Canada's History for Kids
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Kayak

Canada's History Magazine for Kids

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Electrifying!

PM #40063001

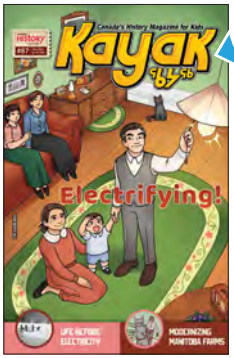
LIFE BEFORE ELECTRICITY

MODERNIZING MANITOBA FARMS

CONTENTS

Psst! These symbols spell Kayak in Inuktitut.

COVER STORY



Cover Illustration: Nickia McIvor

There's More!

FROM-THE-EDITOR

Can you imagine life without electricity? You don't have to understand exactly what it is or where it comes from to appreciate how much better it has made things. But the ways we make and move electricity have also hurt people — especially Indigenous people — as well as animals and the environment. You can help make the future brighter by learning about our power-ful history.

Nancy

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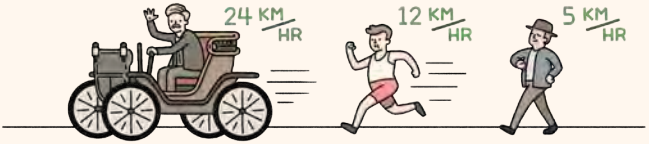
HUDSON'S BAY

THE PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS IN OTTAWA HAD ELECTRIC LIGHTS ONE YEAR BEFORE THE AMERICAN CAPITOL BUILDINGS.

IN 1960, NEW BRUNSWICK AND NOVA SCOTIA MADE THE FIRST INTERPROVINCIAL ELECTRICAL CONNECTION.



ONTARIO LAWYER FREDERICK FETHERSTONHAUGH DROVE CANADA'S FIRST ELECTRIC CAR IN 1893. IT COULD GO 24 KM/HR.

QUEBEC'S JAMES BAY HYDRO PROJECT OF THE 1970S AND '80S FLOODED AN AREA BIGGER THAN LEBANON OR JAMAICA AND KILLED ABOUT 10,000 CARIBOU.

CANADA'S FIRST COMMERCIAL WIND FARM NEAR PINCHER CREEK, ALTA., STARTED GENERATING ELECTRICITY IN 1993.

"WE OF THE PRESENT GENERATION ARE THE FIRST TO ENJOY REAL LIBERATION FROM THE DARKNESS AND LURKING FEAR OF NIGHT."
-FROM AN AD FOR THE MONTREAL COMPANY NORTHERN ELECTRIC, 1924

Ryan Harby

Dark, Dirty & Dangerous

Although everyone's life was different, in the days before reliable electricity, you would have been MUCH less comfortable and worked MUCH harder.

Light

Before your family had electricity, you probably got up with the sun and went to bed not long after it did. You had to carry your small circle of weak candle or lamp light around with you. You might have helped make candles, or had the messy job of cleaning the kerosene lamps.

Reading by a candle or lamp was hard on the eyes.

A kitchen in Freeport, N.S., 1950.

Heat

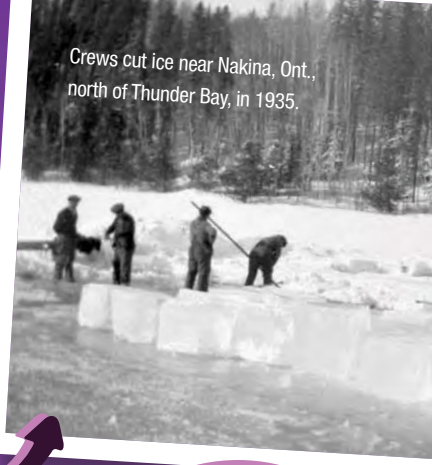
Your house would have had one stove that burned wood or coal (or both). Some might have had a smaller second stove in another room. Few had one upstairs. The stovepipes threw off a bit of heat, but if your bedroom was upstairs, it was cold in the winter.

To help warm up a chilly bed, people would heat a stone or brick on the stove or fill a rubber bottle with hot water.

Library and Archives Canada, Nova Scotia Archives

Food

You wouldn't have had many choices (or many leftovers), since food had to be eaten before it went bad. Kids helped with the slow, hot work of preserving summer's fruit and vegetables in jars for the cold months. Your family might have used a root cellar, where things like potatoes, carrots, apples and turnips were stored in earth over the winter. Some families had an icebox to keep food cool. Crews cut big blocks of ice from frozen lakes. Icemen stored them in straw or wood shavings and sold them in chunks that lasted a few days in the icebox.



Crews cut ice near Nakina, Ont., north of Thunder Bay, in 1935.

For generations, Indigenous people have dried, smoked or frozen food so they didn't need refrigeration. At right, an Inuit woman sets out fish to dry, 1951.

