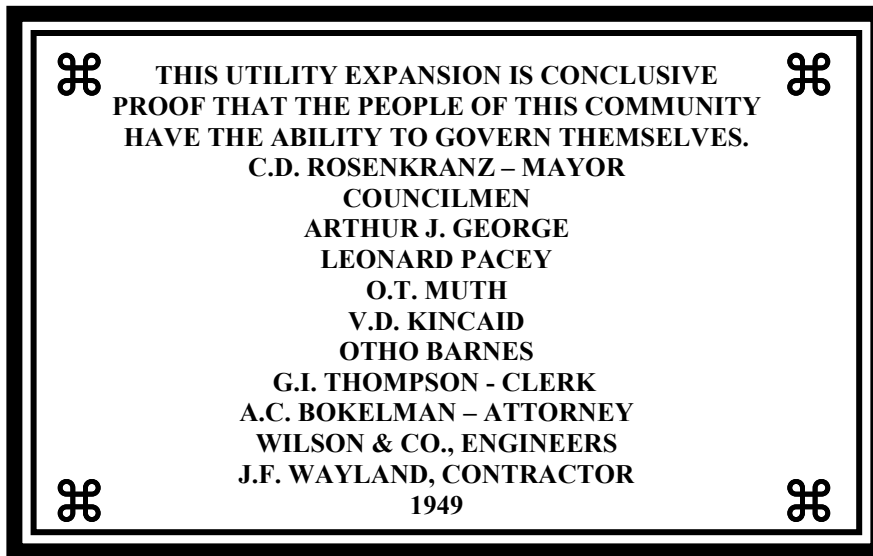


# **HISTORY OF THE WASHINGTON MUNICIPAL POWER PLANT**

**RESEARCHED BY WASHINGTON POWER PLANT EMPLOYEES,  
THE WASHINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND MUSEUM AND  
MARILYN BRUNGARDT.**

**RESOURCES:  
CITY OF WASHINGTON COUNCIL MINUTES AND DOCUMENTS, THE  
WASHINGTON COUNTY REGISTER AND THE WASHINGTON COUNTY  
NEWS.**

**WRITTEN BY  
MARY LECK  
1999**



FROM THE PLAQUE COMMEMORATING THE 1949 EXPANSION.

The Washington Municipal Light Plant officially began operating on April 29, 1938. This excerpt from the Washington County Register documented the event.

‘The new municipal light plant began operation here Thursday evening, April 29, announcing the fact by sounding the fire siren when the lights were officially turned on. The new white way on Main Street was the center of attraction, many local citizens driving down town that evening to see how the local plant functioned here. Employees of the new plant have been busy this week getting lights installed in as many homes as possible and Sup. Callaway says that meters will be installed and homes wired as rapidly as it can be done. The final installation of machinery etc. was completed at the plant last week by Mr. Upright and Mr. Chrchill of the Fairbanks Morse Co. Harry Gorsuch of Pattensburg, Mo. has been hired as engineer and Bob Meyers of this city is student engineer.’

Electric lights first came to Washington in 1887 but the power to operate those lights had to be purchased first, from a private company, and later from a large utility, the Kansas Power Company.

During the January 10, 1936 meeting of the Washington City Council a motion was passed that would give Washington its own source of electric power. The meeting was presided over by Mayor A.N. Holloway, and attended by councilmen E.A. Ward, A.G. Nims, John J. Barley, Lester E. Jones and Fred A. Diedrichs, and city attorney F.R. Lobaugh.

The following action was taken:

‘It is moved, seconded and carried that E.T. Archer & Co. be and they are hereby directed to prepare for and submit to said governing body of said City plans and specifications for the proposed Electric Light and Power Plant and Electric Distribution System, including all building, machinery, equipment and appurtenances, as set forth in the revised preliminary estimates.’

The estimate from E.T. Archer & Co. totaled \$88,000 and included everything from the building and engines to the wire and lamps for the streetlights.

On May 13, 1936 the city council passed an ordinance providing for the issuance of bonds to fund the project and on August 5, 1937 the council voted to advertise for sealed bids for the building and construction of the plant.

