

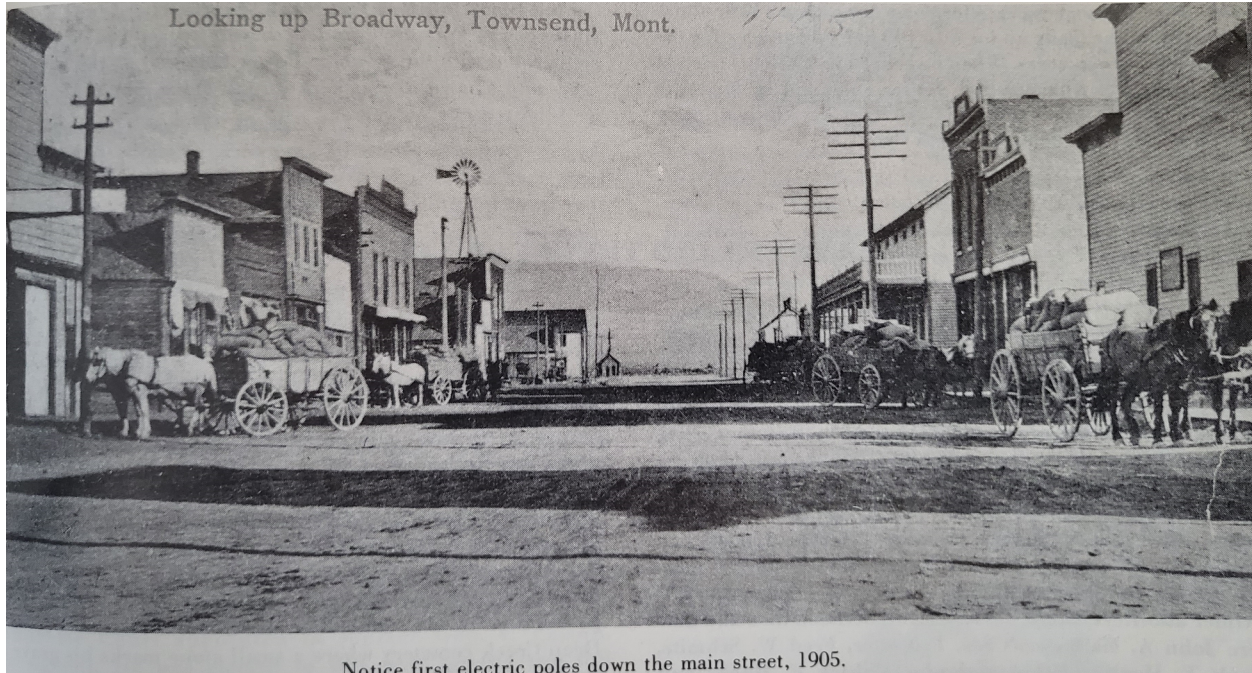
YesterYear

A Little Light, Please

Townsend did not have electricity until 1895 when the Bowhay brothers, Charles and Nick, built a generating plant at 203 S. Spruce. That first generating plant used coal and wood to create steam to power the generators. The Bowhay's sold the electricity to the City of Townsend. The poles to carry the electric lines were set on both sides of Broadway and ran the length of Broadway.

By 1902 an article in the Townsend Star announced that the Bowhay plant could not generate enough power to run the town night and day. For three years Townsend tried to find solutions to the problem.

In 1905 the Townsend Star carried the following announcement: "Motion made in the Council that Mayor Wilder employ an experienced electrician and get estimates on the Bowhay Plant." And "Bowhay offered \$3,500 for his alternating plant complete".