A boy takes a bath in a metal tub near Mannville, Alta., 1949.

Water

Whether you lived in the country or the city, your toilet was outside. (If you've used an outhouse in a park in the summer, just imagine doing it in January!) You might have had a chamber pot under your bed for doing your business — emptying it in the morning was also your job. You likely would have had a bath once a week, using water heated on the cook stove and shared by the whole family in turn.

Risky Times

Candles and old-fashioned lamps look pretty, but if you dropped or forgot one, you could burn down a house or barn in no time. Chimney fires were common. Spoiled food could make people terribly sick. Unclean water carried diseases. Electricity helped make life much safer.

In English, an outhouse is sometimes called the back house. That word became "bécosse," which many francophones use for the same thing.

Glenbow Museum, BAnQ, Library and Archives Canada

POWER TO THE PEOPLE

Making electricity and moving it around is a big challenge in such a big country. The benefits and harm caused along the way haven't always been shared equally.

Shawinigan Water and Power generating station near La Gabelle, Que., late 1960s.

Library and Archives Canada

WATER

Tumbling, rushing water had long been used to turn wheels that ran mills for sawing lumber and grinding grain. In 1881, Canada's first hydroelectric station started generating electricity as the churning water of the Chaudière Rapids in the Ottawa River turned huge turbines. From coast to coast to coast, the race was on to harness water. The bad news: As companies and governments dammed and diverted rivers to create electricity, they often flooded huge areas, drastically changing habitats and killing fish and animals. In some places, changing the water flow or flooding traditional territories destroyed Indigenous people's homes and food sources they had long relied on, such as manoomin (wild rice) and hunting areas. The better news: Hydro power doesn't emit gases that contribute to climate change.

BIG IN: Yukon, British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador

Hydro is an ancient Greek word for water. People from other English-speaking countries often find it funny that when Canadians say hydro, we mean electricity. That's because so much of our power is generated from water, we've just shortened the word hydroelectricity.

Canada's first generating station at the Chaudière Falls in the Ottawa River is becoming a park, thanks to the National Capital Commission and the local Algonquin community. Although it won't be finished for a while, the park already has accessible pathways to viewing stations with an amazing view of the rushing water.

About 60 per cent of Canada's electricity comes from hydro power.

Hydro-Québec started planning huge generating stations in the James Bay region without talking to the Cree, Innu and Inuit people who had lived there for many generations. Protests eventually led to the first modern treaty, the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement in 1975. You can read more about it in the comic "Power of the People" in the September 2018 *Kayak* at CanadasHistory.ca/JamesBay.

TIDES

In Annapolis Royal in 1984, Nova Scotia built Canada's only plant that generated electricity from the ocean's daily tides. Although it doesn't damage the environment as much as other methods, tidal electricity is very expensive. The Annapolis Royal Generating Station shut down in 2019. Other companies have tried to set up tidal energy plants but haven't succeeded yet.

Alamy, National Capital Commission

COAL

People in cities and places without a lot of trees had long burned coal to heat their homes and cook stoves. In the 1950s, some provinces started burning coal to generate electricity. Although coal was plentiful in several parts of Canada, mining it was dangerous: In Nova Scotia alone, nearly 2,500 died between 1839 and 1992 in coal mines. Many more miners died later from years of breathing poisonous dust. Burning coal pollutes the air, and the ash it leaves behind can contaminate soil and water.

BIG IN: Alberta, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia

Early on, boys as young as eight worked in Canadian coal mines. Until the early 1900s, there were no rules about how old a coal miner had to be. The boy shown above is 14. (Date and location unknown)

A freight train loads coal from a processing plant near Cadomin, Alberta.

Oil and gas are forms of petroleum, which comes from fossilized plants and trees under the ground. The Canadian oil industry started with a discovery in southwestern Ontario in 1857. Alberta produces the most petroleum products of any province. Gas was first found there near Medicine Hat in 1904.

Library and Archives Canada, Alamy

Oil drilling operation in Alberta.

OIL AND GAS

In many parts of Canada, people's electricity comes from plants that burn diesel oil or natural gas. Getting those fuels out of the ground and processing them to be useable affects the environment. When oil and gas are burned, they pollute the air, although natural gas is cleaner.

BIG IN: Alberta (natural gas), Northwest Territories and Nunavut (diesel)

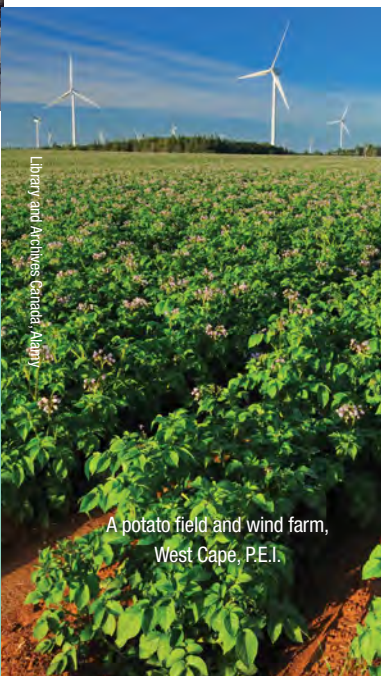
NUCLEAR


Pickering Nuclear Generating Station near Toronto.

