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Index to Contents :

The Index to Editorial Articles is on page 506; index to Advertisements on page 62; the Buyers' Guide is on pages 64-8; the Catalogue Index on page 60

PUBLIC OWNERSHIP DISTRIBUTION OF HYDRO-ELECTRIC POWER.

In January, 1906, the Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario appointed a commission, with the Hon. Adam Beck as chairman, to inquire into and report upon the possibilities of generating and distributing as a public ownership scheme, electric energy. Their first report was distributed in April of that year.

The Commission considered the present probable demand for hydro-electric power in the various districts capable of being supplied from the different water-powers within the Province of Ontario. Special attention was given to the condition of affairs in South-Western Ontario and in that section referred to usually as the Niagara district.

The Commission decided at this time that there was a market for at least 50,000 horse-power within a reasonable radius of Niagara Falls, and that if trunk transmission lines capable of carrying large quantities were constructed, the demand would increase to at least 100,000 horse-power.

The consideration of the conditions existing at Niagara Falls led the Commissioners latterly to recommend the purchasing of electrical energy in a large block from one of the existing companies rather than erecting a new power-house along the Gorge. Prices were submitted, and it was decided that the Union of Municipalities, under the direction and advice of the Hydro-Electric Commission, would attain better results by buying their power and transmitting it than by generating and transmitting. Accordingly, trunk transmission lines were constructed to Dundas, Toronto, Guelph, Galt, Berlin, Woodstock, and lines are planned as far west as Windsor. Work was commenced, and this week there was celebrated at Berlin, Ont., the inauguration of one of the most extensive, intricate, and yet successful public ownership schemes that this continent has or may expect to see.

Ontario, and especially Ontario bordering on the lakes, has been a manufacturing district. The electric companies have in a number of cases made contracts at very low prices for the supply of electric energy, but the supply at low prices has been very limited. Cost of manufacturing was increasing. The possibilities of cheap manufacturing in other centres was becoming greater; in fact, for a time, even in the Niagara district, the cost of electricity to the customer from the largest power plant was just a fraction under what it would cost him to produce the same amount of energy by steam or gas, or other local sources of power.