

CLARK COUNTY CHRONICLES

Arkansas Power and Light traces back to Arkadelphia

Submitted by Wendy Richter
For the Siftings

In December 1913, entrepreneur Harvey Couch and his associates purchased the Arkadelphia Water and Light Company, which produced small amounts of electricity for Arkadelphia. Their "Arkansas Power Company" had been incorporated just a few weeks earlier. Stockholders included Couch, J.H. Meek, J.L. Longino, W.C. Ribenack, C.S. McCain, J.B. Hampton and J.W. Lee.

At the time, much of Arkadelphia's power was being supplied by the Arkadelphia Milling Company, a manufacturer of flour, meal, feed and



COURTESY OF CLARK COUNTY HISTORICAL MUSEUM

other products. In adjacent Hot Spring County, Malvern's generating plant was operated by the Malvern Chair Company, which Couch's company purchased, along with its dynamos. The Arkadel-

phia and Malvern acquisitions were part of a plan to install a transmission line to connect the two towns. Couch ordered and had installed two 500-kilowatt steam turbines. Then, the company ac-

quired a 22-mile right-of-way from Malvern to Arkadelphia for the line.

A milestone was reached in 1914, just over 100 years ago, when Harvey Couch and his associates connected Malvern

and Arkadelphia with power. It was one of the first major endeavors of the corporation that would later be called Arkansas Power & Light. Dependable electrical power was crucial to economic development and modernization in general, and Couch's company offered residents and businesses the opportunity to obtain the needed service.

The hook-up of the two towns marked an important step in Arkansas's industrial development. Couch and his associates decided to host a huge celebration in honor of the towns' connection. A grand ceremony would culminate in the switches being thrown, illuminating the White Ways and

all the other electric lights of Malvern and Arkadelphia. ("White Way" was the name given to a brilliantly-lighted street). The big day was scheduled for Dec. 17, 1914, and dignitaries from Little Rock, Arkadelphia and Malvern participated in the ceremonies.

The first industrial concern to hook up to the new transmission line was the Arkadelphia Milling Company. The Company operated one of the state's largest mills of any kind. Sawmills, gins and many other plants soon followed suit in obtaining the abundant low-cost electrical power then available in the region.