RG&E History

In 1848, the City of Rochester was just 14 years old. And it was a boom town. Powered by the rushing force of the Genesee River racing right through the middle of town and over a series of spectacular falls, flour mills were grinding out the lifeblood of prosperity here. The population had mushroomed to 32,000 people. Lighting dimly flickered on streets, in businesses and homes as whale oil burned in lamps and candles melted on tables.

And then comes along this new way to bring light to darkness. Flammable gas was being made from coal. Not only did gas burn brighter and more steadily than oils, it also could be delivered through pipelines right into the lighting fixture. No more running to the general store for more fuel and candles.

Early in 1848, investors raised money to create Rochester Gas Light Company. Their plan was to build a manufactured gas plant in town at the Genesee River and sell this new fuel to customers through pipelines. On December 13, 1848, curious onlookers gathered in a home to see the first gas light in Rochester. The rest, as they say, is history. And the history of Rochester Gas and Electric Corporation is a rich one, dating back to that dark December evening.

In 1879, an RG&E predecessor brought electricity to Rochester in the form of an Edison Dynamo. Electric power began to replace gas for lighting and, more importantly, powered Rochester's share of the American Industrial Revolution.

RG&E's tradition of fine customer service and community involvement over the last century and a half continues. The photos in this commemorative historical booklet depict some of that history. And you'll also get a glimpse of a few of the tens of thousands of RG&E people who have brought heat, light, industrial power and a sense of community to the Rochester region. This region is the largest remaining industrial center in New York State. That didn't happen by chance.

We at RG&E are proud to have been a sustaining part of this community since 1848. We see this 150th year as not the end of an era, but really...

Just The Beginning

Hobbs Kerosene Lamp - circa 1870
Courtesy of Jeanne Wenrich.

An early customer service center and store.

Always at Your Service
Rochester Gas Light Company's first customers are ten street lamps and lighting for 80 homes and businesses near its Mumford (Andrews) Street gas plant. The Osburn home (above) was the first home in Rochester to use gas lighting in December 1848.

The Copier Model A, the first commercial xerographic process, was announced in 1949. This manual device provided the knowledge and revenues with which to develop automatic xerography.

Courtesy of Xerox Corporation.
One of the first pairs of eye glasses manufactured by Bausch & Lomb, c.1900.
Courtesy of Bausch & Lomb Corp.

The Rochester Gas and Electric Cashiers.

Original Kodak Camera.
Courtesy of George Eastman House.

Glass insulators: Cobalt blue porcelain made by Victor Insulator; Victor, NY c.1945; Hemingway Petticoat, 1893; Whitall Tatum No.1, c.1920; Hemingway "Mickey Mouse" c.1900
Courtesy of Dick Bowman.

1853: John Jacob Bausch opens a little eyeglass shop in Rochester's Reynolds Arcade building.
1855: Henry Lomb partners with Bausch - Bausch & Lomb.
1859: Charles Darwin publishes The Origin of Species.
1861: Ft. Sumter is fired upon - Civil War, Rochester has 2,413 gas customers and 657 street lamps.
Wooden pipes wrapped in Civil War blankets and soaked in pitch were RG&E's first attempt to transport natural gas to Rochester. The pipes leaked, and the project failed. That was 1870. Today thousands of miles of steel and plastic pipe deliver gas to our customers.

The RG&E blacksmith shop was important to operations in the early days.

The year of 1848 was a stirring one in the young city of Rochester, New York. The bustling town on the Genesee River and the Erie Canal had already become the foremost flour milling center in the country. It had a population of 32,000, was a busy canal port and was located on two railroads. Conversion from whale oil to gas street lamps had begun.

~ The RG&E Story

Natural gas table lamp, c.1890-1910, collection of the Rochester Museum & Science Center.

Customer service field representatives of the early days ready for their rounds.

The Central Oilgas Stove, patented in 1891, from the collection of the Rochester Museum & Science Center.

