

1882

Thomas Edison 1st commercial electric system.

1901

Construction of a lumber mill on the Wright Leggett Ditch approximately 555 E. Main near Butler. Also, Charles Randlemon began hauling power poles from Bayfield to Farmington.

January 16, 1902

Quote from the Farmington Times-Hustler, "The poles for the city electric light system were placed in position this week and linemen are now engaged in stringing the wires. The power house is also well under construction and unless something unforeseen happens Farmington will be supplied with modern light within a fortnight."

February 20, 1902

Quote from Farmington Times-Hustler, "A piped water system, electric plant, telephone and town incorporation within one year has made Farmington the peer of any town of its size in New Mexico." Thus the Farmington Light Plant, with a capacity of 100 horsepower and thirty-two customers, was born.

1904

Willis Martin and Jesse Harwood bought the bankrupt power plant from the Colorado State Bank in Durango for \$5000.

1908

Martin incorporated the plant under the name Farmington Electric Light & Power Company and received a 25-year franchise from the City of Farmington. According to Martin, residents were superstitious about electricity. "They just couldn't understand what it was, so they didn't want anything to do with it." Martin installed a coal-fired steam boiler and a 100 horsepower engine to handle emergencies when the ditch froze or the original boiler broke down. This kept the street lights burning during the dark of moon and on cloudy nights. Due to lack of business, Martin installed a grinding mill, cold storage, an ice-making business and a retail store for electrical hardware. Business picked up with the advent of the electric flat irons.

August 1, 1921

On Sunday morning at 2:00 a.m. a fire broke out in the Farmington power plant's building and within 40 minutes the building was destroyed and the ice plant and mill were also burned to the ground. Everything was a complete loss and the insurance carried was inadequate to cover the loss. The plant was located outside the town limits about + mile east of the business section, so no other buildings or residences were lost. The property loss from the fire was estimated to be between \$15,000-\$20,000.

December 1, 1921

A Times-Hustler article entitled "Light and Power Service Resumed Here This Week". "After 4 months of darkness, electric lights were again turned on in Farmington Tuesday night. While minor adjustments are still being made, the town people are rejoicing at again being able to see at night without straining their eyes. All the shops with electric equipment are dusting the old motors, and housewives are dragging electric irons and other electric appliances from their hiding places. Business men no longer refuse to



In 1902, the Farmington Light Plant, with a capacity of 100 horsepower and thirty-two customers, was born. The plant was located on the 600 block of E. Main on the site of Atomic Signs, just south of Atomic's present building.



Incorporating the plant in 1908 under the name Farmington Electric Light and Power Company, owner Willis Martin had difficulty signing up new electric customers because of fear of this new and misunderstood commodity. This 1908 photo shows the first power lines down Main Street in Farmington looking west.

accept money after dark for they can now see to make change perfectly!"

1920's decade

For a long time the power plant still persisted in supplying electricity during daylight hours only one or two days a week so women could do their washing and ironing and evenings from dusk until 10:00 or midnight. But then a local clergyman asked to have the lights kept on until 2:00 a.m. on Christmas Eve, in order to celebrate midnight mass. After this request was granted, Walker decided that Farmington could have electricity and lights day and night.

1925

Walker sold the power plant to R.I. Nightingale, Dr. Wilfred S. Moss, a Farmington dentist, and Frank N. Kneeland, a Chicago financier. The sale consisted of the plant, transmission lines, and water rights in the Wright Leggett Ditch. Customers of the newly named New Mexico Public Service Company paid their bills to Dr. Moss at his office. At this time, power lines ran to Fruitland. The new company constructed a ditch for the present hydro plant adjacent to the Animas Power Plant. This hydro plant was built in 1929.

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Baehr Organization, Inc., parent company of the North Continent Utilities Corporation (NCUC). Among the properties transferred to NCUC was the Aztec Power Company, which Nightingale had purchased in 1926. While retaining the name New Mexico Public Service Company, NCUC added improvements which included power lines connecting Farmington with Aztec, Bloomfield, Cedar Hill, and LaPlata, making the company a truly countywide operation. A new hydroplant with a 300 kW capacity generator was built just north of the present plant. Aztec was served by a similar unit. But together, the two plants couldn't have produced enough electricity to provide lighting and temperature control for today's Animas Valley Mall in Farmington.

