

Local Electric History

1900 Originated at the site of Junction Flour Mill to provide water power for lights, replacing gas lamps. F. Johnson, A. Schrew and H. Sterling were the first Plant Superintendents.

1900 - 1904 Additional water power generators were added. Total capacity was 250 Kilowatts for light and power from upper and lower dams.

1902 - 1936 E.E. Buck served as Superintendent of the plant.

1923 A 125 kilowatt diesel engine was installed.

1929 A 400 kilowatt diesel engine was installed.

1936 - 1966 Harry Ostness served as Plant Superintendent.

1941 A 517 kilowatt diesel engine was installed.

1947 A 315 kilowatt water engine was installed.

1948 A 1,125 kilowatt diesel engine was installed. A contract for partial power supply was entered into with Dairyland Power (DPC).

1965 A 2,050 kilowatt dual fuel and 2,665 kilowatt diesel engines were installed.

Total capacity in 1965:

315 Kilowatts - Water Power
4,707 Kilowatts - Diesel Power
2,050 Kilowatts - Gas/Diesel Power
7,500 Kilowatts - Purchased Power
14,257 Total Power



1966 - 1980 George Thoen served as Plant Superintendent.

1972 A 5,600 kilowatt dual fuel engine installed. New distribution substation was built at the plant site. A distribution upgrade was started to increase from 4.16KV to 12.47KV.

1977 A new substation was built for a tie to NSP's 115KV transmission system for voltage support.

1980 - 2001 Neil Williams served as Power Plant Superintendent.

1980 River Falls joined WPPI Energy (formerly Wisconsin Public Power Inc), a municipal joint action agency.

1982 River Falls signed a power supply contract with NSP and assigned the contract to WPPI. All Dairyland Power (DPC) owned equipment at the plant was purchased by NSP and River Falls Utility, ending the agreement with DPC. This ended a 34-year relationship between River Falls and the REA.

1989 WPPI converted the River Falls power contract to partial requirement status with NSP. River Falls began to receive capacity payment for generating units. River Falls signed an "All Requirements" contract with WPPI. River Falls and Kaukauna power plant operators began scheduling power purchases from several sources for WPPI System members.

1991 WPPI's dispatch center began operation and took over scheduling duties for WPPI member loads. WPPI membership purchased 110 megawatts of power from Minnesota Power & Light's Clay Boswell Power Plant at Grand Rapids, Minnesota. This power plant now serves the River Falls load. At times when the 110 megawatt plant is out of service, the River Falls Power Plant can be called on to generate.

1994 Unit # 5 was updated and equipped with a dual fuel system. This project created additional revenues from WPPI and benefited River Falls customers.

1998 Two used diesel generating units were purchased from the Massachusetts Electric Company in Nantucket, MA. The units were moved to River Falls and converted to dual fuel. The plant was expanded to accommodate the new engines, as well as an updated control room and offices.

1999 Three older diesel generating units were removed from the plant. These units served the system from 1929 to 1999. These units fired only on diesel fuel and were much less economical to operate than the dual fuel units that replaced them. One of the converted Nantucket engines was put in service in 1999.

2000 The second converted Nantucket engine was put in service. The total plant generating capacity will be increased to 20,000 kilowatts with the addition of the two dual fuel units. The units will create new revenues to the utility from WPPI and will benefit customers of River Falls Municipal Utility for many years to come.

2002 Construction of the North Substation and additional feeders started.

2004 North Substation was energized during the summer months, greatly improving system reliability.

2005 WPPI Energy, including River Falls, was required to begin operating under the Midwest Independent System Operator market, necessitating all generation be bid into the market a day in advance and in real time. As a result of this new structure and excess supply capacity in the market, diesel and dual fuel reciprocating engines became less valuable, including those in River Falls.

Over recent years, Wisconsin's electric transmission system has improved tremendously allowing the option to purchase generation out of state at a lower market cost. With these improvements, River Falls is now served by three major transmission sources, minimizing the need to generate locally in the case of a catastrophic event.

2007 River Falls was last called upon to generate in December, despite the fact that requests to generate were higher than normal that year.

2010 Celebrated the milestone of providing municipally owned power to the community for the last 110 years. On September 24, 2010, WPPI provided notice of termination of the generation output agreement to be effective in 2015. Value has declined considerably due to current market pricing and for the long term outlook of the market. In addition to the contract termination, newly proposed national guidelines were announced, likely requiring an investment in pollution controls to reduce air emissions.

2011 With these developments, River Falls was faced with an extremely difficult decision. In the months following the termination announcement, the grueling task of analyzing the financial feasibility of continuing generation operations long term without the supplemental support of capacity payments began. A third-party consultant was hired to assist in researching a variety of options and numerous meetings were held to discuss these options in great detail. Each step along the way transpired into the inevitable decision of closing the plant. On June 9, the plant began operating at one shift. On June 21 and 28, 2011, final decisions were made by the Utility Commission and City Council to accept a financial buyout package from WPPI to begin decommissioning of the plant beginning July 1, 2011.

Following this decision, best options for the market value of the assets at the plant will be sought. Test runs were scheduled in July to demonstrate operability of engines to potential buyers. Sealed bids will be accepted with approval anticipated in August with any remaining items to be demolished and removed from the plant. Future use of the plant has yet to be determined; however, it is known that the electric substation will remain operational and the two hydroelectric generating facilities will continue generating at .40 MW net capability. Electric rates are not anticipated to change as a result of these changes.

Through this difficult decision making process of closing the plant, River Falls Municipal Utilities vowed to make the best decision for customers, while expressing great gratitude to the numerous employees dedicated to providing local power in our community since 1900.