1863 President Abraham Lincoln delivers his Gettysburg Address.
1865 The Civil War ends and the Genesee River floods its banks dousing downtown Rochester and the gas plants and mains.
The first Gas Plant at the intersection of Munford Street (now Andrews Street) and the Genesee River in 1848. The Company had 150 customers at the time. Currently, we have 280,000 gas customers.

1856  Coal Tar as a byproduct is first sold to customers and the Company increases its stock dividend for the first time.

1870  An attempt to bring natural gas via wooden pipes 28 miles from neighboring West Bloomfield fails.

1872  Citizens Gas Company is formed at East Station on the banks of the Genesee River.

1876  Philadelphia Centennial Expo promotes gas for cooking versus oil, coal and wood. Rochester's gas companies follow.
The dawn of the “Electric Age” comes to Rochester. The Genesee River provided the first step in the generation of electricity by furnishing the water power to animate the first generators. It was the catalyst for industrial advances and modern life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1879</td>
<td>Thomas Edison invents the incandescent light bulb.</td>
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<td>1879</td>
<td>Electricity comes to Rochester as Rochester Electric Light Co. A dynamo powers ten arc-light street lamps and lighting for Reynolds Arcade Building.</td>
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<td>1880</td>
<td>Municipal Gas Light Co. is formed.</td>
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<td>1880</td>
<td>Rochester bank clerk George Eastman gets a U.S. patent on a plate coating machine.</td>
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<td>1881</td>
<td>The Brush Light Co. is formed and distributes alternating current over several miles of wire to Rochester factories.</td>
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<td>1881</td>
<td>Electric street lamps begin to replace gas as the Brush Co. sets up hydroplant at Upper Falls on the Genesee to power streetlights.</td>
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<td>1881</td>
<td>George Eastman establishes the Eastman Dry Plate Co. on State St. in Rochester.</td>
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<td>1886</td>
<td>Edison Electric Illuminating Company opens a steam and electric plant downtown at the current War Memorial Site. The first telephone company sets up in Rochester.</td>
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<td>1887</td>
<td>Incandescent lamps begin to replace arc lights.</td>
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<td>1888</td>
<td>A young man, Thomas H. Yawger, takes a job with Edison Electric at the steam plant where he worked 12 hours a day, 7 days a week.</td>
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<td>1888</td>
<td>Electric illuminating becomes the first to meter electric use. George Eastman markets his first roll film camera and calls it Kodak.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>Rochester Gas Light Co., Citizens Gas and Municipal Gas combine as Rochester Gas Co.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>Electric lights are installed at Bausch &amp; Lomb’s manufacturing complex on St. Paul Street.</td>
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Thomas Edison, a founding father of the Electric Age.

Charles Edison, son of the famous inventor, tests one of the first Bipolar Direct Current Generators. Installed in 1888 by the Rochester Electric Light Co. in the Old Hydro Station at Upper Falls, it was in service for more than 50 years until it was retired and moved to an RG&E operations center for display.

Original Brush Light Company plant, 1881-1886, Now known as Station 5.

National Mazda Light display — 1930's

1892 Rochester Railway Co, electrifies its lines and Eastman Dry Plate Co becomes known as Eastman Kodak Co.

The evolution of more lumens per watt began with the first crude filament of carbonized paper. Filaments of carbonized bamboo, squirted cellulose and General Electric's Metallized Carbon ("GEM"), lighted the early days of electric light. Pressed and drawn Tungsten filaments replaced Tantalum, and later, with GE's innovation of ductile Tungsten, higher efficiency coiled filament bulbs were possible. Today's High-Energy efficient bulbs can last up to 10 times longer and use 75% less electricity over those of just a few years ago.

WATT A BRIGHT IDEA!
1892
October 4 - Citizens Light & Power Co., is formed at Brown's Race, to become Station No. 3 at High Falls.

