

OCTOBER 7, 2010

OPG MARKS THE 100th ANNIVERSARY OF POWER IN KITCHENER
Town then known as Berlin was electrified October 11, 1910

While Ontarians enjoy their holiday turkey and residents of Kitchener Waterloo take in the annual Oktoberfest Parade, a historic event, the “electrification” of what’s now known as Kitchener will also be marked.

A century ago, on October 11, 1910, future Prime Minister Mackenzie King, Premier James Whitney and Adam Beck, the father of public power in Ontario, joined local dignitaries and hundreds of people to “switch on” the town with electricity from Niagara Falls, 180 kilometers away – an incredible achievement for the time.

Ontario Power Generation, Hydro One and Kitchener-Wilmot Hydro are honouring the event with a commemorative ad in local newspapers and Kitchener-Wilmot Hydro has developed an exhibit that can be seen at the Kitchener Public Utilities building at 191 King Street West in Kitchener, on Monday, October 11 between 10 am and 2 pm; it will then move to the main branch of the Kitchener Public Library for the remainder of October.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- In the early 20th century, Adam Beck, the father of public power in Ontario and founder of Ontario Hydro (HEPC), staged a series of “switch-on” ceremonies throughout the Province to showcase the power of electricity.
- The first city selected for this honour was Berlin (now Kitchener).
- Berlin was chosen because it had been the site of the so called “Berlin Convention” in 1903 in which delegates representing major municipalities of southwest Ontario met to discuss the transmission of power from Niagara Falls to cities and towns in the region.
- The Berlin “switch-on” took place on October 11, 1910 and was held in the town’s largest indoor space – a hockey rink.

- The “switch-on” transmitted for the first time 110,000 volts of electricity over 180 kilometers of transmission line from Niagara Falls to Berlin – realizing the vision developed seven years earlier at the Berlin Convention.
- Dignitaries attending the “switch-on” included:
 - Waterloo MP and future Prime Minister, Mackenzie King
 - Ontario Premier Sir James Whitney
 - Members of the Ontario Cabinet and Provincial Legislature
- A young girl, Miss Hilda Rumpel, wearing a red, white and blue outfit, carried the switch and its key on a pillow and presented it to the Premier.
- When the time came to turn on the power, instead of turning on the switch himself as planned, Premier Whitney graciously took Adam Beck’s hand and placed it on the switch – allowing Sir Adam to be the one who turned on the power.
- As the switch was pulled, the auditorium in Berlin was flooded with light from hundreds of light bulbs. Dozens of electrical devices, which had been set up ahead of time, started to operate. Outside the auditorium, the town’s main street blazed with light. Miss Rumpel wore a specially designed crown of electric light bulbs that lit up as the switch was pulled.
- Following the “switch-on”, a number of speeches were delivered – both in the auditorium and later that evening at a banquet in the Berlin Market House, attended by over 500 people. Every dish served at the banquet was cooked using electricity.
- During the “switch-on” ceremonies and banquet, “Oh Canada” was played by the band on at least four different occasions. At the banquet, the band also played “See the Conquering Comes” four times – usually whenever Adam Beck rose to speak.

PHOTOS OF THE EVENT ARE AVAILABLE AT:

<http://images.ourontario.ca/kitchener/results?grd=876>