



# Saturday Telegraph

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## Battery lit the way to switched-on city

Napier was once battery powered — strange but true.

Nothing remains of the glass battery which carried the town's electrical load when the generating plant was shut down at night.

Installed in 1918, the battery was destroyed in the 1931 earthquake when the roof of the lean-to it was housed in collapsed.

Primitive as it seems today, the battery was pivotal to the smooth running of the borough's electricity supply.

The battery was charged by absorbing load from the generators when the tram cars were not running. During peak consumption, it returned power into the grid to prevent overloading.

The smell from acid spill when the 500-volt battery shattered was reputed to have been "terrible".

Compared to the tragic aftermath of the earthquake, the destruction of the battery was minor but it remains an intriguing part of the early days of Napier's electricity supply.

It was a history with its fair share of controversy, particularly since the earthquake ended the town's electric tramcar service, just 18 years after it was introduced.

The 1931 earthquake was something of a landmark for the old Municipal Electricity Department, now called the City Electricity Department (CED).

In those days the CED was not dwarfed by its bely neighbour, the Hawke's Bay Electric Power Board.

It was not a matter of if, but when households would be connected.

The borough council saw it as a lucrative prospect, and so did the Napier Gas Company.

In 1906 the gas company extended its contracts to include the installation of machinery to produce electricity for distribution to Napier and Hastings.

A threat indeed because the massive public works of the Waikato/Manawatu hydro-electric scheme were still just a glint in the government's eye and electricity was mainly generated by

### Glory days of energy

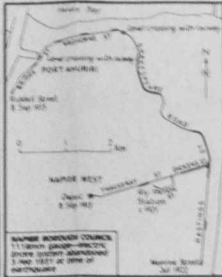
Thursday, September 8, was the 75th anniversary of the public supply of electricity in Napier. On that day back in 1913, the town's citizens also celebrated the opening of their new electric tram car service. They were glory days at the start of a new age of energy.

Staff reporter John Cousins reports on the history of the city's electricity department which is now facing the possibility of merger with its big neighbour, the Hawke's Bay Electric Power Board.

The department's distribution area harks back directly to the size of the old Napier borough: Napier South, the inner city, the hill and Ahuriri.

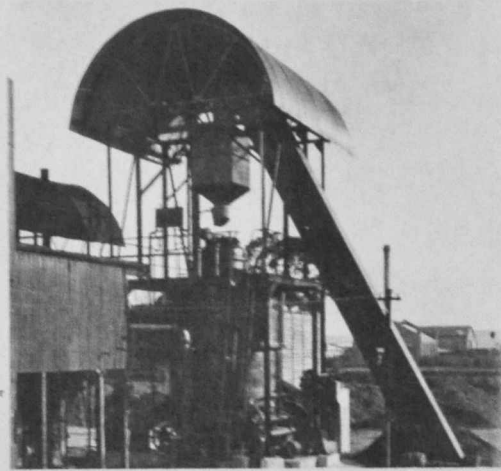
Our thanks to Napier's former city electrical engineer, Mr Ray Matthews, who helped provide the information for the article.

More technical histories of the department have already been published by Mr Matthews, the city electrical engineer from 1953 to 1975, and Mr Harry Hastie, electrical engineer from 1933 to 1958.

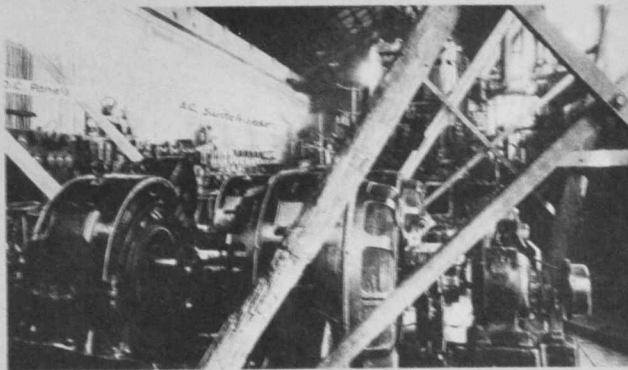


LEFT: A map of Napier's old tram system from the Thackeray Street depot to Riddell Street. It was later extended down Hastings Street until the Railway barred further progress.