1893
July 23 - Central Light & Power Co. is formed to power some downtown buildings.

1903
Rochester Light & Power Co. is formed in January and absorbs Central.

1903
Wilbur and Orville Wright invent and test the first workable airplane at Kitty Hawk.

1904
June - Rochester Light & Power is absorbed by RG&E and renamed as Rochester Railway & Light Co.

1908
Henry Ford produces the first Model T in Detroit, Michigan.

1910
RG&E has 9,000 electric customers, 52,000 gas customers and 19 steam customers.

1916
Hydro Station #5 upgrades and goes on line with 44,000 kilowatts of power.

1917
The United States enters The Great War.

1918
The Armistice signed ending World War I.

1919
Railway operation splits off and RG&E Corporation is formed.

1920
RG&E has 35,000 electric customers, 81,000 gas customers and 81 steam customers.

1925
RG&E builds its corporate headquarters at 89 East Ave.

1925
Westinghouse Electric Ampmeter ~ 1913.

A Rochester Railway and Light representative makes a house call.

Station 5 water wheel ~ 1905.

Folmer Factograph meter reading camera used by Power Billing from 1915. Specially designed to overcome the errors of the pad and pencil. Manufactured in Rochester, N.Y.
The formation of Rochester Railway & Light Co. marked the real beginning of RG&E. For the first time a single organization had the responsibility of supplying the whole community with electricity, gas and steam.

**Weston Voltmeter ~ 1888.**

**An early Rochester Railway & Light Co. gas department crew installs gas pipeline with its manually drawn equipment cart.**

**A 1909, "Judd" electric laundry machine, one of the new-fangled appliances which saved time and made home life easier. Collection of the Rochester Museum & Science Center.**

**Delivery of coke in the early 1900's.**

**Type K Potentiometer & Ammeter from the turn of the century used by the Electrical Standards Lab.**

**Ready for duty. RG&E employees pose with their impressive fleet of vehicles at the Andrews Street facility ~ 1932.**

1926: RG&E installs 97 coke ovens at old East Station and produces dry quenched coke for resale—the first to do so in the U.S.

1929: Stock Market crashes.

1930: RG&E has 114,000 electric customers, 103,000 gas customers and 349 steam customers.

1935: The first of 8 steam boilers go on line at "The Old House," one day to be called Beebe Station.
What One Pound of Fat Will Do

Save every drop of fat you can spare and turn it over to your butcher to be passed along for conversion into explosives that will defeat the enemy and into medicine that will save lives. Each pound of fat will make enough smallpox inoculations to immunize 98 soldiers...or produce 8 cellulose gas masks...or provide 10 rounds of ammunition for a 50-calibre machine gun.

Reprinted from RG&E Monthly Messenger, November 1943.

1936
Thomas Yawger publishes a history of the development of electric utilities.

1940
RG&E has 139,000 electric customers, 113,000 gas customers and 242 steam customers.

1941
December 7 - Pearl Harbor attacked - U.S. declares war with Japan.

1945
VJ Day - The War is over and RG&E pipes in natural gas to support Post-War growth.

1946
ENIAC, the first electronic computer, goes into service at the University of Pennsylvania.

1947
Rochester's Haloid Co. purchases rights to Chester Carlson's xerographic process.

1948
On the occasion of RG&E's Centennial, the first of four coal-fired electric units goes on line at Russell Station.

“Electricity] lifted the burdens of millions of people and gave new and vital impetus to industrial progress.”
~Thomas Yawger

Staffing the steam pressure meters at the Booster House Station
RG&E History

Company prosperity is a forerunner of community growth. RG&E has an essential function in the production of the products that bring Rochester fame in industry. Today we are the largest industrial base in New York State.

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Celebrating 100 years in 1948, complete with cake and the dancing RG&E Kiloettes.

Rochester's Four Corners years ago.

Station 3 electric generating turbines.

Manufactured gas begins to phase out in favor of natural gas.

Korean War begins, RG&E has 168,000 electric customers, 135,000 gas customers and 518 steam customers.

RG&E's last coke oven is shut down on August 6.

Korean War ends, Bausch & Lomb widens screens with the introduction of Cinemascope lens.
The end of an era, the beginning of a new.
With more gas and electric customers than ever, RG&E expands its facilities and services into new territory, develops new technologies and enters the Nuclear Age as the computer revolution dawns. RG&E is in the "fast lane."

Checking a circuit map in electric line operations.

