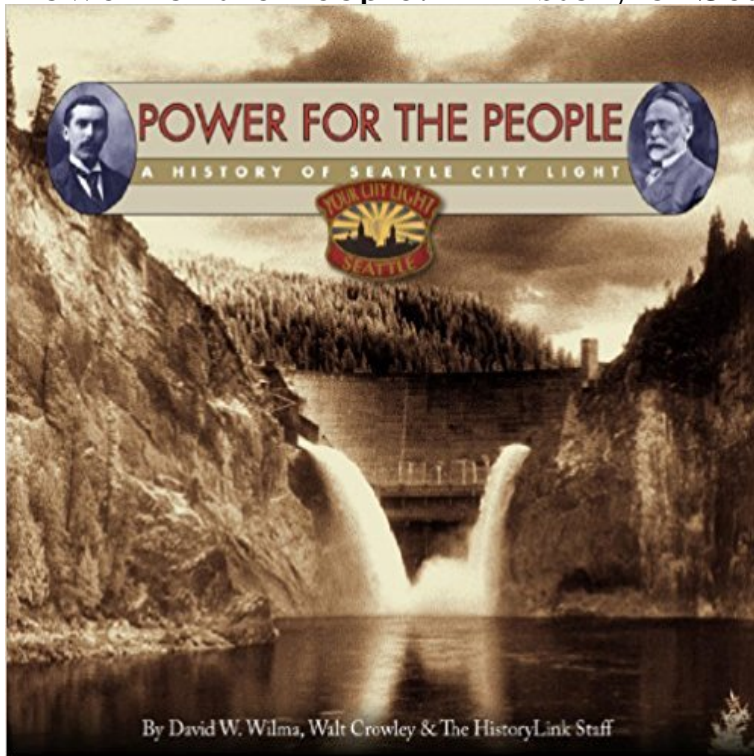


Power for the People: A History of Seattle City Light



Since before Seattle voters decided in 1902 to build their own lighting plant, City Light has been a source of fierce civic pride for its independence from foreign corporations, its impressive public works projects, and its consistently low electricity rates. It has also been a headache for competitors, managers, and politicians. In the first years of the electric age, when Seattle was still a hard-scrabble frontier town, power was supplied by a revolving cast of small private utilities remembered mostly for frequent mergers with rivals and mediocre service at high cost. The failure of the privately owned water company to deliver enough of its product to quell Seattle's Great Fire of 1889 got city officials and residents thinking about an alternative utility model--municipal ownership. Voters quickly approved a municipal water system, and within a decade had laid the groundwork for an electric utility. City Light quickly began a campaign of dam construction that for most of the twentieth century provided Seattle with the cheapest electricity of any major city in the country. This brisk history traces the utility's origins to 1889 and follows its story through the national energy crisis of 2000-2001 up to the present. It is a quintessentially Northwest story.

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