BELOW LEFT: Timber struts supported the badly-bowed walls in the Napier power house, damaged in the earthquake.



ABOVE: The MED manufactured its own gas from this Kerly gas producer, remaining independent of the Napier Gas Company for the power to drive its electricity generating engines. The tall chimney in the background was the destructor which burnt the town's rubbish and supplied steam for the sewerage pumps. Picture taken in 1928.



LEFT: Laying the tram track along Hastings Street in 1913, facing Shakespeare Road.



gas or diesel-driven engine plants.

In 1907 the gas company supplied a leading Napier shop with electricity from a gas powered plant.

The shop, Neal and Close, stood in an arcade on a site now occupied by the Odéon Theatre. Next door was the gas company's office and shop.

It was a move that inflated locals because one of the shop's directors was none other than the Mayor, Mr J Vigar Brown.

Later the Mayor tried to explain it away by saying he authorised and paid for the installation of electric lights to provide an opportunity for a legal opinion on whether the gas company could do this.

The legal opinion favoured the council, saying the gas company could supply the bulk of shops but not extend further.

At the time the town was lit by gas and there was constant debate about the cost and power of the two energy sources.

It was widely accepted however, that electricity provided the best light because gas lights dimmed according to the reduction in pressure caused by other users on the main.

Consequently, the council commissioned a report from Wellington engineer Mr Fred Black, who argued that Napier should adopt a combined supply system for steamways and electric power, saving construction and operating costs.

The tramway scheme was not supported by all Napier ratepayers.

Some regarded it as a foolish, extravagant attempt to bring a provincial town with less than 11,000 people into line with the four main centres.

When the council finally obtained its loan finance of £25,000

and it was not until the 1920s that competition from buses started to turn the modest profit from the trams into losses.

While the trams reigned supreme, there was even a proposal to drive a 191 metre tunnel from Shakespeare Road opposite Curry Avenue through to the intersection of Milton Road and Napier Terrace.

It was one of three engineering options in an attempt to extend the tramway to the hospital but they were scrapped.

The only extension to the original tracks laid in 1912-1913 was down Hastings Street to the rail-

way — ultimately an unprofitable branch line.

Once introduced, the growth in electricity use was rapid.

Until 1926 nearly all the town's electricity was generated by gas-powered engines coupled to direct current (DC) generators.

However, not everyone was on town supply.

J J Niven and Co engineers had a generating plant operating before 1912 in its factory of Waghorne Street.

The old Municipal Theatre, with a roof that slid back to re-

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## Taking to the slopes

About 20,000 Hawke's Bay people visit the Whakapapa ski field each year.

And they contribute a healthy chunk of the \$7 million spent on the slopes annually.

In a good ski season 300,000 people, mostly from Auckland, find their way to the northern side of Mount Ruapehu in the Tongariro National Park.

Dave Massey, the general manager of Ruapehu Alpine Lifts, has conducted extensive research to find out where his customers come from.

Ninety-seven per cent are from the North Island. Napier people make up 1.7 per cent, Hastings residents 3.2 per cent and the rest of Hawke's Bay 1.2 per cent.

A snow-board business is bound to be a bit of a peculiar industry, Dave says.

Success or failure is

TOTALLY dependent on the weather.

By a complex business to manage because a year's worth of trading has to be done in a four-month season — July to October — and 80 per cent of the business is done during half of those 18 weeks.

All it takes is for a change of weather during the peak times of school holidays or weekends to wipe the smile off Dave's face.

At these peak periods thousands of people a day visit the mountain and if it isn't skiable it means money down the drain.

Dave says the best skiing months are September and October but operators just can't get people up the mountain at that time.

The weather is warmer but there is still a lot of snow around so it makes skiing more pleasurable, he says.

