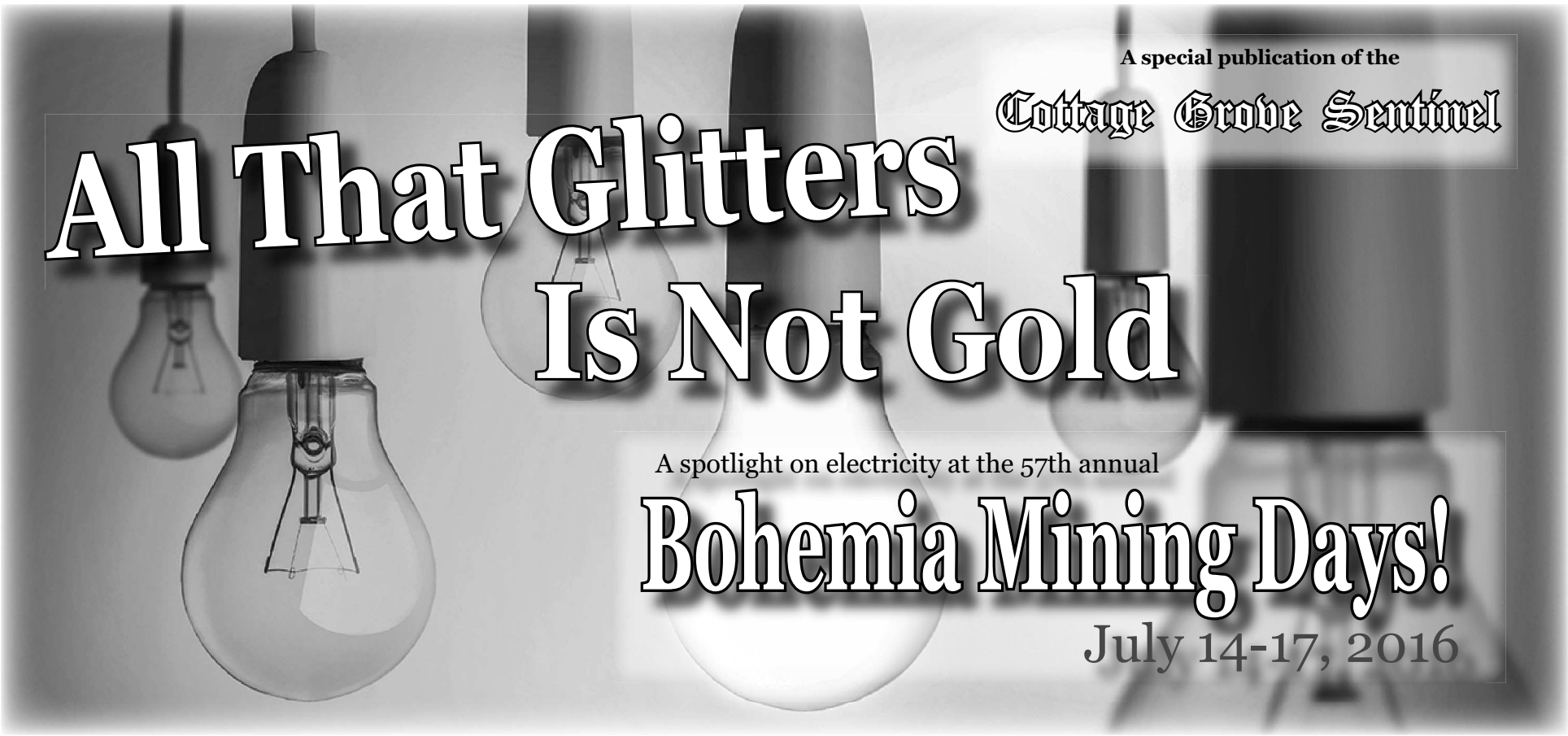
BOHEMIA NUGGET

Devoted to the Mining, Lumbering, and Farming Interests of this Community, to Good Government, and Hustling for a Grub Stake



A special publication of the

Cottage Grove Sentinel

All That Glitters Is Not Gold

A spotlight on electricity at the 57th annual

Bohemia Mining Days!

July 14-17, 2016

By Cindy Weeldreyer

"All that glitters...is not gold!" is the theme of the 57th annual Bohemia Mining Days festival. It highlights the unique adventure of a young Cottage Grove man who visited the 1893 Chicago World's Fair near the end of its six-month run. He learned enough about the concept of electricity to return home with a big dream to establish the first electric company here in 1895.

In the summer of 1893, Andrew "Andy" Nelson was a 26-year-old jack-of-all-trades, working as the steam engineer at the Annie Mine. He had many talents: tinsmith (sheet metal worker), carpenter, woodworker and musician. He worked well with his hands and was fascinated with the work Thomas Edison and Nikola Tesla were doing with electricity.

He was, in his day, what we call a "geek" in ours. He likely had a subscription to Scientific American and read each issue cover-to-cover. That year the magazine reported frequently on the progress of the World Columbian Exposition in Chicago, a tremendous feat of engineering and design on a massive scale that was unprecedented before or since. (To learn more watch the YouTube documentary "EXPO Magic of the White City" narrated by Gene Wilder.)

Andy was born on July 24, 1866, in Gordonsville, Minnesota. His family said he came to Oregon in 1889 for no other reason than to see the country. He had no particular reason for coming to Cottage Grove but evidently liked what he saw. He worked as a railroad telegrapher at Comstock, then as a tinsmith at S. R. Piper's hardware store before becoming the Annie Mine's steam engineer.

The Chicago World's Fair seemed like a good reason to plan a long winter visit with his extended family back in Minnesota. On the way, he'd stop over in Chicago and spend a few days exploring the much-hyped event, to get a glimpse of America's future in the 20th Century. The Eugene City Guard reported that on September 30, "Mr. Andrew Nelson, one of Cottage Grove's handsome and popular young men, left for his native heath of Gordonsville, Minnesota, Monday, to spend the winter with relatives and friends."

To commemorate the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' first voyage to the New World, the United States held the World's Columbian Exposition, also known as The Chicago World's Fair, between May 1, 1893 and Oct. 30, 1893. The White City, as the press nicknamed it, was built next to Lake Michigan on a 600-acre fairground with 200 buildings exhibiting art, food, technological advances and entertainment. It was a grand showcase that put science in the forefront with unbelievable and revolutionary inventions along with a beautifully designed venue that solidified Chicago as a major U.S. city.

It was the fifteenth such exposition in the world and only the second in the United States. From the beginning it was designed to be the fair to end all fairs – and that goal was certainly achieved. It had the biggest buildings in the world at that time. It also featured the world's first Ferris wheel that towered over the fairgrounds and held 2000 riders at a time.

An estimated one in four Americans visited the Columbian Exposition in the six months the White City existed. Andy was one of those 26 million fair visitors. He arrived there determined to learn all he could about electricity so he could return to his adopted town and set up a generating plant to provide the electrical power only large cities had at the time.

Growing up in the tiny towns of Gordonsville and Cottage Grove, no doubt Andy was mesmerized by the sheer size and scope of the fair. He likely spent most of his time in the

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