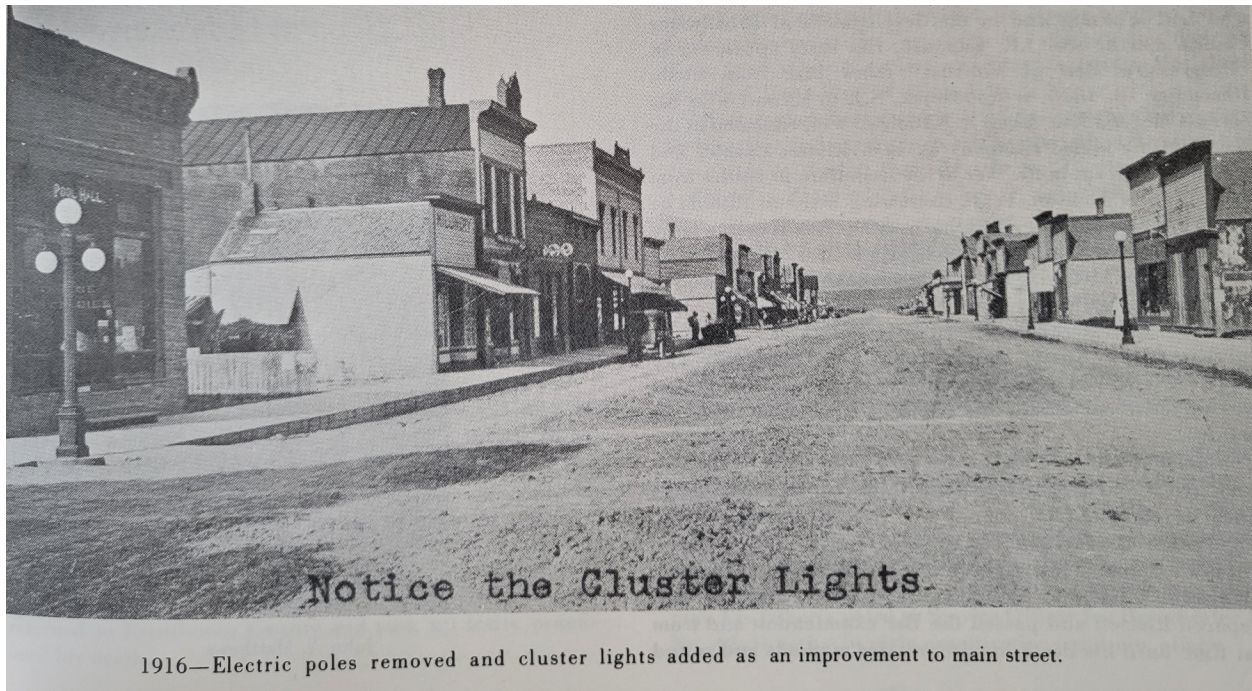
In December of 1905 the Star reported that Bowhay had accepted the offer and the electrical engineer Fred Ramspeck had been hired to run the plant. Ramspeck carried on generating power for the town for 2 years. After Ramspeck, O.G. Ogden worked the generating plant until it was sold.

The Missouri River Power Company offered Townsend \$5,000 for the generating plant in March of 1911. The generating plant had been a financial burden for the City since they took it over from Bowhay. It was an easy decision to sell the power generating plant to Missouri River Power Company. Missouri River Power brought in electricity from the power line running from Canyon Ferry to Butte.

The very next year Missouri River Power sold the power business to the Butte Electric Company that operated the line from Canyon Ferry to Butte. Soon after that the Great Falls Power Company was expanding and built out to Townsend.

In 1912, The Montana Power Company incorporated with their headquarters in Butte and absorbed all of the smaller power companies in the area. Townsend was then powered by The Montana Power Company.

The Milwaukee Railroad running at the south end of the county needed more power and a \$100,000 power line was run close to Townsend. In 1916 Townsend was hooked up to the new line and their power problems were solved.



Townsend remained on The Montana Power Company power grid until Montana Power started divesting their power holdings in favor of becoming solely a telecommunications company. When the “dot com” bubble burst in 2000, Montana Power went bankrupt and began selling its assets. In 2002 Northwest Power Company bought out all remaining power utility assets from Montana Power. Townsend has been powered by Northwestern Energy since then.

The information in this article and the Townsend Star article quotes came from information in the Broadwater Bygones available at the Broadwater County Museum. The timeline information about The Montana Power Company failing financially and selling assets to Northwestern Power is from a website titled “Northwestern Energy: A 104-year Timeline”. Visit the Broadwater County Museum to learn more about the history of electric power in Townsend and the men that managed the power in Townsend. The pictures are taken from the Broadwater Bygones and are available to be seen at the Broadwater County Museum.