

## MY FATHER'S DREAM

(His Own Story)

"One of my first ventures after getting married was bringing electric lights to North Yamhill, in 1901. Back in 1888, I had, as a boy, lived in Astoria, Oregon where Uncle John Trullinger had installed the first electric lights. I was very much interested in his operation from a business standpoint, so when my family moved back to our home and mill at North Yamhill, I dreamed up the thought of having electric lights to replace the old oil lamps for street lights, as well as lights for the homes.

In 1902, I asked my wife's uncle, Lee Laughlin, for a loan of \$2,000, which was about the installed cost of the machinery and equipment necessary for the plant. Fortunate for me, Uncle Lee was in agreement and loaned me the \$2,000.

My father and I went down to Astoria to consult with my Uncle John. I asked him if he thought it wise to put so much money into such a small town light plant. He advised me to forget the idea as the income from the plant was too small to ever pay a return.

On our way home, my father stopped to sell some flour to a logging plant nearby. When we reached Portland, I had made up my mind to go ahead with the electric deal, in spite of the advice from Uncle John.

I had a full day to kill before meeting my wife, Grace and my father, coming in to join me from Yamhill. So I got busy.

I first contacted the electric supply house and bought 200-16CP legats, 1815W generator with 2200 volts, 2 transformers, #14 hard drawn bar copper wire with telephone insulators and rubber-covered wire for installing of lights. I also hired an electrician to come to Yamhill to install the plant.

All this was done before I met Grace and my father. The first words my father said were, "I suppose you have given up the idea of the electric plant?" I said, "No, I have not. As a matter of fact, I have bought all the machinery

necessary and it is on its way to Yamhill by freight train.

From the dock where my father had landed, we went out to see my sister, Mary, who was in nurses' training at the Good Samaritan Hospital. As we were leaving the hospital, I left Grace and my father to visit O.A. Thornton, an old friend and classmate of 1893, at Monmouth, Oregon. While I was gone, my father asked Grace if she knew about my purchase of the light plant. She said, "yes", she knew. He said, in reply, "I'm afraid Fred is a goner." This was rather a discouraging remark to tell a young wife that her husband was "a goner."

(It didn't exactly work out that way.)

I hired ten or twelve men to dig holes for the heavy green fir poles which we set up by main strength and awkwardness. It was in January of 1901 and we had to work in rain, mud and snow, in temperatures below freezing. Some job.

I installed the generator in my father's flour mill, using about 25 horse power. The flour mill was located one and one half miles west of the town of Yamhill. I paid him \$50 per month to start the plant in the evening and to shut it down at daylight. (No lights during the day hours). I charged \$1 a month per 16 C.P. light. The City paid me \$25 per month for 25 street lights. I started out with a gross income of about \$200 per month, which gradually increased each year.

Hope Perry ran the Post Office and collected for the lights, the water and the telephone. (The water was brought in from the Hutchcroft Creek, 3 miles west of town.) I charged one dollar per year for switching. The users built their own lines. I furnished the switchboard and gave them free use of the long distance line into McMinnville where we connected with the Pacific Telephone Company out of Portland.

The first year, the telephone exchange board was in the drug store, run by Dr. Coffeen. The second year, it was moved to the Rude home, with Bell Rhudes' sister as operator. Dr. Coffeen was too busy to give adequate service to the users.

In 1900 my brother, Carl, went out on his own, working in a gold mine in Idaho. Work was hard and pay not so good, so after one year, he traveled to California where he got a job with the Pacific Lighting Corporation. He worked out of Los Angeles installing a new power line. It was dangerous work and my mother was quite worried. She asked me to sell my Yamhill light plant to Carl. To please her and to ease her anxieties, I did so. Carl operated the plant for ten years and then sold out to the Portland General Electric Company for about \$15,000.00.

When I sold the plant to Brother Carl, it was paying about \$350 per month gross income. I soon made enough to pay Uncle Lee his loan of \$2,000. In those days, \$2,000 was a lot of money. Uncle John would call it "chicken feed," but I got a lot of satisfaction proving my judgement was right and the Yamhillers were enjoying electric lights a long time before other little towns in the Willamette Valley.

After Brother Carl sold the electric plant, he built a new home just west of Yamhill by  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles on the Darees Farm. He also rented a shed roof warehouse which I had built on the back end of my General Merchandise Store. Here he operated a feed mill for several years and also helped me in the operation of my store. This venture did not work out well for Carl, so he closed out the feed mill and bought the John Johnson Farm, some three miles from town.

In 1909, I took Ray Gill and my brother-in-law, Chester Fox, as partners in a prune orchard deal. We bought 40 acres from Abe Blackburn, each owning an undivided  $\frac{1}{3}$  interest. I looked after the planting of the trees and the cultivation and pruning. Ray Gill lived in Spokane and Chester Fox lived in Astoria, Oregon, so most of the working responsibility was mine.

In 1912, Chester Fox and I bought 60 more acres of land adjoining the Blackburn track and planted it to prunes. My wife, Grace bought 9 acres of the Blackburn track which was also planted to prunes. Later, I bought a prune dryer on this lot at a cost of \$11,000. It was in operation for about ten years. It finally burned to the ground. My insurance

covered \$6,000 of the loss. I then sold my interest in prunes to Roy Fryer for \$5,000.

Altogether, as a farming adventure, I had put in 20 years of my management for free. I spent about \$100,000 in experience and had an income of \$99,000 in return on the sales of prunes. On the whole deal, it showed a loss of \$1,000.

I came out very lucky considering that for several years the price of prunes was down to  $2\frac{1}{2}$  to 3 cents per pound. But, like the man who bought a pig for \$10, fed it \$10 worth of feed and then sold it for \$20-- he justified his pig deal by saying he had had the use of the pig all that time. I had had the use of the prune orchard for 20 years and it had cost me only \$1,000."