**Pictures Warren Buckland Report: Neill Gordon**



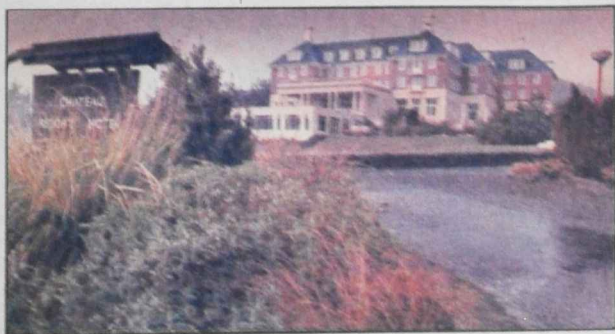
ABOVE: Ski suits — fashionable but necessary in sub-zero temperatures.



LEFT: Napier skier Mark Nilsson on the slopes at Whakapapa.



ABOVE: Paul Wotherspoon, 14, of Auckland, was enjoying a skiing holiday despite the cold.



RIGHT: High altitude luxury — the Chateau at 1140 metres above sea level.





# 50 YEARS OF POWER

The last power supply authority to be established in the area, the Hawke's Bay Electric Power Board, is celebrating its 50th anniversary. It is the knowledge that it is the major supplier of electricity in the province.

The board is justly proud of its achievements, which were made possible through the efforts of successive administrators and employees who surmounted the problems encountered on the way to the Jubilee.

"From humble beginnings the board has grown to become one of the province's major industries," said the chairman, Mr. K. R. Gillon.

"We number our customers in many thousands and they range from the one-room consumer to the great industrial complexes. The lifeblood of modern society and all are vitally dependent on the service we provide.

"It is my board's responsibility to see that this power is distributed efficiently, equitably, and as economically as possible and this has always been our endeavour," he added.

## COUNTRY RESIDENTS

Electricity was already being supplied to Hastings, Napier, Havelock North, Taradale and Greenmeadows, when, in answer to the demands of country residents, the board was formed in 1924.

As the other suppliers found they were unable to keep pace with the growing demand, they were gradually absorbed until the board is now the only distributor of power in the area, with the exception of the Napier Municipal Electricity Department which still remains independent.

The Hawke's Bay Electric Power Board came into existence in Napier, on September 27, 1924, with the first meeting of district representatives.

Mr. T. Crosse (Hawke's Bay County) was elected chairman. Others present were Messrs J. B. Andrew, W. Bayley, R. W. Waters, Henry Hill (all of Napier), R. D. Kettle, Father C. H. Seymour, and Mr. J. Lillis (Hawke's Bay County).

Mr. J. Lillis (Taradale Town District) was granted leave of absence.

## FIRST ACTS

One of the board's first acts was to purchase the electrical undertaking of the Taradale Town Board, which had been obtaining its power in bulk from the Napier.

It was also resolved to reticulate the Hawke's Bay

County and to supply power in bulk to Napier at its boundary.

Soon after its establishment the board began formulating plans to widen the scope of its future activities. These involved essentially the supply of power to both Hastings and Havelock North if necessary.

Faced with the mammoth task of reticulating the Hawke's Bay County, the board raised its first major loan, for \$500,000 (£200,000) in 1928, to enable it to carry out the work recommended by the consulting engineers, Vickers and Laoster.

Steel poles purchased at the time proved an excellent investment as they are still in excellent order and giving good service 46 years later.

Also in 1928, the Havelock North Town Board found that its small Ma-



Mr. K. R. Gillon, Chairman of board's record.

reticulating generating plant was inadequate and said it was prepared to consider the sale of its equipment to the board subject to the approval of the ratepayers.

However, nine more years were to elapse before the Hawke's Bay Electric Power Board did eventually take over the plant and supply power to Havelock North.

## 14 YEARS

In 1927, only three years after started operations, the Hawke's Bay Electric Power Board began supplying power to Hastings.

This was followed in 1933 by an agreement to purchase all the electrical assets of the Hastings Borough Council and to assume responsibility for the reticulation and supply of power within the borough.

