



Upper Left: One of the rotor / turbines for the Madison River Power Plant.

Upper Right: Rotor on the scow.

Middle Right: Madison River Dam & flues.

Above Right: Completed power plant

Above: 25 horses and five men move the rotor up the Madison valley.

Right: The interior of the power plant.

Left: Street lamp on the corner of Cedar and Main St. Three Forks, c. 1917



Madison River Power Co.

Today, one takes for granted that if a switch is flipped, lights will come on or music will play. But, it was just 100 years ago that the Gallatin Valley got powered up.

The Madison River Dam was constructed in 1903 and it was two years before the power plant was completed. Part of the difficulty was getting materials to the relatively remote location just a few miles from Norris and Redbluff. After the dam, flues and power plant building were constructed, one last challenge remained to finish the plant, getting four rotor / turbines to the plant and installed. Each rotor weigh several tons and had to have a special wagon to move it. It took 24 horses and five men to get the four rotors, one at a time, from the rail station at Logan to the mouth of the Madison Canyon. There, the rotor was transferred to a scow and floated up river to the construction site.

Power lines were run to Bozeman and they had their first

electricity in 1906. Power lines reached Trident and Three Forks about the same time. To help give impetus to the idea, J. Q. Adams, founder and patron of the City, pledged the funds to buy and install six street lamps. The two banks in town, Three Valleys Bank and First National Bank, pledged one street lamp each. So, on December 8, 1912 the fancy five-globed electrified lights of Three Forks were turned on for the first time.

The Madison River Power Company paid a annual \$25 business license fee to the City in 1911. Only the bars and hotels paid higher annual fees (\$50+).

Butte Electric and Power Company merged itself and its three subsidiaries to form the Montana Power Company on December 12, 1912. Madison River Power Company was one of the subsidiaries, along with Billings and Eastern Montana Power Company and the Missoula River Power Company. By 1917, Montana Power had an office in town (at the Ruby Theatre), and through the years the office changed locations.