



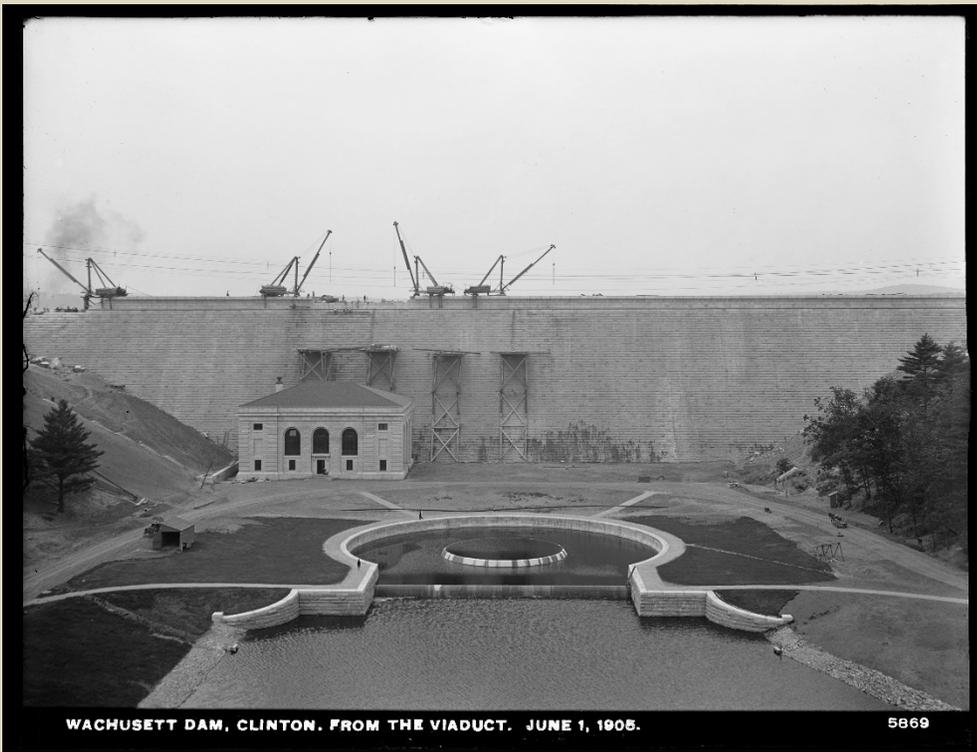
**Municipal Light Department
Sub-Station No. 1
Historic Building
Main Street**

What is the small stone building in the Historic District located on Main Street just after the library and Cottonwood Place?

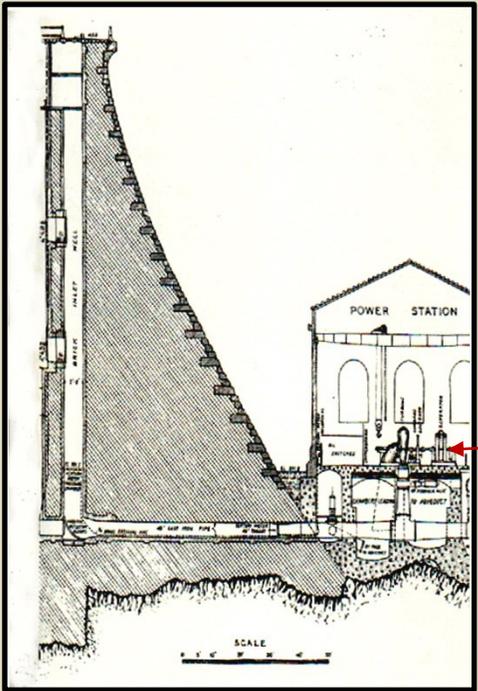
In the early 20th century, electric lighting was a luxury and predominately found in hotels, factories, and mansions. Thomas Edison, Charles Brush, and Werner von Siemens were the leaders in the industry of direct current systems in the late 19th century. Electric direct current systems which provided light and power for factories initially used coal-fired steam engines and later, hydroelectric power; however, electricity did not reach 95% of homes at that time. At the turn of the century even Boylston's John B. Gough's mansion did not have electric power, but utilized gas for lightening.

By the 1880's the Sawyer's Mills section of Boylston had dammed the Nashua River such that it had been deep enough for a steamboat to travel between Clinton and Boylston to bring residents to Cunningham Grove a local picnicking and dance pavilion.