For its first 14 years, the board's headquarters were in Napier but after taking over the Hastings reticulation the axis of operations moved to that area.

In 1938, 5300 of the 7000 consumers were living in power supply throughout the Hastings of the surrounding district.

Accordingly, new premises were bought in Hereingana Street, and the headquarters was moved there when a new building was opened in 1938.

While the board received its first supplies of power from the Napier power house, to supply residents of the Greenmeadows area, this applied for only three years.

Then, when a State electricity supply became available from Waikaremoana in 1927, it was the board's turn to supply power to Napier.

Steel poles purchased at the time proved an excellent investment as they are still in excellent order and giving good service 46 years later.

Power shortages are often considered to be a post-war phenomenon, but the first of these recurring problems occurred in 1923.

The board was asked to make temporary arrangements to reduce its load by 20 per cent and to keep faith with its consumers the board and for some months the staff worked constantly to restore power and repair and diesel plants in the area.

## NO WARNING

The beautiful clear warm morning, with children going back to school after the Christmas holidays, gave no warning of the disaster which would strike just before noon.

The business area of Napier was destroyed by the earthquake and subsequent fire.

Hastings buildings suffered slightly less damage and were spared the fire.

Electrically, the board's reticulation continued throughout the board's area to meet the ever-growing demand for electric power.



SOPHISTICATED CONTROL systems are an integral part of the Hawke's Bay Electric Power Board's organisation. Shown here is the nerve centre, the operations control room in Hastings.

In common with other power supply authorities throughout New Zealand, the Hawke's Bay board was feeling the effects of the economic depression in 1930, but a bigger headache was in store.

On February 3, 1931, Hawke's Bay reeled under the impact of a disastrous earthquake.

It was a day that all Hawke's Bay residents nearing 40 will remember all their lives.

## ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATED WITH GRANT

To celebrate its 38th anniversary, the Hawke's Bay Electric Power Board established a Children's Foundation with a \$13,000 grant, in February of this year.

The objects are to finance and promote research into diseases and illnesses of children, and three projects have already been completed.

Further projects are now being considered.

The programme came into a halt, however, during the Second World War, and all the energies were directed at consolidation and efforts to continue to supply power under increasing difficulties.

It was not until 1946 that the board was again able to take stock of its position and plan for the future.

By 1957, the maximum demand had reached 28 megawatts and the revenue for the year had passed the million dollar mark, totalling \$1,068,000.

The board was now in a strong growth period, with the demand for electricity continuing at an ever-increasing rate.

By 1963 the accounts showed a revenue of \$4,800,000 for the year.

## NEW SUBURBS

All through this period reticulation of new areas continued and in 1973, as the 50th anniversary approached, the work was accelerated to include the new suburbs of Tamatutu and Flaxmere.

Demand was also increased with the supply to another large consumer, the new pulp mill at Wharfedale. When the board started, the average house used no more than one or two low-wattage lamps. Electric stoves, refrigerators, panel-heating and other major usages of power were yet to be developed.

In the past 25 years the demand for the average house has increased threefold from about one kilowatt to more than three kilowatts.

At what point the demand will level off, one can yet venture to say.

"Never in its first 50 years has the board been free of problems as these are inevitable in any fast-growing and vital enterprise," said Mr. Gillon.

## EVERY EFFORT

"There will be more major problems and the board is pledged to apply every effort to ensure the continuing efficiency and effectiveness of its undertaking.

"We salute the achievements of those who have gone before.

"It is hats off to the past and new coats off to the future for hard work lies ahead," he said.

The Hawke's Bay Electric Power Board at present comprises Messrs K. R. Gillon, chairman, K. L. Duckworth, D. D. Twigg (Napier), M. R. Henton, J. E. Robertson, C. W. J. Tucker, V. S. Crisp (HB County), J. K. Agnew, H. M. Leeboldt, J. G. Seton (Hastings), W. C. F. Leister (Havelock North).