On September 1, 1937 the council awarded the contract for the building to J.F. Wayland Bridge Company of Washington, Ks. for \$15,915.00. The specifications called for a 52’8” by 51’5” brick building, plumbing, wiring and heating system, machinery and equipment foundations, cooling tower concrete basin, cistern, drains, etc. Fairbanks Morse & Co. were awarded the contract for power plant equipment including a 300 H.P. and 150 H.P. engine with generators and the distribution system at a cost of \$65,494.40. Sangamo Electric Co., Springfield Illinois was given the contract for 120 electric meters for \$1,015.00 and agreed to furnish the city with any additional meters for one year at the contract price.

As the city council proceeded with the plans for the power plant not all the citizens of Washington were in favor of the project. A local battle between community members supporting or opposing the new municipal light plant was so intense that the Washington County Register, the local weekly newspaper, did not even make mention of the building when it was erected. There were several strong articles and letters to the editor opposing the project and the power plant was the main issue during the April 1937 election.

The controversy over the power plant was not restricted to the citizens of Washington. The minutes from the September 20, 1937 meeting of the Washington City Council contain the following excerpt:

'It is moved, seconded and carried that the City Attorney be instructed to make an investigation regarding the feasibility of collecting rental from the Kansas Power Company for their poles and lines since the expiration of their franchise, and further to make investigation relative to the collections of damages caused by said Kansas Power Company in connection with the construction of the Power Plant and Distributing System being built by the City.'

The document doesn't specify what damages were incurred but the Kansas Power Company apparently tried to fight the city with court action and lost. Washington was free to proceed with the power plant project.

In early 1938 the local newspaper began reporting on the approaching completion of the power plant.

'February 25, 1938: Two large engines and some other equipment for the new municipal light plant arrived in Washington the latter part of last week and were being moved to the new building the middle of this week.

The equipment for the new plant, including generators and engines came in over the Missouri Pacific Railroad and R. R. Hansen agent, reports that one car weighed 37,750 pounds, the other car 56,150 pounds.

March 25, 1938: As the municipal light plant nears completion, the city is making arrangements to service its patrons. Within the next week or so, someone will call at your door to give you an opportunity to sign a card asking for service.'

By April 1 of that year 200 customers had signed up and by September 17, 1938 over 500 meters were installed.

When the power plant first went online it generated electricity with two Fairbanks Morse diesel engines. The number one unit was a 300 H.P., 4 cyl., 32E14 and before it's retirement in 1963 it had operated over 73,000 hours. The number two unit was a 150 H.P., 2 cyl, 32E14 and was retired on March 24, 1958 having operated 50,734 hours and produced 2,982,310 KW.

As electrical use became more popular and electrical appliances made everyday life easier the demand for electricity increased. By July of 1940 the city of Washington conducted a customer survey. The city had 373 "A" residential customers, 59 classified as "B" residence with range, 126 "C" commercial and 24 "D" power.

This increased demand led Mayor A.W. Soller, Councilmen Carl Rosenkranz, Virgil Dahl, O.T. Muth and Robert E. King to pass a resolution at the September 11, 1941 city council meeting that would allow the city to purchase additional generating equipment. The number three unit was a Fairbanks Morse 375 H.P., 5 cyl 32E14 diesel engine. The engine, generator and auxiliary equipment was purchased for \$26,800.00 and was in operation from 1942 until 1962.

During the war years even the power plant was issued fuel oil coupons from the local rationing board. These coupons ranged from 25 to 100 gallons each.

In late 1948 the city again felt the need to increase their generating capacity. The council voted to purchase the number four unit, a 520 H.P. 8 cyl., 31AD8-1/2 dual fuel engine. The dual fuel unit's ability to run on diesel or natural gas meant the plant was able to lower it's production costs as natural gas was more economical than diesel. Operating with natural gas wasn't without hazards as an entry in the maintenance log details:

‘Monday November 9, 1953. We had a gas explosion in #4. The gas leaked out of the flange that goes to the gas header. The engine was not hurt only the outside cover.’

The number four unit would begin operating in 1949 when the peak load for that year was 510KW. It would continue to generate electricity for the community into the 1960’s.

The addition of the number four unit also required an expansion of the existing building. There would be three such expansions of the plant over the years.

