

# Electric Line Connected Malvern and Arkadelphia

Back in 1914, a milestone was reached when two towns began to be served by a new, soon-to-be major utility company: Harvey Couch and his associates provided electric service to the area, connecting Malvern and Arkadelphia with power. It was one of the first major endeavors of the corporation that would come to be called Arkansas Power & Light and still later, Entergy. 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.

In December 1913, entrepreneur Harvey Couch and his associates purchased the Arkadelphia Water and Light Company, which produced small amounts of electricity for that town. 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, Arkadelphia's power was being supplied by the Arkadelphia Milling Company, a manufacturer of flour, meal, feed, and other products. Malvern's generating plant was operated by the Malvern Chair Company, which Couch's company purchased, along with its dynamos. The Arkadelphia 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 acquired a 22-mile right-of-way from Malvern to Arkadelphia for the line.

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 December 17, 1914. Malvern's *Times-Journal* stated that "Thursday afternoon, despite the sleet and snow, marked an epoch in Malvern history. The vacant building, owned by Charles A. Bryan, had been transformed into a veritable fairyland by our ladies. Booths were decorated, in which the churches and the United Daughters of the Confederacy displayed their banner lines of Christmas fancy work, and the whole was enhanced by a grand electrical display provided by our skilled electrician, Tom Edwards."

Dignitaries from Little Rock, Arkadelphia, and Malvern participated in the ceremonies. Mildred Mattison, Malvern Queen, touched the button that lighted the White Way in town. At the end of a parade, the party entered the building where a program took place. Mayor W.A. Haley of Malvern welcomed all in attendance, and J.W. Lee served as master of ceremonies. The newspaper reported that then came "the program's picturesque feature, the honoring of our queen and her princesses. Little Rock Mayor Charles Taylor with appropriate remarks placed the pretty bulb-studded crown on the head of Miss Mattison. Rich floral pieces were presented to Arkadelphia's queen, Miss Beck, and her princesses." The party then boarded the train and headed for Arkadelphia and a celebration there.

The first industrial concern to connect 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 followed suit in obtaining the abundant low-cost electrical power then available in the region.

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