1944

The Security Exchange Commission ordered NCUC to divest itself of numerous properties, including New Mexico Public Service, under the provisions of the Public Utility Holding Act. NCUC offered to sell New Mexico Public Service to the town of Farmington for \$300,000. The City was willing to buy it, but under New Mexico statutes, a municipality was prohibited from providing electric utility service more than one mile past the city limits. To resolve the problem, the City offered to purchase the Farmington portion of the utility and a private corporation could be formed to buy the remainder. This would allow the company to operate economically, which it could only do as a complete unit and would also solve the dilemma presented by the fact that the State Public Service Commission would not permit the utility to cut off the customers outside its limit.

March 23, 1945

Mayor Willis Martin had an ordinance introduced which would allow the City to issue \$225,000 in revenue bonds for the purchase of a portion of the electric company. The ordinance passed a vote of the populous by a margin of 164 to 8. Mayor Martin interested some of Farmington's leading citizens: Don Moxom, J.D. Hubbard, Perry Smoak and C.C. Mumma, in joining him in providing the additional \$100,000 or so needed to purchase the remainder of the utility. The five men formed a new company, Basin Light and Power to operate the county portion of the utility, while the City operated the Farmington portion. To simplify matters, the private company would operate the entire system. It was understood that Basin Light and Power would actually be a property of the town of Farmington, and that the town would be the sole beneficiary of any profits of the corporation. A 25-year agreement was drawn up and a board of trustees was formed to look after the interest of the town. The first trustees were C.C. Culpepper, Roswell Nelson, and Mather Eaks, town attorney. The elected town officials had no voice in the operation of the company and were not consulted on utility business, even though the town had definite interest, financial and otherwise, in the company.



With the advent of electric flat irons in 1920, Willis Martin's electric business picked up. A timer was installed to provide electricity from 6:00pm until dusk. This 1919 photo shows the power plant's spillway on East Main.

June 7, 1948

A resolution reiterated that all the net income of the company would go to the town. If the property was ever transferred to the town, the resolution provided that the incorporated town and villages served by the outside system, principally Aztec and Bloomfield, would be given first chance to acquire the property within their limits.

1957

Basin Power and Light's steam plant was built, fired by natural gas, and known as the Animas Power Plant.

June 7, 1959

Farmington Daily Times reported on the events of November 12, 1957 during the administration of Mayor W.W. McClellan. "On that date the town board met and ...secretly signed two documents. Those documents proposed to end as of January 1, 1958 the Town-Basin Light Association. Basin Light stockholders would become owners in fact. The town would relinquish all claims to the outside properties, other than settlement of a debt to the town of about \$300,000. Both the trust agreement and operating agreement were to be nullified. ...Following an extraordinary conference of town officials and interested officials on December 4, 1957, the town board met in special session and called off the "divorce". An advisory committee named to study possibilities of reorganizing Basin Light and Power as a nonprofit organization with a broader management base and eligible, perhaps, for certain tax exemptions which could not be claimed under the existing set up. Members of that committee were J.L. Foutz, McClellan, Tom Bolack, W.R. Gibson, Scott Brown, Erick Johnson, T.A. Wilson, C.C. Culpepper, J.D. Hubbard, I.J. Coury and W.H. Nygren with City Attorney James B. Cooney and Consulting Engineer W. Carlos Powell as advisors. A reorganization plan was drafted but was rejected by Basin Light. A series of meetings between the town and Basin Light representatives failed to bring about any agreement for changing the Basin Light structure.



On May 29th, 1958, Farmington Electric Utility incorporated the system outside the town limits after a heated takeover of Basin Light and Power by the Town of Farmington. This '50s era photo shows Farmington's bustling Main Street, looking east.

1959

Mayor Foutz introduced that a four-bill package would be introduced in the New Mexico legislature making it legally possible for the town to take title to the properties held in the name of Basin Light and Power providing for the appointment of a board of public utility commissioners to manage and operate the utility and authorizing the town to enter into contacts to serve Indian tribal enterprises, and authorizing the town board to sell or lease municipal property without a vote of the citizens. These bills were passed by the legislature and signed by the governor and it appeared long years of skirmishing might end". But it was not to be so.

May 29, 1959

Reporter Bob White tells the story of the "occupation" in the newspaper, "The electric lights have come on as usual throughout the San Juan Valley in the last couple of weeks. Nevertheless at least one housewife had a few nervous moments on the morning of May 29.

The Town of Farmington - Basin Light & Power controversy had been in the news again. The housewife had just learned of one of the more startling developments... within the hour a town "occupation force" had moved into the Basin Light offices. Her blinked lights off. "I wonder..." she mused in dismay. But the outage was only temporary. She sighed in relief as the power came on again.



Built in phases over eight years, the Animas Plant, a natural gas-fired facility, was completed in 1959.