The number five unit, a Fairbanks Morse 960 H.P. model 38, 6 cyl., dual fuel engine was added in 1953 at a cost of \$74,655. Unit number five was started at 2:00 p.m. August 10, 1953 and is still in operation today.

In 1957 the city council voted to replace the number two unit, the old two cylinder Fairbanks Morse, with a Superior White 6 cyl., Model 80-GDSX-6 turbocharged, dual fuel engine. This larger newer engine would be able to produce 10 times the KW as the old unit.

The cost of the new engine which included installation, removal of the old unit, generator and auxiliary equipment came to \$140,000.

To install the unit it was necessary to knock out the wall between the upper and lower windows on the east side of the plant. The engine was then moved into place on wooden rollers. It still operates today as the power plant’s number two unit.

In 1962 the council decided to replace the old number one unit with a new Nordberg supairthermal 4 stroke, 8 cyl., turbocharged, dual fuel engine with a 13-1/2 bore, 16-1/2 stroke, 1765 H.P. this engine is rated at 1250 KW. The new engine was built specially for the city of Washington by the Nordberg Manufacturing Co., St. Louis, Mo. At a cost of \$174,145. Installed in 1963, unit number one is still in operation.

The addition of a second Nordberg engine was approved in 1966 at a time when the city’s peak load had reached 2000KW. This addition included expansion of the existing building in order to house the new number six unit. The city contract with the Nordberg Manufacturing Co. for a Nordberg Supairthermal, turbocharged, 8 cyl., 4 stroke, dual fuel, 2160 H.P. engine rated at 1540 KW. The cost of the engine which included installation and auxiliary equipment was \$240,100. The cost of the building addition, complete with electric hoist was \$11,358. The number six unit was originally installed in a missile silo before returning to the factory for a complete rebuild. Unit number six began operating in 1967 and is still in use today.

A new electric switch hoard for the plant was purchased in 1968 from Trans-American Constructors, Inc., of Salina Kansas at a cost of \$61,017.

In 1971 the city council submitted a letter of intention to interconnect its electric energy system with West Plains Energy. In order to interconnect with West Plains Energy the city purchased a 34.5 KV tie equipment from Trans-American Constructors, Inc., of Salina Kansas for \$83,961.

The contract with West Plains Energy would allow the city to purchase excess power from West Plains Energy. The purchase of this excess power during months when the demand is low allows Washington to keep the electrical rates charged to the city’s customers low.

During the summer months when demand is high and excess power from West Plains Energy is no longer available the Washington Power Plant goes online to service the electrical needs of the city’s customers.

Over the years the original contract with West Plains Energy has undergone some changes. In 1998 Washington signed a new contract with West Plains Energy whereby the Washington would sell some of the city's excess power generated at the municipal power plant to West Plains Energy.

During the record breaking heat of the summer of 1998 many businesses and manufacturing plants in Kansas were asked to shut down because of a shortage of electricity. The Washington Municipal Power Plant was able to meet a new local record demand of 3800 KWH and sell additional electricity to the West Plains Energy system.

Unit number seven was added to the plant in June of 1976. The Fairbanks Morse Model 38D-1/8, 10 cyl., 2 stroke, 1600 H. p. diesel engine, rated at 1136KW was purchased from J.&M. Engineering Co., Kansas City, Kansas through a lease purchase agreement for \$160,000. The new unit had been previously in operation for a telephone company and was rebuilt prior to its sale to the city. The number seven unit is still in operation in Washington.

In 1978 the city council voted to replace the old number three unit with a rebuilt Fairbanks Morse 1280 H.P. 720 RPM, 8 cyl., Model 38D8-1/8, dual fuel engine rated at 900 KW. The city entered into a rental agreement with J.&M. Engineering Co. that would provide the city with the engine, accessories and services for the cost of \$152,915. The city agreed to make rental payments to J.&M. Engineering as follows:

\$25,000 on execution of rental agreement, \$31,615 on monthly estimates during installation period based on materials furnished and work accomplished, \$6,300 on completion of installation and testing, the remaining \$90,000 is to be paid in 36 consecutive equal monthly payments of \$2,500 each beginning August 15, 1980 and extending through July 15, 1983 and upon completion of the above rental schedule, the city may take title to said equipment for \$1.

