

# Richmondville Power & Light

*"Since 1918"*

The forefathers of the Village of Richmondville, nearly a century ago, had the wisdom and foresight to electrify our community.

The Great Bear Light and Power Company of East Worcester had been selling electricity to parts of Richmondville in the early years of the twentieth Century. But it was not until August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1918 that the village board members thought it was time that we sell our own electricity and that would change how we would become a unique community here in upstate New York. The village board was upset by the poor service Great Bear Light and Power was providing. Power was only produced from "dusk until midnight" and the utility was having trouble maintaining even that level of service! The village petitioned the Public Service Commission multiple times during 1917-18 complaining about the poor electric service that Great Bear was providing. On September 7<sup>th</sup>, 1918 a "special election" was held in the village to decide whether the village would be allowed to purchase the Great Bear Light and Power Company in the Town and Village of Richmondville. The plan was to buy and extend even further into the town with Richmondville power, but the cost was not to exceed \$15,000. That evening Village Clerk Smith A. Patrick recorded a vote of 88 yes and only 2 no! The agreed upon purchase price was \$12,500.

A few months later, by a unanimous vote of 42-0, an additional \$5,000 was approved. This money was used to build the high-voltage transmission line connecting the village with the Mohawk Hydro Electric Company. This allowed the village to detach our power from the unreliable Great Bear Light and Power Company and provide 24-hour service. This power line still exists today going along the right-of-way of the old Route 7 and connects National Grid's Summit sub-station with the George Davis sub-station located behind the Richmondville EMS station. Eventually a \$20,000 bond was issued by the Bank of Richmondville at a five percent rate of interest for further expansion of our system.

Other communities were also becoming electrified, but by 1920 all of them, with the exception of the Village of Richmondville's Power & Light, were sold to

Mohawk Hydro-Electric Company. Mohawk Hydro later merged with the Niagara Power Company to become Niagara Mohawk. Niagara Mohawk was later purchased by the British utility, National Grid. Today National Grid operates and supplies electric power to most of the upstate New York towns and villages. There are not too many municipal power companies existing today in the eastern part of New York State, but the closest one to Richmondville would be Green Island north of Albany.

What does it mean to have an independent municipal electric utility? Well for one thing we have cheaper rates than our neighbors in surrounding towns. Power outages are few and far between here in Richmondville, and when one does occur it rarely lasts more than a few hours. And when we do on a rare occasion get a long power outage it usually is because the problem exists somewhere far from Richmondville. Lastly, the workers at Richmondville Power and Light are friendly and do their best to keep us out of the dark. We like to think that we have a personal relationship with our customers.

So, the next time you flip on a switch, turn on your television, or log onto the internet, take a moment to think about the great advantage we have because our citizens in the Village of Richmondville of long ago took a bold step affecting all of us. Hats off to you many nameless folks from so long ago!

**Notes:**

**From the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Report of the State of New York Public Service Commission, Second District for the year ended December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1918:**

**Changes in Operation:**

*(p. xc) Village of Richmondville authorized to acquire the entire lighting system and plant of the Great Bear Light and Power Company east of the Otsego County line, together with the rights and franchises heretofore granted that company by the Town and Village of Richmondville.*

**Orders, October, 1918:**

(p. 447) [Case No. 6589]

*State of New York  
Public Service Commission, Second District.*

*At a session of the Public Service Commission, Second District, held in the city of Albany on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of October, 1918.*

**Present:**

*Charles B. Hill, Chairman,*

Frank Irvine,  
John A Barhite,  
Thomas F. Fennell,  
Jerome L. Cheney,  
Commissioners.

*Joint Petition of Great Bear Light and Power Company and the Incorporated Village of Richmondville, Schoharie County, under sections 70 and 68, Public Service Commissions Law, as to transfer of and operation of electric lines.*

*The Great Bear Light and Power Company has for about ten years been operating an electric plant with a power station at East Worcester, Otsego county, from which it has supplied electricity in the village and town of Richmondville, in Schoharie county, and also in the villages of Schenevus and the towns of Maryland and Worcester, Otsego county. At an election duly held for the purpose September 7, 1918, the taxpayers of the village of Richmondville voted to purchase that part of the system and plant of the Great Bear Company lying east of the Otsego County line, being the entire portion of said system of plant within the town and village of Richmondville. An issue of bonds was also provided in order to carry out this purpose. A contract has been entered into between the Great Bear Company and the Village of Richmondville for the transfer of that portion of the works and system of the Great Bear Company, together with the franchises under which such portion is operated. It is the intention of the village to construct a transmission line from the village of Richmondville easterly through the town of Richmondville to the line of the town of Cobleskill, where it can be connected with the lines of the Mohawk Hydro-Electric Company, and current obtained from that company for an all-night or twenty-four hour service. The present service is from dusk until about midnight, and has been very irregular at that on account of the water shortage and other causes. A public hearing was held at Albany October 2, 1918, when the village offered proof, and there was no opposition. It is therefore determined and stated that public convenience and necessity require the transfer of the franchises, works, and system as herein set forth, and the operation of said electric plant for supplying electricity for lighting purposes both municipal and commercial, and it is*

*ORDERED: That the permission and approval of the Commission be given to the transfer by the Great Bear Light and Power Company to the Village of Richmondville of the entire lighting system and plant of said company east of the Otsego County line, and the rights and franchises heretofore granted to said company by the Town and Village of Richmondville; and this Commission certifies that said village is authorized to maintain and operate said works and system accordingly.*

*IT IS FURTHER ORDERED: That said company and village notify this Commission within ten days after said service of this order as to their respective acceptances thereof.*

Many thanks to Joe Bernocco, the Historian for the Town of Richmondville. He provided the initial research into the Village of Richmondville's board meeting minutes regarding the decision that led to the village to purchase and finance the Great Bear Light and Power assets that became Richmondville Power & Light.