May 26, 1959

Mayor Foutz told the town board that negotiations seeking transfer of Basin Light properties to the town had failed. The town board then voted to "institute proceedings" if no action toward the transfer had been taken by May 29.

May 28, 1959

Trustees C.C. Culpepper and Roswell Nelson informed Foutz, also a trustee, that they would not accept the town's deadline demand and that a suit was being filed asking the District Court to adjudicate the transfer. The suit named its plaintiffs, among others, the town board and the Basin Light officers and directors.

May 29, 1959

Three members of the town board moved into the Basin Light offices, scraped the Basin Light name off the window, installed Town Administrative and Finance Director C.R. Sebastian as comptroller, and announced that the town was running the show from now on. Basin Light General Manager J.D. (Deb) Hubbard was retained in that post along with all other employees.

After a tense weekend, Trustee Culpepper and Basin Light Director C.C. Mumma arranged for another conference of trustees, directors and town officials. It was announced as that session adjourned that the directors had given the town a quit-claim deed to all Basin Light properties, thus assenting to town control." Thus, nearly 60 years after the lights were first turned on in Farmington, the power utility came under the ownership and control of the city.

January 1960

By a vote of 323 to 83 the City of Aztec proceeded to exercise its option and obtained the electric system with the Aztec city limits. Litigation over the price to be paid began in 1959 and a year-long district court suit finally resulted in a reported \$790,000 price tag. With help from Sterling Arnet and C.H. Hopper, a several month physical severance went ahead with little incident.

1965

A District Court suit and counter-suit forced an agreement in which Farmington would for 1 mil per kW hour transport, or wheel, Aztec's power from Shiprock to Aztec. The Aztec utility thus began receiving federal hydropower from the Bureau of Reclamation. A tense relationship and city rivalry between Farmington and Aztec continued as a result of this loss of revenue to Farmington and independence by Aztec. Squabbling over boundaries and service areas continued between Aztec and Farmington, particularly over the water treatment plant. Farmington refused to sell the feeder line in 1965 and wanted to lease it to Aztec forcing the construction of a new line and the cutting down of Farmington's line when Aztec decided to serve the plant.

April 8, 1965

The Town of Farmington signed an agreement with the United States Bureau of Reclamation for the purchase of power and energy. The power was to be delivered to Shiprock Substation starting no later than July 1967. Farmington built a 115 kV line from the Shiprock Station near Waterflow to the Fruitland area, installed a step-down transformer to 69 kV and interconnected this new source to the 69 kV line owned by Navajo Tribal Utility Authority. This project was completed by October 1966. Navajo Tribal Utility Authority wheeled the power to Farmington over its 69 kV line at no charge to the town for many years.

FEUS began receiving power under a long-term contract with the Bureau of Reclamation. This power was provided by the new Glen Canyon Dam on the Colorado River (Lake Powell) and other newly constructed hydroelectric facilities in the west. 16 MW of power was made available to supplement Farmington's steam and generation of 32 MW and its 300 kW hydroelectric plant in Farmington.

February 1978

On Superbowl Sunday the Dallas Cowboys and Denver Broncos were preparing to kickoff for the Superbowl.

Farmington residents were split in their loyalty between these two regional teams. At the kickoff, the power of the Farmington Electric Utility System went off and the system went black. Power was not restored until after the game was completed and the local residents were furious. No event in the history of the utility has had such an impact on the utility organization, staff, and system investment. It seems the electric system load had outgrown the capability of the local steam-fired power plant at Animas Plant. When a short at the new Fruitland Substation took the station out and the relays would not allow the station to be re-energized, the system had more load than generation and went black. As a result of Superbowl Sunday (as it is now known), Farmington obtained the services of a new Utility Director, W.C. Lewis from California and preceded to hire professional engineering staff to fix the system. Existing engineers Larry Dobson and John Chambers were soon joined by Bill Statton as Chief Electrical Engineer and Dale Carlson as Generation Plant Superintendent and were given the charge to develop a reliable electric system for the Farmington Electric Utility System. In a two-year period a 115 kV transmission system, including 33 miles of transmission line, two switching stations, two new substations, and a 24-hour System Control Center with SCADA were built. This interconnected the Farmington system with PNM's system 22 miles south of Farmington.

1981

The new 115 kV transmission system was completed and the City of Farmington also purchased a 42,000 kW ownership share of San Juan Power Plant Unit No. 4. During this two-year period, the system designed and built what would normally take 5-10 years to complete at a cost approaching \$100 million. The San Juan Unit #4 purchase was made possible by Mayor Marlo Webb through a pollution control bond issue. Mayor Culpepper and City Attorney Dwight Arthur were instrumental in getting the MEGA legislation passed in Santa Fe and in the negotiation of the PAPA Agreement.