Unit number three is still in operation at the Washington Municipal power plant.

On July 1, 1985 the Washington City Council authorized Mayor Donald Darby to sign a contract with P.B. Contractors of Goodland, Kansas that would allow the city to purchase an additional engine and construct a building addition to house the new unit.

The new number 4 unit is a 1950 Nordberg 8 cyl., 2 stroke, dual fuel, 3400 H.P. engine is rated at 2635 KW. The largest engine to be installed at the power plant. Number four has 21" pistons, 31" stroke and the rods measure 7". The fly wheel weighs 47,000 pounds.

Unit number four was hauled piece by piece from Denton, Texas and has an Allis Chalmers generator.

Over the years the Municipal Power Plant has grown and adapted to meet the needs of its customers. Engine overhauls and improvements to the cooling and other auxiliary systems continue. Total horsepower of the seven engines is 12,588, capable of generating a maximum output of 9136KW.

## **Employees**

Eugene Callaway, plant supervisor, April 1938–August 1948

Harry Gorsuch, April 1938-April 1941

Robert Meyer, April 1938-October 1942

Wallace Laxton, April 1941-January 1944

R.B. Coffin, August 1942-July 1948

Roy Evans, July 1943-September 1953

Dwayne Taylor, January 1944-June 1944

Floyd Fletcher, June 1944-?

Larry Longwell, June 1948-July 1950

George Cerveny, July 1948-September 1951  
Harry Justis, plant supervisor, August 1948-?  
Art Malsbury, June 1950-?  
Earl Rutherford, September 5, 1951-August 1954  
J.W. (Red) Reier, August 9, 1953-November 22, 1958  
Emmett Yound, August 15, 1954-May 1955  
Elmer Zabokrtsky 1955-1957  
Fred Perkins, April 15, 1958-April 1, 1968, plant supervisor April 1, 1968-October 7, 1977  
Jess Johnson, November 24, 1958-November 1, 1968  
Francis Uhlrich, November 5, 1962-June 1, 1976  
Vernon Kollie, October 16, 1964-November 1, 1982  
James Svanda, March 1, 1966-September 1, 1969  
Gilbert Tegethoff, February 15, 1968-August 2, 1972, November 6, 1978-September 30, 1980  
Otis Simnitt, November 6, 1968-June 1, 1975  
Clarence Smith, April 1, 1969-April 3, 1991  
William Skrabal, April 15, 1970-July 31, 1972  
Donald Mullen, September 18, 1972-November 6, 1972  
Ivan Hinkle, November 27, 1972-October 7, 1977, Plant supervisor, October 8, 1977-January 1993  
Francis Linenberger, February 26, 1973-August 27, 1973  
David Rowland, August 27, 1973-May 1, 1977  
Mike Lester, March 8, 1976-November 1, 1977  
Charles Kemp, April 4, 1977-April 30, 1978  
Robert Marsteller, November 1, 1977-January 31, 1994  
Raymond Babcock, April 26, 1978-March 5, 1996  
Kermit Hanshaw, November 1980-  
Glenn Mills, November 15, 1982-January 31, 1993, plant supervisor February 1, 1993-February 28, 2003  
Robert Walter, April 17, 1991-April 14, 1994  
Terry Morse, April 22, 1991-Power Plant Supervisor March, 1 2003-May 18, 2007  
Kevin Elder, June 1 1993-January 9, 1998  
Melvin Brungardt, May 9, 1994-Retired June 29, 2007  
Greg Metz, April 21, 1996-transferred to street March 9, 1998  
Mary Leck, November 6, 1997, Power Plant Supervisor May 21, 2007  
Tim Pinnick, January 31, 1998-transferred to street November, 29 2004  
Tom Shannon, April 24, 2000; Power Plant Asst. Supervisor March, 1 2003-May 18, 2007  
Bill Kern, February 10, 2003-  
Tom Zabokrtsky, October 21, 2004-transferred to water dept. April 16, 2007  
Changed from 24/7 operation to M-F, 8-5 April 16, 2007  
Dennis Stigge, August 20, 2007, transferred to water dept. October 6, 2008