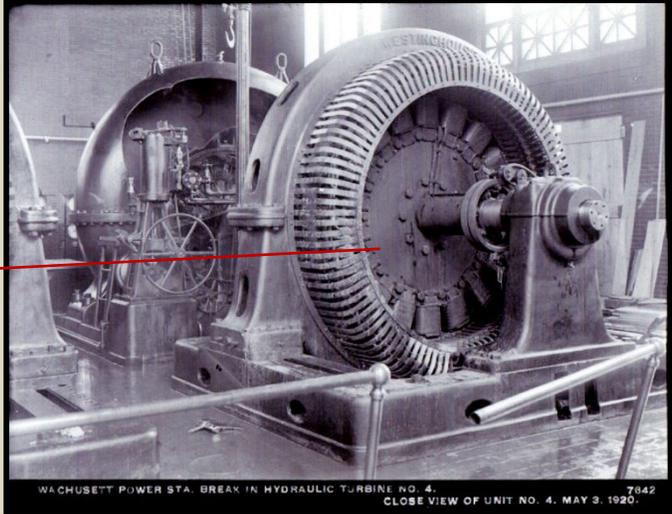
Boylston's move towards electrification in all probability stemmed from the construction of the Wachusett Dam and Reservoir System on the Nashua River which began in 1897 and was completed in 1905. In 1911, the year of Boylston's first move towards electrification, transmission of electricity from the Wachusett set the precedent for hydroelectric power worldwide; marking the first known instance of hydroelectric power generation from a domestic water supply.¹ Hydroelectric power is a form of energy that harnesses the power of water in motion to generate electricity.



Wachusett Dam with Power Station (on left)
Digital Commonwealth Photograph Collection



Wachusett Dam and Power Station
Wachusett: How Boston's 19th Century Quest for Water Changed Four Towns and a Way of Life by Eamon McCarthy Earls



Generator of Electricity (in foreground)
BHSM Photograph Collection

The first formal record to introduce electrification into the town of Boylston was during the Annual Town Meeting of 1911. A commission had been chosen to study the feasibility of introducing electricity into Boylston. The commission included three individuals: Munson Flagg of Elmwood Place, Burtis J. Garfield of the Centre, and Allan L. Stevenson of Cook Street.² After a feasibility study was completed, despite a

¹ Hydropower and MWRA, Massachusetts Water Resources Authority, 2013
² Boylston Historical Series, Bruce D. Filgate, 2012

positive recommendation by the commission, the move was defeated twice by the townspeople of Boylston:

“At a town meeting held on April 17, 1911, a ballot was taken upon a motion “that the town of Boylston construct and maintain a plant for the manufacture or distribution of electricity for furnishing light, heat or power for the use of the inhabitants of the town of Boylston, or otherwise procure such light as may be most advantageous to the town, at a cost not to exceed \$6,000,” and 26 voted in the affirmative and 21 in the negative, and the motion was declared lost by failure to receive the necessary two-thirds vote.

*At a meeting held on May 15, 1911, a similar motion was offered and a ballot taken which resulted in 37 affirmative and 33 negative votes, and the motion was declared lost by failure to secure the necessary two-thirds vote”.*³

The issue was not dead, however, and electricity was allowed into Boylston the following year at a town meeting held on May 4, 1912:

“... a ballot was taken upon a motion “that the town vote to construct and maintain within its limits a suitable plant for the distribution of electricity for furnishing light, heat and power for municipal purposes, and for furnishing light, heat and power for the use of its inhabitants, and that power or current be purchased by contract from any electric light, transmission or other company who are able to furnish such power or current at reasonable and satisfactory term,” and 71 voted in the affirmative and 12 in the negative, and the motion was declared carried in the affirmative by a two-thirds vote.

*At a meeting held on June 24, 1912, a similar motion was offered and a ballot taken at which there were 77 votes in the affirmative and 13 votes in the negative, and the motion was declared carried by two thirds vote of the voters present and voting. At the same meeting the town appropriated not to exceed \$8000 to “pay for the building and equipment of a plant for the distribution of electricity, light, heat and power for municipal use, and for furnishing light, heat and power for the use of its inhabitants;” and the town treasurer was authorized under the direction and with the approval of the selectmen to borrow the sum of \$8000 and to give therefor sixteen notes of the town of \$500 each, under the serial system, one note to be payable each year. It was also voted that the committee on electric lighting be authorized to construct a plan for the distribution of electricity in accordance with the foregoing votes, and make and sign all contracts and do all necessary acts to supply light, heat and power for municipal use or for the use of the inhabitants of the town, or for other purposes, and serve until the next annual town meeting”.*⁴

In 1913, the stone switching station in the center was built, and electric lamps began to flicker in our community. Within several years, the process would be extended to the outlying districts.

³ Annual Reports of the Various Public Officers and Institutions for the Year 1911, published by the Secretary of the Commonwealth, Vol. V., 1912

⁴ Twenty-eight Annual Report of the Board of the Gas and Electric Light Commissioners of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, for the Calendar Year 1912, published 1913

Photography by Bruce D. Filgate

Wachusett: How Boston's 19th Century Quest for Water Changed Four Towns and a Way of Life, Eamon McCarthy Earls, 2010