1983

Dale Carlson, Generation Plant Superintendent, discovered that a license was possible for the construction of a hydroelectric plant at Navajo Dam. The federal government had proposed to build a generator at Navajo Dam earlier but was stifled by environmental concerns and lack of authorization by the federal government. They had planned to build the plant to supply power to the relatively new NAPI project. Farmington applied for a license and began environmental studies with 13 state and federal agencies. It was determined that the plant would be run of the river so that it would not affect downstream fisheries, i.e. the quality waters. The Navajo Nation protested the license and obtained an opinion from the Undersecretary of the Interior that Navajo Dam and Lake were built for the benefit of the Navajo Nation and that they should reap the benefits of any hydroelectric generation. A settlement was reached through negotiations by Mayor Tom Taylor with the Navajo Nation. An escrow account was set up for an economic development fund to be jointly funded by the federal government and the town of Farmington for the benefit of economic development for the Navajo Nation within the service territory of the electric utility. Over \$2 million for the purchase of existing hydroelectric facilities at the dam from the federal government and cash payments directly to the fund by the City of Farmington were made. The escrow fund has not yet been used and has accumulated, with interest, to over \$4 million. The scope of the escrow fund has been enlarged to allow economic development anywhere in San Juan County, even outside the Farmington Electric Utility System's territory. The license was granted and R.W. Beck, as Project Manager, implemented the construction of the hydroelectric facilities. CDK Contractors were the primary contractors on the job and Orenco provided generation equipment from Red China. Existing turbines were purchased from mothball storage in Farmington from the federal government. Under the direction of Farmington Electric Utility System Project Engineer Gary Rollstin, the Navajo Dam Hydroelectric Project was completed and made commercial in September 1988. Under Gary's oversight, the project total cost came in at \$17.6 million, or \$3.2 million under budget. The new 32 MW hydroelectric project began producing the second lowest-priced power available to Farmington, second only to the federal hydropower through the USBR. The project included the construction by our Line Department of a new 25-mile 115 kV transmission line terminating at the new Bergin switching station in Bloomfield, NM.



In 1982, Farmington Electric purchased 8.475% of Unit #4 at the PNM San Juan Generating Station (42,200kW).

1981-1993

During this period of time the Farmington Electric Utility System began doing all of its design work on major projects: switching stations, transmission lines, substations, power flow studies, long-range forecasting, and other areas that were previously provided by R.W. Beck Consulting Engineers. FEUS also began constructing all substations, switching stations, and transmission lines. This resulted in considerable savings for the electric utility during the design and construction of 9 major distribution and transmission switching stations and related transmission facilities. Doing design and construction work in house was a major turning point and has resulted in significant savings to the utility customers.

1991-1993

FEUS performed an evaluation for a new power resource. Purchased power bids were received, as were bids for a long-term gas supply contract and the turnkey construction of the combined cycle power plant, repowering of Units 1 & 2 at the Animas Power Plant. As a result, the Animas Combined Cycle Turbine Project was begun based on a net savings of over \$14 million for the 15 years 1992-2007. Under the direction of Dean Chirigos, Assistant Director of Energy Resources and Power Production Engineer Mike Sims, a new gas supply contract was secured at very attractive prices and terms, and the project was constructed. Zurn-Nepco of Washington was the prime contractor with the units being built by Asea Brown Boveri of Sweden. Electrical Engineering provided the design and construction of the switch yard modifications to interconnect the new generator into our system. Power Plant personnel overhauled the existing Units 1 & 2 and provided construction in other areas in support of the turnkey project. The combined cycle turbine project was completed on May 10, 1994. All of the \$18 million total cost of the project was paid out of operating reserves that the utility had accumulated over the past ten years. Even though rates have not increased since 1982, the electric utility, through reduction of manpower, of workforce, renegotiation of wholesale purchase contracts, in-house design and construction of major projects, and improved efficiencies of the workforce, were able to accumulate over \$27 million in reserves. This was during a time of rapid expansion and investment in the power system.

