


Georgia Historical Society publishes Georgia Power business history profile for students

MONDAY, AUG. 1, 2016 - The Georgia Historical Society (GHS) has published a Georgia Power business history profile that is available to teachers, students and interested citizens throughout the state.

The distribution of the profile is part of GHS's Georgia Business History Initiative that seeks to highlight iconic companies in the state in an effort to teach Georgia students, citizens and tourists about the role of Georgia's leading businesses in the economic, cultural and social development of Georgia and the United States.

In addition to the profile, the GHS honored Georgia Power last year with a historical marker that describes the early history of the company in a brief paragraph. The marker is located on the corner of Ralph McGill Blvd. and Piedmont Ave.

Other honorees to date have included Coca-Cola, Delta Airlines, Georgia World Congress Center, Southern Company, United Distributors and Waffle House.




Georgia Power Company has been serving Georgians since the 1880s. From a small electric company supplying electricity primarily to Atlanta residents, Georgia Power has grown to become the state's leading power provider. Not just a producer of electricity, Georgia Power lives up to its longtime motto "A Citizen Wherever We Serve" by creating jobs, bringing new industry to the state, and running one of the largest corporate foundations in Georgia.


The people of Atlanta took the initiative to organize the first Georgia Power Company, the Georgia Electric Light Company of Atlanta (GELCA). In 1883, the company built a 940-kilowatt generating plant on Marietta and Spring Streets, installed 22 electric streetlights, and received a franchise that allowed it to provide electricity to Atlanta residents. At first, GELCA primarily provided electricity for street lighting and street railway transportation. After Atlanta banker Henry M. Atkinson took control of the company in 1891, GELCA expanded to include a new steam electric generating plant on Davis Street. He also shortened the company name to Georgia Electric Light Company.

Although the Davis Street Plant was generating 11,000 kilowatts of power and serving about 400 customers, the demand for electricity continued to increase. Atkinson recognized this demand and decided to expand the company. He and rival Joel Hart, a streetcar entrepreneur, competed to gain control of Atlanta's small electric, streetcar, and steam-heat businesses. Hart and Atkinson raced to purchase the small companies. The dispute finally ended in 1902 when Atkinson bought out Hart and formed the Georgia Railway and Electric Company (GREAEC). The same year, Georgia Power's most iconic leader, Preston S. Arkwright, became the first president of the new company.

One of Arkwright's greatest challenges was keeping up with Atlanta's demand for electric power. Up to that point, two main steam plants and one substation generated Atlanta's electricity, but the output could not keep up with demand. Arkwright looked to a new source to meet Atlanta's needs—hydroelectric power.



Top: Henry M. Atkinson, founder of Georgia Electric Light Company.



Bottom: Preston S. Arkwright, first president of Georgia Railway and Electric Company.