

Your guide to all things BMD!

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“A. Nelson was granted a 20-year franchise for electric lights about two months ago for the towns of Cottage Grove and Lemati. He has finished his work and the plant started up last night. The light gives satisfaction. The plant will run until midnight until further notice.”

— Eugene City Guard
Jan. 4, 1896

GOLD

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Electricity Building and the Machinery Building scrutinizing each machine, talking to engineers and inventors, and learning all he could to fuel his big dream.

After spending the winter with his Minnesota relatives, in 1894, Andy returned to Cottage Grove. He most likely went back to the Annie Mine to earn the money he needed to buy the equipment and supplies to generate electricity for the still-small frontier towns of Cottage Grove and Lemati. His first task was to speak with Mr. Stone, the owner of the local flour mill. The flour mill was a very important place when white settlers began arriving to establish farms in this fertile river valley. They would bring wagonloads of sacked wheat to the mill in exchange for a winter's supply of flour.

The mill also shipped many loads to the Bohemia Mines to provide food for the miners. Residents and local stores were also customers of the mill's products.

The local history book, *Golden Was the Past, 1850-1970*, notes the mill was built in 1857. It faced South River Road on a millrace, a side channel diverting water from the river to create a swift current of water to drive the mill wheel. The millrace began above the rapids by the Swinging Bridge near where the Chambers Covered Railroad Bridge is today. It was lined with flowers and was one of Cottage Grove's beauty spots.

The millrace paralleled South River Road to the mill pond that was held back by gates. The water spilled onto the big waterwheel that turned the flour mill's machinery before it dumped the water into Silk Creek and

back into the Coast Fork.

Today, the Old Mill Farm Store on South River Road still stands next to Silk Creek and across from the Dr. Snapp House museum. It is the oldest continuously operating business in town. (You'll see all these locations when you hop on the BMD Express Time Traveling Train and take a stroll along River Road.)

The Nov. 9, 1895 issue of the Cottage Grove-Lemati Leader reported “A. Nelson is now busy pushing forward the electric light business. He has a building up adjoining Mr. Stone's mill in Cottage Grove, where he will secure power for running the electric plant. He expects 80 good sized trees in Saturday, which he will place in Lemati and Cottage Grove for general lighting up.”

Two months later, the Jan. 4, 1896 issue of the Eugene City Guard report-

ed, “A. Nelson was granted a 20-year franchise for electric lights about two months ago for the towns of Cottage Grove and Lemati. He has finished his work and the plant started up last night. The light gives satisfaction. The plant will run until midnight until further notice.”

Andy Nelson's granddaughter, Larzana Nelson, wrote the *Golden Was the Past* chapter on “Mr. Nelson's Light Plant.” It describes how her grandfather did all that he said he would do. He bought an Edison dynamo and belted it up to the flour mill's waterwheel. He set poles around town, strung the wires and billed the customers 50 cents a month per lamp, and the city paid \$30 a month for street lights.