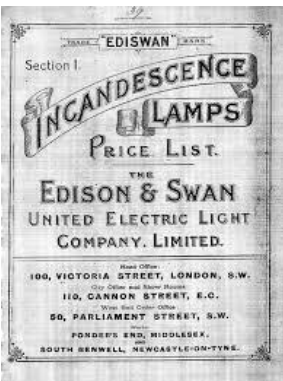


Madeira: *Electrified* by Carol (Klenk) Heck

As you may know, Madeira didn't always have electricity. The early pioneers date back to about the mid 1790's, when land was purchased from John Cleves Symmes. In 1837, The Cincinnati Gas, Light and Coke Company began an incorporation charter for the purposes of gas-powered street lamps and gas heat for their main customers in downtown Cincinnati. Electricity came to Cincinnati around 1880, shortly after Thomas Edison and Joseph Swan collaborated to form The Ediswan Company. Together they produced practical electric light bulbs and the popularity grew quickly nationwide to light streets and buildings with electrical power. By 1883 small electrical generating companies sprang up all around Hamilton County, which allowed more people to have access to electricity.



Electricity came to Madeira in 1905 as The Interurban Cincinnati & Columbus (C & C) Traction Line started its "Swing Line" electric commuter train. The building which still stands today, at 6912 Miami Avenue, was the



substation for this electric power.

Madeira Village was incorporated in 1910 with a population of five hundred. It wasn't until 1910-11 that The Interurban Electric Light and Power Company of Norwood, Ohio was contracted to erect and maintain poles, wires, cables, conduits, and all other apparatus and appliances necessary in the streets of The Village of Madeira. Service was extended to residents who got electric power for purposes of light and all other uses. This contract was for ten years. The ordinance was passed January 3, 1911 and signed by Samuel K. Druce, Madeira's first Mayor and President of Council. There is a copy of this contract in the archives of The Madeira Historical Society.

The contract provided for thirty-five or more electric street lamps to be installed for lighting of the streets. The price was set as quarterly payments of \$25.00 per lamp, per year. The cost set forth in the contract was 8 cents per kilowatt and remained the same price for the entire ten years. The Interurban Company furnished electricity for street lights as well as all public buildings, churches, stations, and the depot.



Residents were also charged 8 cents per kilowatt with a discount of 5% for prompt payments. However, if the usage was 12 kilowatts or less in any one month, there would be a \$1.00 maintenance charge assessed, minus any discount. Can anyone today imagine only using 12 kilowatts, or less, of electricity in a month's time? Today's power charges are almost as complicated as these were more than 100 years ago.

But, here's the big difference. When the last C & C Traction Car of the day pulled into the station, the workers went home, and the electric power in Madeira was shut off. The contract says the hours of furnishing electricity for the village would be for "the entire day". But they really meant from 4:30 in the morning until 11:30 at night. That's a different concept of what we think of now as "the entire day"!

There were two clauses in this contract: 1.) that if another village or municipality wanted electricity from Interurban beyond 11:30 PM, then Madeira's service would be extended the same, but not beyond 1:30 AM.

And, 2.) if the C & C Traction Line extended its train schedules past 11:30 PM., then the agreement for power would extend simultaneously, but still no later than 1:30 AM.

For residential hook-ups, The Interurban Electric Light and Power Company's duties included erecting poles, installing wires, making all connections from the street wires to the houses, supplying the meter and maintenance of their equipment. If a house was located farther than 150 feet from the street, additional costs were negotiated.



You might ask, "How could the power be turned off at night? What about the refrigerators?" This was before refrigerators. The first electric refrigerators for consumers were made popular a few years later around 1913. Before that, Madeira, like other communities, had an ice house which sold large blocks of ice. Homeowners would put the ice blocks in their ice boxes or window boxes to keep foods relatively cool. An ice box was an insulated box with a few shelves in it. A window box protruded out from the house. (Probably only useful in the winter months.) When the ice melted, and they had a need for it, more ice would have to be purchased. Madeira's ice house was located on the north side of the Traction Building. You might be curious as to how ice could have been made if there were no freezers or refrigerators. I know that it was one of my questions. Blocks of ice and snow were cut from frozen lakes and wrapped in sawdust and straw then stored close together in underground basements or root cellars. It could last like that for over a year with only a small amount of melting. If you remember around February this year, Cincinnati had lots of ice and snow that in the past would have been harvested to build up the reserves for ice houses. Instead, today, we salt and plow it all away.

The C & C Traction Line only ran until December 1919. However, The Interurban Company had to maintain electric service to Madeira until October 1920, when Madeira signed a new contract with The Union Gas and Electric Company.

Over the many years, smaller electric companies around Cincinnati were eventually bought out, and today we have one big Duke Energy Company, that owns and can supply all our electricity and gas. Let us ponder for a while how electricity has made this remarkable difference in our lives. So often we take things for granted. And let us reflect on the notion that everybody has family members who lived through times without electricity.

Photos courtesy of online research, Madeira Historical Society, and Carol (Klenk) Heck.

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Also see, "Swinging on the Swing Line"