Canada's first nuclear power plant started operating in Ontario in 1962. Canadian scientists developed the world-famous CANDU nuclear reactor. Although it's very expensive, this kind of power doesn't pollute the air or create greenhouse gases the way oil, gas or coal do. For a while it seemed nuclear energy would be a big part of our electrical future, but by the 1970s, many Canadians were starting to worry it was too dangerous. Researchers are working on something called small modular reactors that are safer but produce less energy. Nuclear power generation creates deadly radioactive material. Canada's Nuclear Waste Management Organization has the job of finding a way to deal with it safely.

BIG IN: Ontario, New Brunswick

At first, private companies set up and ran most of the electricity generating plants. Provincial, territorial and local governments eventually took over the business of making, moving and selling power. These governments often sold these businesses back to private companies.


Library and Archives Canada, Alamy

A potato field and wind farm, West Cape, P.E.I.

WIND AND SUN

These are sometimes called "renewables" because their power sources just keep producing — we don't use them up. The wind turns giant turbines to create electricity. Solar panels generate power by converting the sun's energy. Both have taken off since the 1990s but are still on the pricey side. They don't generate electricity when there's no wind or the sun isn't shining, though, so the next step is finding the best way to store power for those times.

BIG IN: Prince Edward Island


Inuit kids by a window, Northwest Territories, 1955.

People have used passive solar power — heat and light from the sun — for centuries. They left salt water out to evaporate, dried fruit in the summer sun or put in windows to allow sunshine.

Power lines in Alberta (top) and Manitoba (right)

POLES AND LINES

Once you've generated electricity, how do you get it to customers? The first hydro plants had to be located fairly close to the people who needed it. Companies soon started experimenting with ways to transmit electricity over longer distances. They strung long wires along rows of tall wooden poles. These power lines carried power to stations where it was reduced in strength and sent on to homes, businesses, schools and anywhere else that needed electricity.

A 27-kilometre-long power line built in 1897 from the Saint-Narcisse generating station to Trois-Rivières, Que., was the longest in the British Empire at the time. The next year, a plant on B.C.'s Kootenay River started transmitting to mines about 50 km away. Those distances continued to grow, and electricity travelled farther and farther away. Giant metal towers supported bigger and stronger lines.

Mines, paper mills, factories and other big industries were usually first in line to get electricity. Big cities generally had electric power before smaller towns and villages. People in the countryside waited longest, especially if they lived on small islands or far from bigger centres. Areas with lots of rivers that could be harnessed got electricity before places that didn't have such good ways to generate power nearby.

