

# COSMOPOLITAN CHRONICLE

True tales from the annals of history, archaeology, construction, and restoration of the Casa de Bandini and Cosmopolitan Hotel.  
Old Town San Diego State Historic Park

VOL. III. No. 18

SAN DIEGO, ALTA CALIFORNIA, JULY 10, 2009

PRICE: FREE

## Electricity

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When Cave Coutts Jr. remodeled his grandfather's casa in 1930, he added plumbing to the building for the first time, but electricity was already there. A picture taken between 1900 and 1910 when the Cosmopolitan was being used as a school, shows electric wires strung on the ceiling, powering electric light bulbs.

This was about 25 years after electricity was first available in San Diego. In 1886, only 4 years after the very first commercial power plant was built in Manhattan, the Horton House (at the current location of the U.S. Grant Hotel) was the first building in San Diego to have electric lighting, 15 years after it was built. It received its power from the Jenney Electric Light Company, the first in town. San Diego Gas, Fuel, and Electric Light Company formed in 1887, buying out

the Jenney Electric Lighting Company, of Indianapolis, the San Diego Gas Company, and of the San Diego & Coronado Gas & Electric Light Company, becoming the second company in town to provide electricity. In 1095 it became the San Diego Consolidated Gas and Electric Company. In 1910 however, it still had less than 6,000 electric customers.

Where did these companies get electricity to sell? Almost everyone in the U.S. has heard that Benjamin Franklin did experiments with kites and lightning. He is credited with developing the notion of positive and negative charges, and his experiments illustrated that lightning is an electrical discharge.

But we do not harvest our electricity from lightning. To do that it took the work of many more people. As early as 1650, the German physicist Otto von Guericke experimented with generating electricity. In 1729 Englishman Stephen Gray discovered electrical conductivity, Hans Oersted discovered electromagnetism

in 1820, Michael Faraday in 1831 formulates the principles of electric motors and transformers, bringing us to 1879, and Thomas Edison's invention of the light bulb. But to make the bulb work, Edison needed to also invent 6 other things: the parallel circuit, an improved dynamo, the underground conductor network, the devices for maintaining constant voltage, safety fuses and insulating materials, and light sockets with on-off switches.

In San Diego, the power company built an electric power plant on Second and J Streets to power arc street lights, some of which were 125 feet tall. A second was built in 1888 to supply power to an Electric Rapid Transit (which failed,) and the city's first incandescent lighting service.

