

# EARLY HISTORY OF POWER CO. IS THRILLING

## Power Development on the Rogue River Reads Like a Story Book—First Hydro-Electric Plant Established Here Only 25 Years Ago.

(By Horace Ironsley)  
The history of electric development in southern Oregon reads like a story book. Though occupying but a relatively short space of the time well within the memory of most local residents today, this development has made gigantic strides, not only keeping abreast of the remarkable growth of this territory, but also anticipating future needs well in advance of the demand. This progress has been due to the foresight and private initiative of a few progressive men of vision. The history of electric power development in southern Oregon

is indeed an interesting story, starting with the installation of the first small hydro-electric plant at Gold Ray in 1903 and ending with the construction of Prospect No. 2, the first hydro-electric plant in the entire state. When one considers the fact that all of this progress has been made in less than a quarter century, it stands out as a truly remarkable achievement. The history of this unprecedented growth is a story of numerous little power enterprises throughout southern Oregon and northern California that in 1903 owned a mine, which property was bought by Dr. Ray, in order to get the power site. A dam—the present Gold Ray dam—was built in 1903, also the power house, and in 1904 the first electricity was transmitted from this plant. Dr. Ray organized the Condon Water and Power company to operate this enterprise. It is interesting to note that the original intention was to construct the power plant some three-quarters of a mile further down stream where a 49-foot head, instead of a 23-foot head could have been obtained. The original unit consisted of two vertical 50-foot turbines, in what was known as Gold Ray plant No. 1. A good many difficulties were experienced in the construction of this plant, as is true with practically all of the old pioneer plants. Machinery was transported by rail

to a point near the plant on the opposite side of the river and from that point was transported to the plant by barge on the pond formed by the dam. Working conditions were none too good. At the beginning of the job, laborers received \$1.50 a day for a 12-hour day, working seven days a week. Later this was raised to \$2.00 a day, and finally the hours were cut to 8 hours a day. The town of Tolo was, in those days, a thriving village, having a payroll of some \$600 a day, this payroll being supplied mostly by the brick and tile factory, the lumber mill and the rock quarry being operated by the Rays. It is of interest to note that all of the rock in the Copco general office building in this city, which was constructed about 1910, was taken from this rock quarry.

### Medford Connected in 1904.

The original unit at Gold Ray soon became inadequate and in 1905 and 1906 two new generators of 150 h. p. capacity each were installed. Lines were built into Medford and Grants Pass and other points. Medford was connected in December, 1904; Jacksonville in January, 1905; Gold Hill and Grants Pass in June, 1905 and Ashland in September, 1905. Even with the additional 1905 and 1906 two new generators the Gold Ray plant was overlooked and it became necessary to build a new plant. The prospect site was selected and the Prospect Construction company was incorporated for the purpose of doing this construction work. A temporary plant was installed above the present Prospect plant at approximately the location of the present concrete highway bridge, the purpose of this plant being to supply power for construction purposes. In those days it was a day's trip from Medford to Prospect; one left Medford at 8 o'clock in the morning by rail and traveled 30 miles to Derby over the P. & E. railroad, reaching Derby at about 11 in the morning. Lunch was served at Derby and immediately after lunch the stage trip from Derby to Prospect was begun. This was a 22-mile trip and ended at Prospect about 6 in the evening. The stage made two round trips a day from Prospect to Derby, leaving Prospect in the morning and traveling to Derby by way of the road along the north side of the river. The return trip in the afternoon was made by way of the road along the south side of the river.

The present bridge at McLeod was constructed primarily for the purpose of transporting machinery to the Prospect job. All machinery and other equipment for the job was hauled in by team and wagon. The largest piece of machinery, the motor, was transported from Derby to Prospect in a specially constructed wagon, the wheels of which were cut from the root of a tree, 36 feet in diameter. Each wheel was 14 inches thick and was steel banded. Thirty-two horses were required to pull this wagon and as the trip was made during the winter, most part of the road, in January, 1912, the roads were bottomless and on several occasions the wagon would travel less than half a mile a day. In spite of such inadequate transportation facilities and numerous other heart-breaking handicaps, work was carried on day after day and the plant was finally completed and put into operation on February 29, 1912. This was the first Prospect plant, which is now known as Prospect No. 1. In connection with the new plant a high tension line was built from Prospect to Gold Ray in 1911. This was the first 60,000-volt line on the Copco system.

All property, franchises and contracts of the Condon organization were transferred to the Rogue River Electric company in 1907, which company became a part of Copco at the same time the Rogue River Electric Power and Light company die—when the California Oregon Power company was incorporated. Records give January 1, 1912, as the date of the purchase. From that year until 1915 development of what is known as the Rogue River division included the construction of numerous substations, distribution systems and the purchase of others.

### Copco No. 1 Built in 1916.

The reorganization of the financial set-up of the company in 1920; the construction of Copco No. 1 dam and generating plant, completed in 1916; the raising of this dam and installation of a second unit, in 1922; the interconnection contracts made possible through the increased generating capacity of the company; the purchase of the physical properties of the Douglas County Light and Water company (the Umpqua Division) in 1923—these are among the outstanding factors in the Copco of today. To them, and a vast amount of lesser development, is Copco's present prosperous condition largely due.

From 1923 to 1928 many other important projects have been completed, including the construction of the new East Side plant in Klamath Falls, the building of many miles of high tension transmission lines and distribution lines, and the construction of the Copco No. 1 plant on the Klamath river

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