

Wisconsin River Power Company

Since the Wisconsin River Power Company (WRPCo) was a later entity to CWPCo and the plants are basically unchanged since they were constructed in the middle of this century, not as much time will be spent on their history.

The original planning for the two hydro plants known as Petenwell and Castle Rock began in the late 1920's. Consolidated Water Power & Paper Company was an expanding industry and the need for added electric power sources in the Wisconsin valley was a necessity. Under George Mead's guidance, new hydro sites in the areas of Adams and Juneau County were explored. By this time Bill Thiele and Tom Utegaard were part of Consolidated's team. With the help of a Corps of Engineers study of the Wisconsin River made in about 1905 the team set out on several field trips to explore the river's potential. Two sites were chosen, one just north of Highway 21 and the other site was south of the old village of Germantown. In 1928 a surveyor named William Halldane was employed to make detailed maps of this entire stretch. Each section of land was mapped carefully and the data was incorporated into about 30 or 40 large section maps. A net head of 40 feet was chosen for the northern site and a net head of 28 feet was chosen for the lower or Germantown site. The new water elevations were then superimposed onto the maps and the laborious process of purchasing the land began. Three main buyers were selected, their names were Mr. Kinnister, Mr. Brockman and Mr. C.C. Fuller. The latter being president of the Necedah Bank. Claude Lynn, of Consolidated was chosen to keep all the necessary records for the company. In general, the public was not informed as to the reason for the land purchases. As one might recall, the economy in this era of time was not the greatest, so the public in general was willing to sell the land. Quite a bit of land was purchased for back taxes. One of the more interesting purchases involved the Dellwood Subdivision in Adams County. In about 1922, 4,000 lots generally measuring 50 feet by 125 feet were laid out on a rectangular grid. The streets were normally 33 feet wide. A large hotel and a rather elegant town house was erected by the developer. Since the C & NW passenger service ran right through this area, it was the intent of the developers to bring trainload of prospective buyers to the area and entertain them for the weekend in hopes that they would purchase lots. The general asking price for the lots was \$49.50 per lot. In addition to the hotel and the town house, a large dance hall pavilion was also erected. During its heyday, many of the large name bands (Dorsey, Whiteman, Lombardo and others) made frequent stops at this facility. When the depression came, this development was hit hard and there were many lots left unsold. The three buyers purchased a large percentage of this subdivision.

In the 1930-36 era the company formed an entity called the Wisconsin Hydro-Authority. The plans began at Mosinee, included a canal, a tunnel, two reservoirs (The Big Eau Pleine and the Little Eau Pleine), a new hydro plant and reservoir at the Knowlton site, the building of the Highway 21 and the Germantown hydro plants and a canal which

would divert up to 1,500 cfs from the Wisconsin River to the Fox River in an old cross over canal at Portage. During this time, names for the two new hydro plants were chosen. The northern site was to be named Petenwell, after an old Indian tale and myth involving the Petenwell Rock. The Germantown site was to be called Castle Rock. Near Highway 81 towards Mauston is a large rock that resembles a Castle and George Mead decided that Castle Rock would be the name for the southern hydro site.

The Wisconsin Hydro Authority finally had to be abandoned due to a variety of things, such as politics, financing and the general economy of the times. It was in the late 1930's that construction of the Knowlton Plant (DuBay) was begun. It was also an era where America's participation in World War II seemed eminent, so the plans for Petenwell and Castle Rock were put on hold.

After WW II, George Mead decided to renew activity on the plans for Petenwell and Castle Rock. It was also about this time, 1945, that a Federal Law suit involving the Tomahawk Hydro plant was decided which gave the Federal Power Commission prime jurisdiction over new sites on the Wisconsin River. The plans for the hydro plants had to be redrawn and redesigned to new specifications and rules. Harza Engineering Company of Chicago was hired to handle this job.

There was more land to buy and the costs of construction had escalated to a point where it was impossible for Consolidated Water Power & Paper Company to finance this project alone. After some long meetings with likely partners and after having worked through a tangle of legal agreements, the Wisconsin River Power Company was formed in 1947. The stock was to be issued in essential equal amounts to Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co., Wisconsin Power & Light Company and Wisconsin Public Service Corporation. Consolidated Water Power Company was chosen as the entity that would handle all of the legal, administrative, regulatory, maintenance and operating details of these two plants and would oversee a Power Purchase Contract that would see that the three partners received equal outputs of the two plants. Later, the stock belonging to Consolidated Water Power and Paper Company would be purchased by Consolidated Water Power Company. Thus, over twenty years after George Mead's first dream of harnessing the power at these two sites, construction would begin at the Petenwell site on Aug. 1, 1947. Following is a chronological history of events.

Thus, on this 100th anniversary date, the dreams of Mead, Thiele and Utegaard have been churning out kilowatts for over forty four years. These two plants are still the most modern hydro facilities on the Wisconsin River and probably are the last sizable developments that will be constructed on this river.

The Wisconsin Public Service Commission, which had jurisdiction over such things in those days, set the operating limits of the ponds. These have basically remained unchanged since that time, but will be reviewed closely during the present relicensing process.

The two plants were built with many similarities. The turbines and gates are exactly the same at both plants. Castle Rock has one more taintor gate, giving that plant slightly more capacity for floods. This is because of the Yellow River which flows from the northwest into Castle Rock Lake. Under the right conditions, the Yellow can produce flood flows of 12,000 cfs or better, adding to the flow from Petenwell. By operating these plants early in a flood, the peaks can be shaved, saving worse flooding below Castle Rock.