

LIGHTING IN MAYNARD TOWN
THE SAGA OF THE LAMP LIGHTER

Maynard town, nee Assabet Village, was a happy place for young people up to 1878, but that year dealt a mortal blow to those that were wont to wander arm in arm under a kindly moon or in total darkness whispering sweet nothings to each other. Another curse of civilization, in the form of oil lamps stuck on six to seven foot high posts lighted up the streets of Maynard, forever ruining the privacy so needed for that stolen hug and kiss. Twenty-five street lamps installed by J. M. Bruce at a cost of \$252.65, another \$11.75 to Joel Abbott for expenses about street lamps (quaint language), \$187.50 to E. C. Charlton for care of the lamps, filling them with oil every evening and lighting them from his wagon brought Maynard into the Nineteenth Century.

E. C. Charlton held the contract for 1879 and 1880 at a cost of \$254.59 and \$324.03 respectively. *Additional* lamps must have been installed in 1880 for the cost *increases that year*, making Nason and Main streets literally the Great White *Way* Robert Elliot takes over until 1884 when the name of Findley P. *Robertson* appears along with his as the lamp lighters. Robertson *continues* through 1886 with Charles F. Cahill taking over the following year at a cost of \$300.88. The Wheeler Reflector Company assumes responsibility in 1888, continuing through 1893, at an increased cost *running* between \$665 and \$937 yearly. Either inflation reared its ugly head during this period or more lamps were added. Charles F. Cahill is the lamplighter the following year with Fred Taylor coming in *some time* after that to 1902. The era of the lamp-lighters came to an end then. Maybe it wasn't as unromantic as I have pictured it, for *some time* during the 1950's there was a popular tune by the name of the 'Lamp-Lighter' and it was Love-Love-Love!

Gaslight was used to some extent during part of this period for home lighting - we do not know how much. A news note of August 25, 1899 tells us that "Maynard's Block (which is still on the corner of Main and Walnut Streets) presents a brilliant appearance with new gaslight - far superior to those previous". We have been told that a large globe existed just on the other side of the river, owned by ^{AB}Asset Manufacturing Company, so possibly both that block and the Congregational Church had their source of supply from there rather than their own cylindrical containers.

But the days of the oil lamp and the gas lamp were numbered - electricity was here. A rash of news notes in 1902 heralded this: August 15, 1902 - electric lights to be installed in Nason Street School and the Engine House - electric lights to be installed in St. Bridgets Church - electric lights in barbershop of M. J. Crowley - electric lights in Arthur Sullivans Store, bought from O. L. Prescott.

Selectmen have authorized Fred Taylor to continue lighting streets although his contract has expired until town will be illuminated by electricity - 42 incandescent lamps were lighted at lower end of town Monday. There will be 85 lamps and 7 arc lamps. Contract with American Woolen Company is dated for September 1, 1902 - will last five years - can be renewed. Incandescent lights will cost \$16 yearly and the arc lights \$75.

April 5, 1912 - town meeting appropriated \$300 to install 10 to 15 lights in New Village (the area with presidential names for streets off Parker Street) though still property of American Woolen Company. It still was newsworthy or status worthy in 1915 to have electricity installed in homes, for a date-line of May 14, 1915 tells us of Mrs. Julia May's new home on Summer Street being wired for electricity.

An anecdote has been related to us concerning the above-mentioned arc lights. They gave much better illumination than the incandescent lights but they flicked on and off continually because of their construction which was two carbon points not touching each other and causing an arc between them. This continuous flickering at certain times of the summer would attract the gypsy moth to such a degree that the light was barely distinguishable.

September 3 and 10, 1920 news notes tells us of a request by the town for all night lighting - up to now it has been eight hours per night - for all night the cost would be \$22 per light - the cost last year was \$4,300 - \$1,354 more now for all night lighting. No romance left at all now - All Night Lighting!

On June 14, 1929 it is reported in the papers that Edison Light has bought out American Woolen electric circuits. Before this there was agitation on the part of a segment of the town's population to buy them and set up a Municipal Lighting Department as the neighboring Town of Hudson has but curiously enough a sort of a coup-^{- D'ETAT}~~de-tat~~ took place before anything of the sort could transpire. Could it possibly be said that we have been paying higher rates all through these decades because of curious doings at that time? A news note of November 30, 1934 bears out at least the contention of high rates, for the Board of Selectmen set up a special committee to investigate the rates but silence follows, we read nothing further in the papers - we know not why.

A side effect of Edison's purchase was the change from 40 cycle to 60 cycle current. This took place December 5, 1930. At that time Maynard and Milford, New Hampshire were the only communities left in the country with the 40 cycle current. All electrical equipment was manufactured for 60 cycle current causing Maynard people to change

something by converter to cut them to 40 cycles.

And so ends the Saga of the Lamp-Lighter. He wasn't half bad, after all that was to follow!

I am indebted to the following for information ^{ON} ~~on~~ this ^{PAPER} page:
Annual Reports 1878-1894, Maynard News, James Farrell and Ralph Sheridan.

Read at September, 1967 meeting - Maynard Historical Society.

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