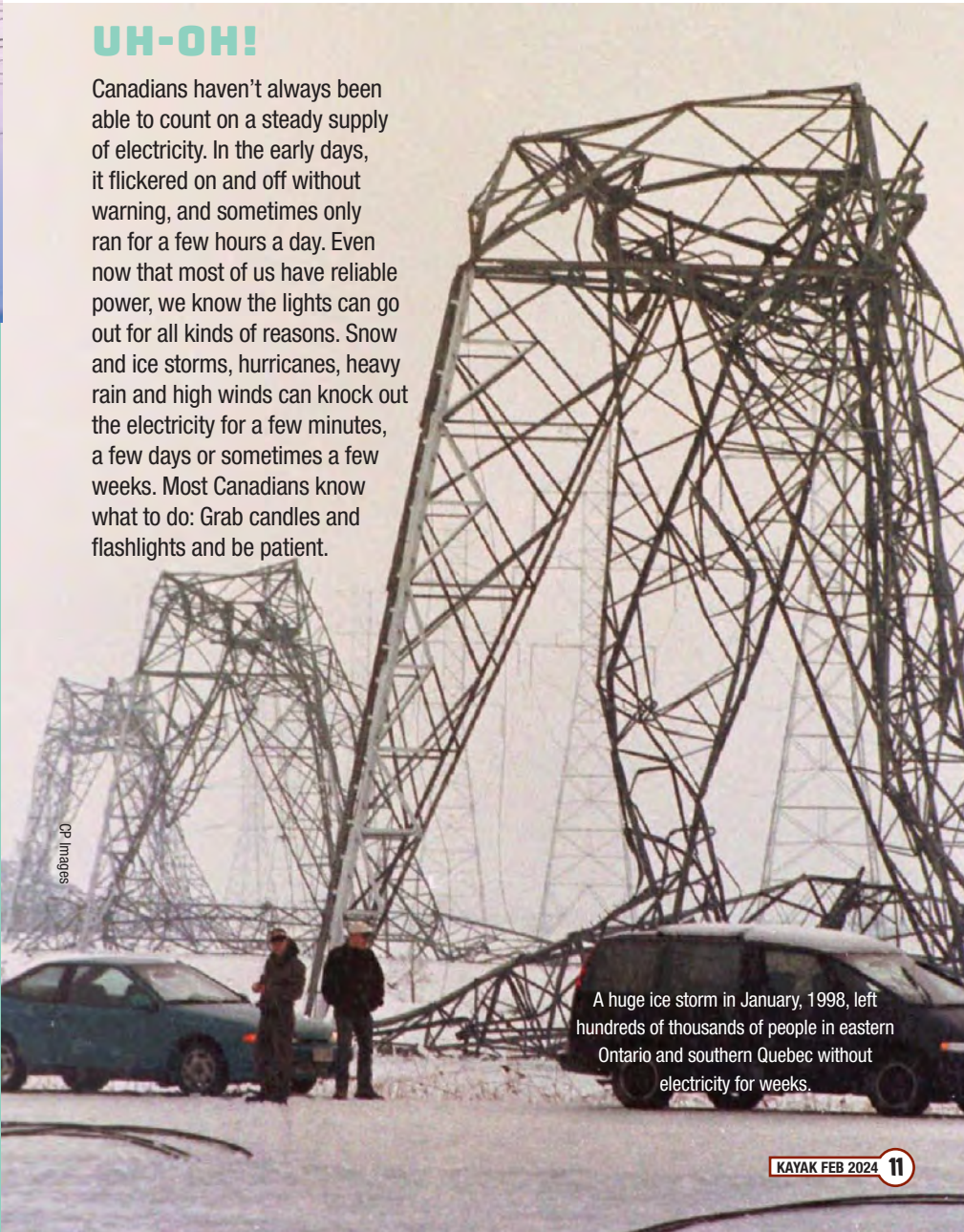
Most Canadians had access to electricity by the 1960s, but there are still places today that don't, whether because it's too hard to provide or because those customers would prefer to live "off the grid" (unconnected to larger power systems). And in some places, including many Indigenous communities, people would love to have reliable, clean electricity but must burn diesel oil to create power from generators.

Alamy

Canada sells more electricity to the United States than we use here at home.

UH-OH!

Canadians haven't always been able to count on a steady supply of electricity. In the early days, it flickered on and off without warning, and sometimes only ran for a few hours a day. Even now that most of us have reliable power, we know the lights can go out for all kinds of reasons. Snow and ice storms, hurricanes, heavy rain and high winds can knock out the electricity for a few minutes, a few days or sometimes a few weeks. Most Canadians know what to do: Grab candles and flashlights and be patient.



CP Images

A huge ice storm in January, 1998, left hundreds of thousands of people in eastern Ontario and southern Quebec without electricity for weeks.

OFF AND ON

The arrival of electricity changed almost every part of life for Canadians who lived in towns and cities. Here's a look at one change that didn't last, and one that did.

Passengers board a Toronto streetcar, 1905.

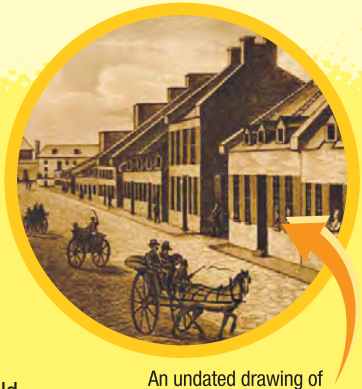
STREETCARS

Between 1886 and 1920, nearly 50 Canadian communities had electric street railways. Picture a train, but much smaller, usually with just a few cars. They ran on special tracks and had cables connecting them to overhead power lines. And they weren't just for big cities, either. Cornwall and Peterborough, Ont., Sydney, N.S., Lethbridge, Alta., Moose Jaw, Sask., St. Stephen, N.B., Nelson, B.C., Trois-Rivières, Que. — you could have hopped on an electric streetcar in any of them. Well, at least until after the Second World War, when cities decided to replace their street railways with buses, and more people started driving cars. Several cities such as Vancouver, Ottawa, Calgary and Montreal have electric light rail systems that run on separate tracks, but only Toronto has kept its streetcars.

Library and Archives Canada/Alamy

A streetcar in Toronto's Chinatown, 2007.

STREETLIGHTS



An undated drawing of Notre Dame Street in Montreal.