## THE HAWKE'S BAY ELECTRIC POWER BOARD Jubilee Children's Foundation

The foundation is... a charitable Trust set up by the Board to mark its 50th Jubilee.

Its principal objects are... to finance and promote research into diseases and illnesses of children whether physical or mental.

It was created because... Statistics show that the Hawke's Bay region has one of the higher death rates of newborn and infants in New Zealand.

The Board of Trustees... administer the foundation. The present Board of Trustees is:-

- Dr J. R. Grimaldy Superintendent and Chief, Hawke's Bay Hospital Board.
- Dr J. S. Hopkirk Surgeon, Hawke's Bay Hospital Board.
- Dr A. S. Turner Physician, Hawke's Bay Hospital Board.
- L. J. Webb Partner, Brown Webb & Co.
- K. R. Gillon Chairman, Hawke's Bay Electric Power Board.
- T. M. Graham General Manager, Hawke's Bay Electric Power Board.

You can help By forwarding your donation to THE SECRETARY, C/- BOX 555, HASTINGS.

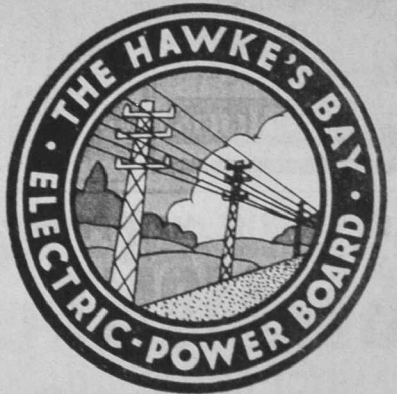
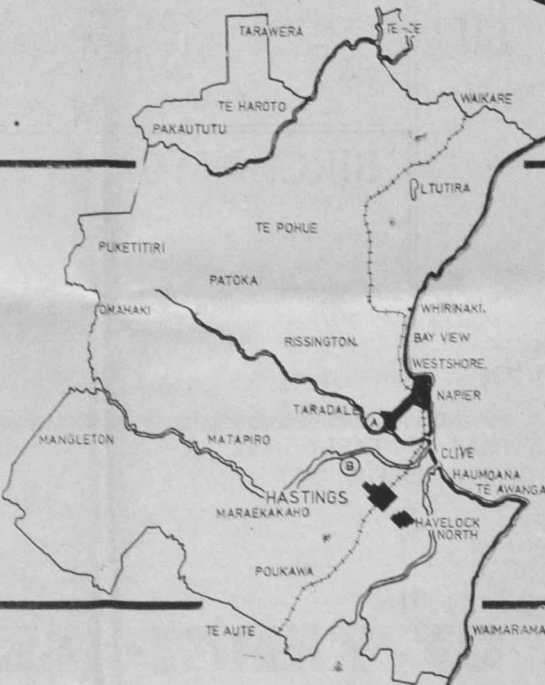
# 50 YEARS OF PROGRESS 1924 1974

For 50 years the Hawke's Bay Electric Power Board has distributed electricity to satisfy the ever-increasing demand for power throughout the Hawke's Bay area.

We are proud to have played an important part in the development of Hawke's Bay and today, thanks to the prosperity of the district and support of the Industrial, Farming and Domestic Consumers, your Board is the fifth largest in New Zealand.

The Power Board belongs to you  
Its members are elected by you . .

- Power is purchased from the New Zealand Electricity Department, and distributed to your home, office, shop, factory or firm.
- New lines to give supply to housing developments, business and farming communities must be surveyed and built.
- The Board's distribution lines are maintained by a fully-trained staff to give continuity of service.
- Electric Ranges and appliances are sold and maintained, providing a satisfactory and economic service.
- A qualified staff of inspectors are employed to ensure a high standard of electrical work.
- Each two months over 75,000 meters are read and accounts rendered to every consumer.
- Free advice on the use of electricity is available through the Board's Advisory Service.



Then	
Population	12,325
Consumers	90
Revenue	\$920
Staff	5
Now	
Population	92,300
Consumers	33,592
Revenue	\$7 million
Staff	255