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The St. Gabriel Powerhouse

The Jacques-Cartier Water and Power Company built the St. Gabriel hydroelectric powerhouse in 1899 and it was inaugurated in March 1900. During the time it was fully operational, the St. Gabriel Powerhouse supplied electricity to the Valcartier military base, the municipalities of Loretteville and Shannon and a small section of the City of Quebec.



The powerhouse, built in 1902 – Surrounded by houses built for its employees
Source: City of Shannon Archives



“Bulk Head” and gravity dam – Source: City of Shannon archives

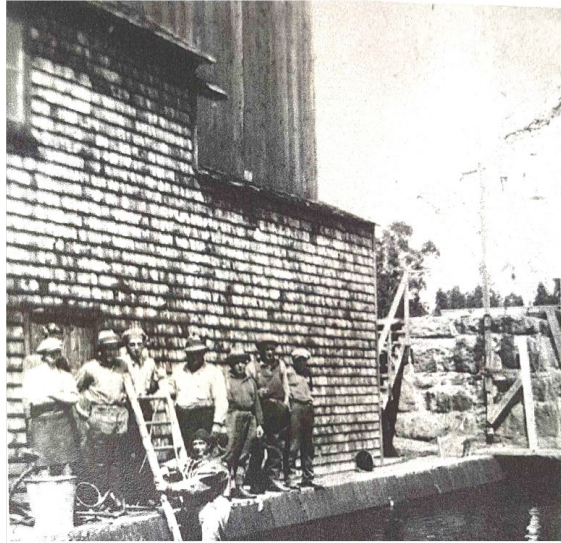
In 1909, the St. Gabriel Powerhouse was taken over by the Quebec Railway, Light and Power Company. In 1923, they became the Public Service Corporation of Quebec, then in later years the Quebec Power Company. Hydro-Quebec was the last owner of the powerhouse, when the electric power companies were nationalized in 1963.



Gravity dam and "Bulk Head" - Source: City of Shannon archives

A fire destroyed the first wooden framework of the main building in 1904, which required the rebuilding of the roof and the structure. In 1972 there was another fire at the powerhouse but by this time, operations had already ceased (1964). In 1973, the buildings were torn down. In 1976, following a bad flood, a large gap appeared in the dam, and Hydro-Quebec decided to demolish it. Members of the Armed Forces took part in its destruction.

The electricity generated by the powerhouse was carried a distance of 29 kms to a receiving station on Queen Street (rue de la Reine) in Quebec City. The electricity was carried by two 24,000-volt lines on wooden poles. The employees of the powerhouse were all local Anglophones of Irish ancestry. Up until 1957, eight employees: a superintendent, four machine operators, and three machine maintenance men, worked 12-hour shifts to run the powerhouse.



Powerhouse employees cleaning the trash racks
Source: City of Shannon archives

Several homes were built for those employees not already living in the vicinity of the powerhouse. These electrically heated homes were equipped with refrigerators, stoves, water tanks, etc. all of which were maintained by the company. There were five houses including a duplex, which in total accommodated six families.



Powerhouse home of Leo and Marcelle Floyd
Photo, courtesy of the Floyd family

During the 1950's, an operator earned 62¢ an hour and if he was living in one of company houses, he was charged \$12 a month for rent.

The powerhouse employees and their families became a tightly knit social group. After the First World War, Major-General Sam Hughes' residence was converted into a school for the children of the powerhouse employees.

The powerhouse site was not only a place of work, but it also became a meeting place for the Irish community that had established itself on the banks of the Jacques-Cartier River. It offered a well-maintained tennis court in the summer as well as a skating rink on the river in the winter. Activities, such as dances on Saturday nights, were organized to entertain the employees.

In 1973 when the powerhouse was being demolished, the foundations and turbines were left in place and covered over with earth. Then in 1993, Hydro-Quebec excavated about half of those foundations and turbines to preserve and feature them as historical artifacts.



Old turbine – Source: Patri-Arch
With permission of the MRC de La Jacques-Cartier

In 2000, the Municipality of Shannon created a park so that the public could visit this historical site. This park was inaugurated in 2004.



Remnants of the "Bulk Head's" foundation – Source: Patri-Arch
With permission of the MRC de La Jacques-Cartier

The heritage value given to this site is mainly based on its historical value. It was one of the oldest hydroelectric power plants in Quebec and it played an important role in the development of Shannon.