When Canadian cities started installing reliable electric lights along their streets in the early 1880s, people were dazzled — literally. Suddenly the night felt less dangerous. People could walk around confidently after the sun had set, now that they could see almost as well as during the day. Women in particular felt more comfortable and could leave their houses with less fear. Crime dropped because there were fewer dark spots to hide in. Just imagine walking around your city or the nearest town in the pitch black, without streetlights or friendly brightness spilling out of houses and businesses. Traffic lights were another welcome invention. The first ones in Canada went into operation in Hamilton, Ont., in 1925, and soon afterward in Toronto. They would certainly have made life easier for the police who had to try to direct horses, cars, streetcars and people walking.

Two police officers walk down Vancouver's Pender Street, around 1967.

Vancouver Archives, Public Domain

SAVING THE FUTURE

You have a part to play in the story of Canada and electricity.

Canadians use *waaaay* more electricity per person than all but a few other countries — about three times as much as most Europeans! Of course, it can get very cold and very hot here, so we need to heat and cool a lot of buildings. Plus the kinds of industries we have in Canada gobble electricity for processing things like oil, wood and metals. As more people buy electric cars, the need for power is going to continue to go up and up.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

BRIGHT IDEA #1

Ask your grown-ups to get power bars that you can turn off at night. That way, a TV or printer plugged in to the bar won't be draining electricity to keep those little lights on.

BRIGHT IDEA #2

When a device is charged, unplug it so it doesn't keep using even a small amount of power.

Harvesting manoomin (wild rice) on Rice Lake, Ont., 1921.

Library and Archives Canada, Brittany Luby

FOR AND FROM GENERATIONS

Brittany Luby, whose paternal ancestors come from Niisaachewan Anishinaabe Nation, is one of our advisers at *Kayak*. She grew up in Treaty 3 territory on Lake of the Woods in what is now known as northwestern Ontario, where her Anishinaabe relatives' lives were upended by flooding from hydroelectric dams. She shared the Anishinaabe idea of Seven Generations with us. This is a way of thinking that asks whether our actions show respect for those who came before us: our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents. It also considers how those actions will affect our present and future relations: our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Keeping the past, present and future in mind helps us to make better choices because we're thinking about more than just ourselves in this moment. When it comes to how you use electricity, as Brittany says, "What kind of ancestor do you want to be?"

BRIGHT IDEA #3

Turn off lights when you leave a room.

HEART OF HOME

Written by Allyson Gulliver • Illustrated by Arden Taylor

ALMA, QUE., NOVEMBER, 1983

Sophie carefully measured the maple syrup and poured it into the slow cooker, mixing it with the hard little white beans. "Salt pork, beans, water, onion, powdered mustard, molasses, bay leaf, pepper — that's it!" Her mother had taught her to read the ingredient list out loud so she didn't miss anything.

"Add a wee bit of vinegar, ma belle," her grandmother suggested, looking up from her knitting. "Only if you want, though," she smiled. "You're the chef!"

"Merci, Mémère," Sophie said doubtfully. She didn't want to seem rude, so she took out the jug of vinegar but only pretended to add it to the pot. "We'll see how the baked beans turn out." As she washed her hands, she said, "Do you want to go sit in the living room?"

"Non, merci. I'm happy right here, in the kitchen."

Sophie plunked down in a chair at the table. "Why is that, Mémère? You always sit in here when you visit, even though the living room is much comfier."

"But the kitchen is . . . friendlier," her grandmother replied. She sighed. "We all used to spend so much more time together when we had the wood stove."

Memories of visiting when she was a little girl flooded into Sophie's mind — pictures of Mémère adding more wood to heat up the oven, sticking the little coil-wrapped handle in to move an element around. "Wasn't it a lot of work, though? And so hot in the summer!"

"But there was always hot water ready for tea," her grandmother said. "And it was so cozy in the winter, right Michel?"

Sophie's dad had just come back in after clearing the season's first snow from the driveway. "Sure was, maman," he said, "but not just from the fire. We spent a lot of time chopping kindling, too."

He and Sophie looked at each other with a smile, and at the same time, imitated Mémère's familiar instruction: "Don't come in unless you have an armload of wood!"

"But," Mémère said triumphantly, "the wood was free from your uncle's farm. Electricity? We have to pay for that. And sometimes — " she snapped her fingers "it went off, just like that. No lights, no heat, no warning. We never knew when or why. That doesn't happen with a wood stove!"

Sophie's dad nodded. "True. I was always a bit in awe of you and that thing. I could never figure out how to get the fire the right temperature. You were an artist with the wood stove, maman — the bread always golden, never burned."

"And you could leave beans at the right spot on the back of the stove all day and they'd be perfect for supper," Mémère added. "I'd still prefer that to electricity."

Sophie looked at her grandmother, astonished. "But it would be so dark in the winter. And no TV or stereo?"