Expanding gas service, Wolcott, NY ~ 1963.

The RG&E Big Band still swings today, at community events.

Tracking wind storm damage, 1964.

The "Great Blackout," do you remember where you were?

1954
Thomas Yawger dies as an active RG&E employee with 66 years of service.

1956
Last unit of Russell Station goes on line ~ 275,000 kilowatts total.

1959
An 84,000-kilowatt electric generating unit goes on line at Beebee Station.

1960
RG&E has 202,000 electric customers and 157,000 gas customers.

1961
Haloid Co. becomes Xerox Corp. First U.S. troops sent to Vietnam.

1965
November 9 - Blackout affects 80,000 square miles of north east United States.

1966
Brookwood Science Information Center opens to introduce people to the advantages of nuclear power.

Water heater installed in Lake Ontario ~ Russell Station, 1954.

RG&E History
One stop shopping for the conveniences of modern life—at one of the many RG&E appliance centers from the 1950's.

Inspecting the gauges at Station 5.

Russell Station

Early pneumatic cable cutter, used by linemen.

Glass lightning resistor, circa 1940.

1969: Grinn Station - 470,000 kilowatts on line, on schedule and on budget at a cost of $88 million.

1970: RG&E has 254,000 electric customers and 196,000 gas customers.

1971: The Clean Air Act places heavy demand on oil and natural gas fuels for electric generation.

1973: RG&E installs a 24-inch gas main to increase reliability between east and west sectors.
As the previous pages have shown, we have deep roots in the Rochester community and a charter commitment as one of its founding contributors. We support and serve its people, our customers. RG&E is poised for sweeping change, and has anticipated and embraced the future by leading the way with its deregulation agreement which the PSC recently approved. We're ready for competition. And at RG&E we're saying that the first 150 years is just the beginning.

One-of-a-kind technology is featured in the Energy Control Center at West Avenue. Precise monitoring of gas and electric operations 24 hours a day allows the most rapid and efficient energy service response in utility history.

RG&E sponsorship of the Rochester Museum & Science Center's Challenger Space Center Exhibit benefits the community at large.

1973: Heavy oil demand combined with the Arab Oil Embargo creates the energy crisis of the 70s.
1975: Vietnam War ends.
1983: RG&E establishes The Community Heating Fund with the American Red Cross.
1985: With declining use, RG&E goes out of the steam heating business.
The history-making, unprecedented process of removal and replacement of a nuclear steam generator through the top of the containment dome at Ginna.

New infrared coal thawing shed technology at Russell Station.

Station 5 automation makes hydro functions easier, safer and more efficient with the new Master Controller Console.

State-of-the-art Customer Telephone Service Dept. handles over a million calls annually.

Today's computerized Electrical Standards Lab equipment features fully automated calibration and remote site measurement. It is 10,000 times more accurate than the analog meters shown throughout these pages.

"RG&E's First 150 Years - Just the Beginning"
RG&E wishes to thank all of those contributors who went out of their way to be so accommodating and informative: giving of their time and expertise, lending their artifacts for photography, and providing their photos for inclusion.

The informal archivists of RG&E:
Dick Biedenbach, Ginna
Kim Magnuson, Ginna
Rick Meier, Corporate Communications
Bill Meyers, Operations
Dan Schlegel, Operations
Paul Siison, Laboratory & Inspection Services, Operations
Betty Weis, Marketing
Jim White, Operations
Steve Wright, Operations
Leo Zimmerman, Employee Emeritus and former RG&E Kilvoette

Private Collectors and Our Friends in the Community:
Dick Bowman, Webster, NY: glass insulator collection
John A. and Jeanne Wenrich, Avon, NY: Kerosene lamp and light bulb collection
Daniel M. Barber, Deputy Director, Collections; Eugene Umbarger, Curator of History Chairman and Stephen Fentress, Director, Strasenburgh Planetarium; the Rochester Museum & Science Center

The George Eastman House,
International Museum of Photography and Film
Bausch & Lomb Corporation
Xerox Corporation

Our apologies to all those who heed the call and contributed items but were left out due to space limitations.

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