

THE ENERGY CRUNCH

On March 11, 1909 the Town granted the North Shore Electric Light and Power Company a franchise to supply electricity in the Shoreham area. In 1910 that company made application to the Public Service Commission for authority to implement the franchise but was turned down. Early in 1911 it renewed its application, which was granted. However there was a second power company - Port Jefferson Electric Light Company - which was also interested in a franchise. Apparently North Shore Electric did not immediately extend its service into Shoreham, and it seems that in the interim.

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someone had given Port Jefferson Electric a franchise. There ensued a period of doubt as to which of the companies should cover the Village's requirements, but service was established in 1914. Unfortunately there was considerable trouble with the early wires due to falling trees and branches, and after a severe thunderstorm in July of 1915, an elderly gentleman (ironically a relative-in-law of Lee De Forest) was electrocuted in consequence of touching a downed live wire on Wardencliff Road north of Gridley Road.

Shortly after electricity came in, we also had telephone service. The first exchange was located in the small house still standing on Woodville Road opposite Ashley Lane. The switchboard was manned (today we would probably say "womaned") by Miss Overton. The first phones were of the sort that had to be hand-cranked to get through to the operator. In humid summer months the service was precarious because the magnetic "drop indicators" on the central switchboard failed to function, and one could ring all day without contacting "central". Nevertheless, the system was not without its compensating benefits: the subscribers to telephone service were so few at the outset that Miss Overton memorized all the local numbers, and you could place a call by name instead of by number.

The electric company - the telephone company the water company - the iceman - the garbage collector the stage coach - the railroad: those were the utilities of the clay. Their total energy requirements for the entire summer season were probably less than what is needed to feed today's automobile population for twenty-four hours.