"Electricity was good in a lot of ways, but in others, it meant a lot more work," Mémère said. "Those lights show everything — all the spiderwebs and dust. When we had lanterns or candles, we didn't worry so much about the house being spotless."

Her face grew wistful. "And the evenings — they were so nice. Everyone in the kitchen, doing homework or listening to the radio."

Sophie tried to picture her dad and his five sisters and brothers all finding space in the old kitchen along with her Mémère and Pépère Tremblay. It sounded crowded but, just like her grandma said, friendlier, too.

"I'm used to it all now," Mémère said. "It's good to be able to read as late as I want, and I do enjoy watching *La famille Plouffe*. But it would be nice to have a place to dry wet mittens and socks, or keep the kettle hot, without having to pay extra."

Sophie's dad winked at her, then turned to his mother. "Here's an idea. I think your electric stove is here to stay. But what if we got you a little wood stove for your living room? Then you could watch TV or read while your socks dry and your water heats up for tea. I'd even chop the kindling."

Mémère's face lit up. "Oh Michel! That would be wonderful!" She turned to Sophie. "You can come over to do your homework in the evenings as often as you want. I'll even make you baked beans . . . *with* vinegar!" **K**

Rose-Alma Déry and daughters Lorina and Rose-Ella in their kitchen in Buckingham, Que., around 1905.

The people in this story aren't real, but a lot of what Sophie's mémère (French for grandma) describes was true for women throughout Canada. Wood-fuelled cook stoves needed a lot of work and attention, but they also did a lot. Besides providing cooking space, they could keep water hot all day, heat up the room and dry damp laundry, all without costing money. (Although of course it takes many hours of work to chop and stack all that wood.) The mother of a family was usually in charge of the stove, and had to learn how to make it do what she wanted, which was not easy.

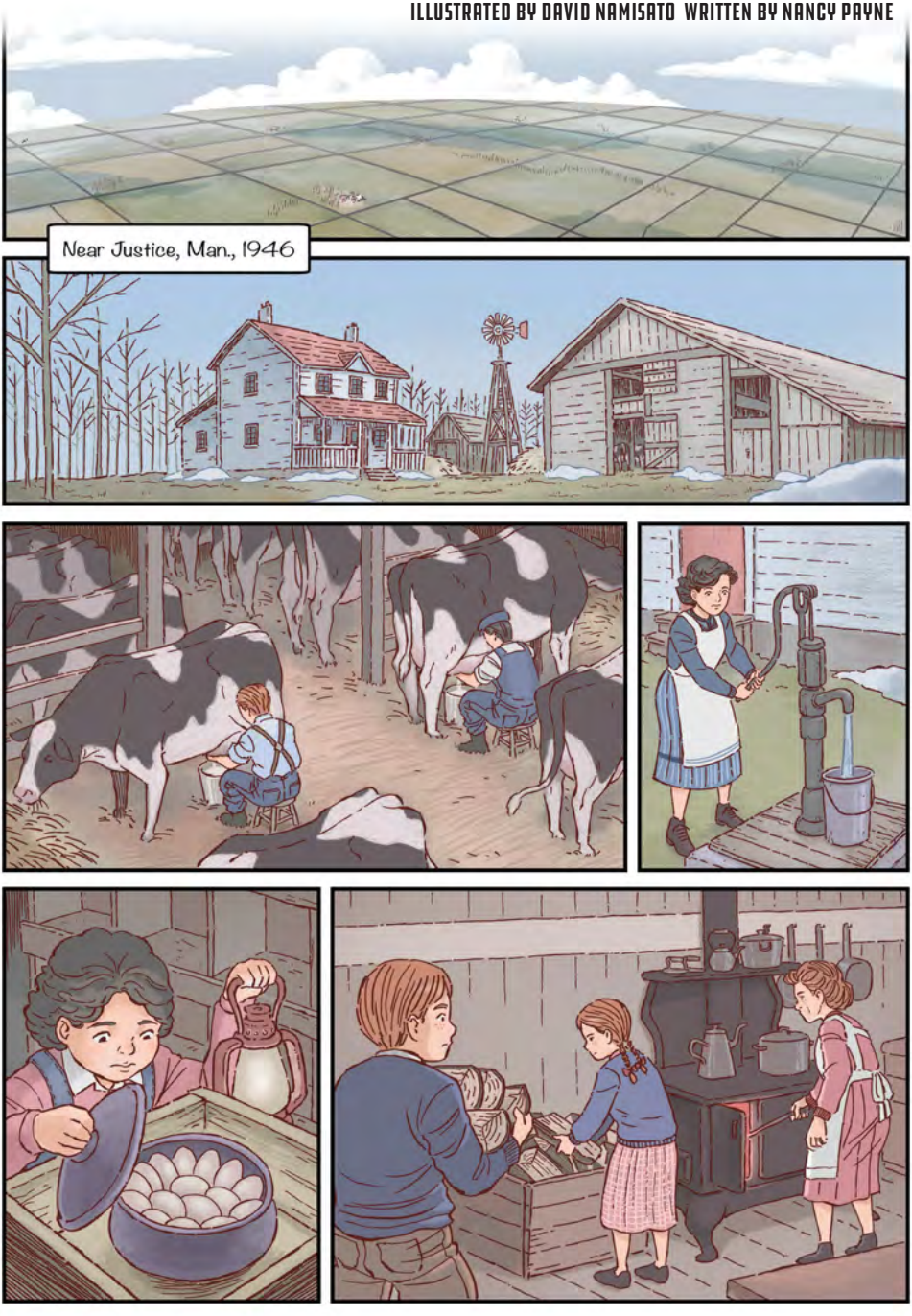
Just like in this story, families spent many chilly evenings together in the kitchen, which was always the coziest room in the house. Electric lights and heat made it possible for people to be in different rooms doing different things, which changed family life. (It's a bit like streaming video. Families used to all watch shows together on their one TV, but if they have good internet service, now everyone can be in separate places watching whatever they want.)