1995

Now in its 14th year without a rate increase and having dealt with a 50% growth in electrical demand and energy sales since 1983, the electric utility is still in the black. However, current environmental concerns and regulations are expected to reduce the amount of cheap electrical power from the Glen Canyon Dam and FEUS' Navajo Dam in the amount costing the utility approximately \$3 million a year. The utility may have to increase rates 13+% in 1997 if these proposed environmental constraints are implemented. The electric utility is operating a system that has grown 50% with less people than it had in 1986. Growth rates are exceeding 5% per year and reserve capacity is rapidly being depleted. The electric utility is facing Integrated Resource Planning; deregulation of the electric utility industry, including retail wheeling; the possible sale of the federal hydroelectric power system to the highest bidder, and environmental constraints on its existing resources. There are many challenges that will need to be met by the staff, Public Utility Commission and City Council as the utility approaches the turn of the century. FEUS has an excellent staff with many years experience in both the private and public sector that can meet these challenges and compete with the best.



The Combined Cycle Turbine(25,800 kW) at the Animas Power Plant was completed in 1994 and fully operational, using state-of-the technology design, netting 38% more efficiency than the plant's next best generator.

1996-97

After nearly 96 years since the first light bulb was switched on in the Farmington area, local electric customers now have their first woman to head up their utility. Maude Grantham-Richards was chosen from a field of talented candidates in a nation-wide search for an electric utility director. Maude brings with her 21 years of experience in the electric industry, having worked for Plains Electric and Colorado Public Service. Maude is an administrator rather than an electrical engineer as the practice has been in the past. Challenges facing Maude are, amongst others, the uncertainty of de-regulation, preparing for Y2K, and the impact of a pending Federal mandate to restructure the electric utility.

1998

To improve efficiency and become more competitive, Farmington Electric spent \$1.8 million for its share in PNM's pollution project to replace the sulfur dioxide removal equipment, not only helped to further clean the air but also to reduce generation cost. The utility updated its SCADA (supervisory control and data acquisition) system. Information about our customers' electricity requirements, the status of substation equipment, the ability to remotely operate substation equipment and sophisticated SCADA software programs enable the system dispatcher to schedule for delivery the most economical mix of electricity resources for our customers...also expedites power recovery for customers when a power outage occurs in our 1718 sq. mi. service territory.

1999

The utility put into service its first automatic meter reading systems at remote customer locations which monthly meter readings are transmitted to a central computer over existing power lines. A second system was installed for customers located in "cluster" areas where a small radio transmitter is installed in the customer's meter, enabling the meter reader to read the meters with a hand-held computer....downloading the data to the main computer at the end of each day for billing.

2000

Farmington Electric Utility and its customers survived the dreaded Y2K! In its extensive planning in anticipation of a worst case system-wide power outage as feared by most utilities nation wide, Farmington Electric was prepared to keep the lights for its customers. By having our own power generation to meet customer needs, the utility was prepared to isolate itself from the rest of the "world" if necessary in order to keep homes lit and heated on January 1.

2001

A large distribution project, located in the Navajo Dam area was completed on Pump and Sims Mesas. At a construction cost of \$800,000 to Devon (a gas distribution company), Farmington Electric Utility constructed power lines and installed transformers to provide power to run a number of compressor stations owned by Devon. The Lakeview Substation, located near Farmington Lake was completed. It serves most of Crouch Mesa and areas east and west of the lake.

2002

The Aztec Metering Station was added to meter the power delivered through the system to the City of Aztec from outside sources, such as power marketers and the Western Area Power Administration, a major power supplier for Aztec. Upgrades were also made to the Aztec Substation including a remote control system (SCADA), batteries, relays, and a circuit switcher to isolate the substation should an electrical problem develop, avoiding power disruption for the remaining transmission system substations.

2003

The 10-mile 115,000 volt transmission line to connect the Hart Canyon Substation to the Glade Switching Station was completed...providing an alternate path for service to customers and a path for electric generation from the Navajo Dam Hydro Plant and the Williams Milagro Plant in Bloomfield.

2004

The Bluffview Power Plant, a new combined-cycle natural gas facility in the planning stage, was designed by our own engineering staff. Growth in the region continued to place pressure on our utility resources. In the ten years period from 1990 to 2000, the population of the City of Farmington and San Juan County increased 9.4% and 24.2% respectively.

2005

In May, Farmington Electric's 60,000 kilowatt Bluffview Power Plant was completed to help meet customer power requirements. The electric utility's new administrative building located at the Municipal Operation Center (MOC) was completed and provides with a location where they can pay bills, make arrangements for budgeting, obtain estimates for connecting their new home or business, or simply discuss their concerns with services they are receiving.

2006

The College Substation was completed to serve areas from Main Street to Sullivan Avenue to Pinon Hills Bypass. The substation was needed to meet load growth on East Main Street and the San Juan College area. It also relieves overloading on the Sullivan and Foothills substations and to a lesser degree at the Animas Substation.

2007

As of March, the Farmington Electric Utility celebrated 25 years without a customer rate increase.