

## GOLD

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The waterwheel ran the mill in the daytime, the electric light generator at night, so electricity was available only from dusk until 10 o'clock.

Later that was extended until midnight. At first there were only 50 lights and no appliances of any kind – not even irons. Business rapidly outgrew the capacity of the first dynamo, so he added a larger one.

The Nov. 21, 1896 issue of the Eugene City Guard reported, "Andy Nelson, owner of the electric light plant, is making arrangements to increase the power of his plant and improve the light. Another dynamo will be put in to be used exclusively for street lighting purposes and the present one to be used exclusively for interior lighting. The plant will be moved from its present

site and a new one built on the bank of the river some distance below Main Street (122 N. River Rd). The building is now underway and the change will take place soon. Back water interfered with the water wheel at the electric light plant here Sunday night and the people had to use lamps and the streets remained in darkness."

Tragedy was no stranger in Andy's life. While working at the Piper Hardware Store he fell in love with the boss's daughter, Nola C. Piper. He was just 36-years old when she died in 1902, and he never remarried. They had one child, Ray Nelson.

On Nov. 1, 1900, his new steam plant burned down and he didn't rebuild it. In frustration he said, "Every time I start to make money the city has grown and I have to buy a

bigger engine and a bigger dynamo." He sold his franchise to W.H. Abrams, who worked with Mr. G.H. Stone, the flour mill owner, to furnish the building and adequate water supply for a turbine water wheel for a new light plant. After purchasing Andy's franchise, Mr. Abrams moved it after a few months to the railroad track beside the Brown Sawmill. There, slabs from the mill were used to fire a boiler for a 75-hp Corliss steam engine to power the plant. Visitors were impressed by the 10-foot high flywheel that ran the generator. At that time a \$1 monthly flat rate was charged for lights and \$3 per month for an iron. Many housewives didn't list their irons with the light company, and at about 10 o'clock in the morning the steam engine would begin to pull down. The

owner would climb into his automobile and start checking houses. The irons were hidden, and the engine would perk up again.

Electrical power was supplied by this plant until it burned down about 1927. On July 27, 1935, Andrew Nelson's life ended quite suddenly and unexpectedly at the age of 69 in an industrial accident at the W.A. Woodard Lumber Company, where he worked as an electrician. His body was found on the ground outside of the main building of the re-manufacturing plant. He was doing electrical work and had to reach through the window and fell 20 feet to his death. His son, Ray, followed his father into the electricity business, and by the mid-20th century earned the nickname "Radio Ray" as the sole proprietor of Nelson Electric. Ray

was a popular local businessman who had a passion for preserving Cottage Grove's unique and colorful history. He was one of the chief organizers of the wildly successful centennial observance of Oregon Statehood in 1959. He was a founding member of the Prospector & Golddiggers Club, which established the Bohemia Mining Days Festival. Today, we fondly refer to Ray Nelson as the "Father of BMD".

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