

Tillman County Chronicles

Tillman County Historical Society Column

by Joe Wynn

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Foster-Harris Light Plant powered early Frederick

When the first electricity was available to homes and businesses in Frederick, the year was 1906 and the service was provided by a privately owned company.

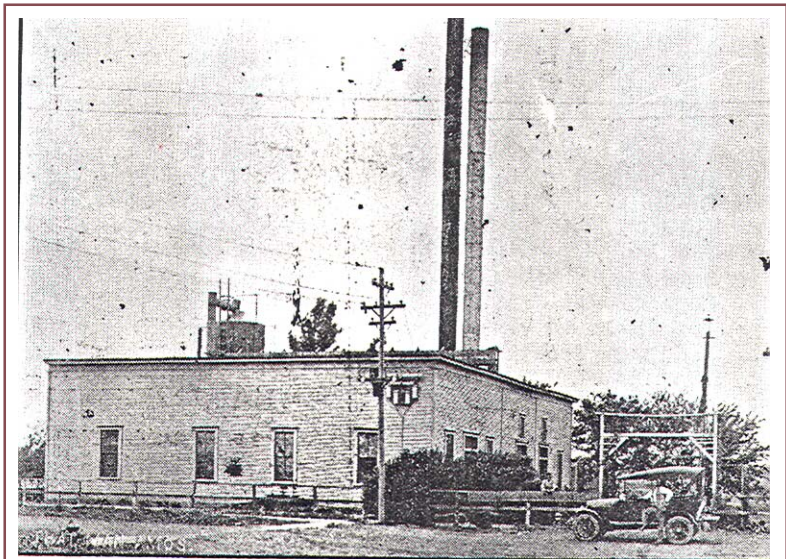
The Foster-Harris Cotton Gin and Electric Company was located on North 8th Street. Its owners were R.J. Harris, who also served as manager of the operation; S.J. Mathies, who kept the accounts; and company president J.T. Lively, a Seymour, Texas businessman.

The company's office was in the rear of the Corner Drug Store.

A July 21, 1916, newspaper described the Foster-Harris electrical operation as follows:

"The first lighting system to be started in Frederick was established by this company early in the year 1906. At that time it installed a small, 35 kilowatt machine, attached to a 60-horsepower engine direct. This plant was established at the gin, which was built in 1905.

"Shortly after its establishment, however, it was soon learned that, with the rapid strides the city was making towards progress and upbuilding, it would be but a



Foster-Harris Light Plant

period of a few years until the plant would be inadequate to handle the current necessary to furnish the patrons light and power. The company has continually been adding to and building until today it has two 150-kilowatt machines, with two engines large enough to pull the load.

"In fact, this plant is one of the best equipped in the state at the present time, being built in duplicate throughout, which almost assures the patrons that they will never be without light and power with a possible exception of a few minutes at a

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time. The duplicate plants are operated alternately and both are kept in excellent repair by the manager, Mr. Harris, who is noted for his upkeep of the machinery, both of the electric company and the gin.

"In addition to the excellent machinery equipment of this company it now has about seven miles of standard copper transmission lines to various parts of the city, and is constantly adding additional lines as the occasion demands. In fact at the present time this company can give its service to any residence in the city.

"The number of patrons that this company has in Frederick is in keeping with the excellent service accorded by the company. There is not a business house in the city that has any use for lights at all which is not equipped and using the current of the company. In the principal residence sections of the city the current is used. Of course, as in all cities, there are homes that are not wired for electricity and never will be, but, taken as a whole, the larger percent of the residences in the city are today lighted by electricity.

"In addition to furnishing electricity to the residence section this company also furnishes power to three elevators, an ice cream factory, two shoe repair shops, two newspaper offices, one machine shop, a broom factory, repair shop of one gin (besides its own), two meat markets, two bakeries, three picture shows. In fact, any institution that could use electric current to an advantage as a power has motors installed and is using the current of this company.

"In addition, the company furnishes power to light the streets of the city. At the present time a system of street lighting is



Foster-Harris Cotton Gin, North 8th in Frederick

being installed which will call for 35 street lights, which will be of the latest improved Mazda type. This will place adequate street lights in every portion of the city. The rate charged by the company for the lighting of the streets is as low as good business judgment will permit.

"The street lighting is always maintained to the highest degree of efficiency."

"The company employs four men through the entire year at the light plant and from 10 to 12 during the cotton season at the gin. They are all efficient in their line and expert workmen.

"While the beginning of the electric service in Frederick was nothing that could be compared with today, there is not now a city in the southwest that can boast of a better lighting system nor a company conducting a system that will do more for the growth and progression of a city than the Foster-Harris Gin and Electric Company."

The City of Frederick began operation of its electric service in 1917.

Joe Wynn is a member of the Tillman County Historical Society Board of Directors.