The town of Alma actually had electricity fairly early on. (Four villages joined to form the town in 1962.) The huge Isle-Maligne hydro station was built on a nearby river in 1926. It provided power for an aluminum factory and a paper mill. As the province quickly increased its ability to generate electricity, several smaller Quebec communities became responsible for distributing power. Most eventually became part of Hydro-Québec, but about 10 still exist throughout the province, including in the Alma area of the Saguenay-Lac Saint-Jean region.

BAnQ

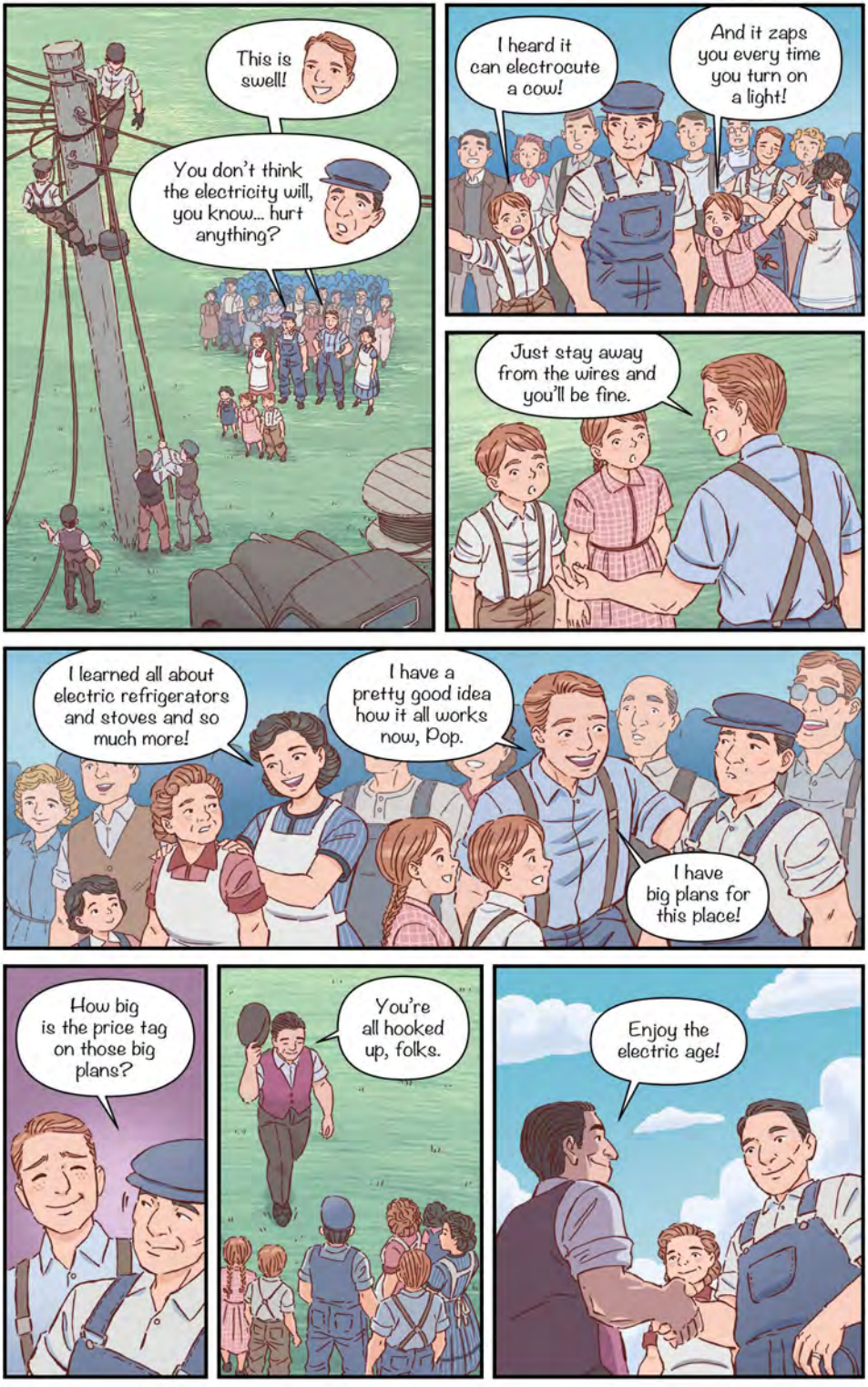
MANITOBA TRANSFARMATION

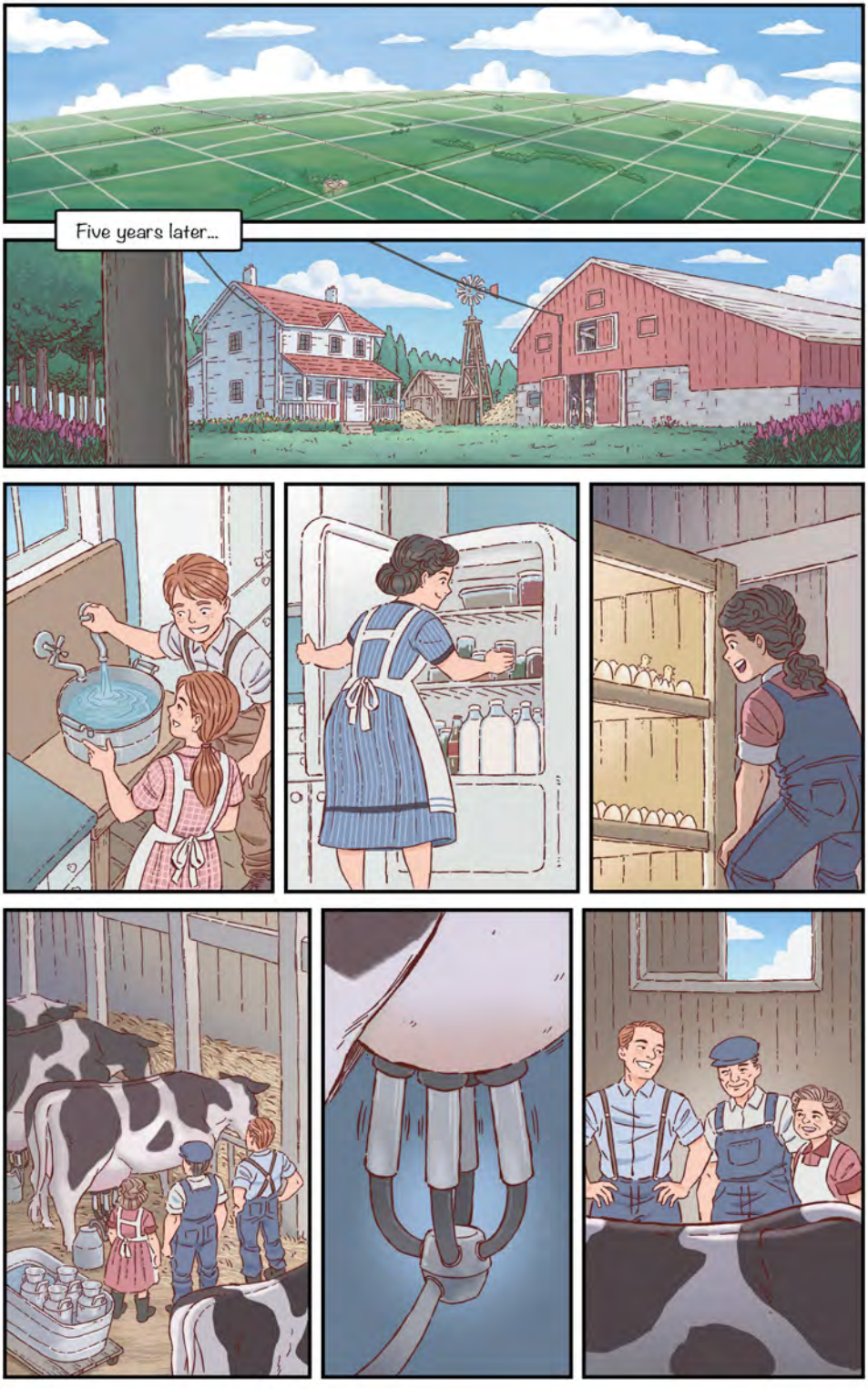
ILLUSTRATED BY DAVID NAMISATO WRITTEN BY NANCY PAYNE

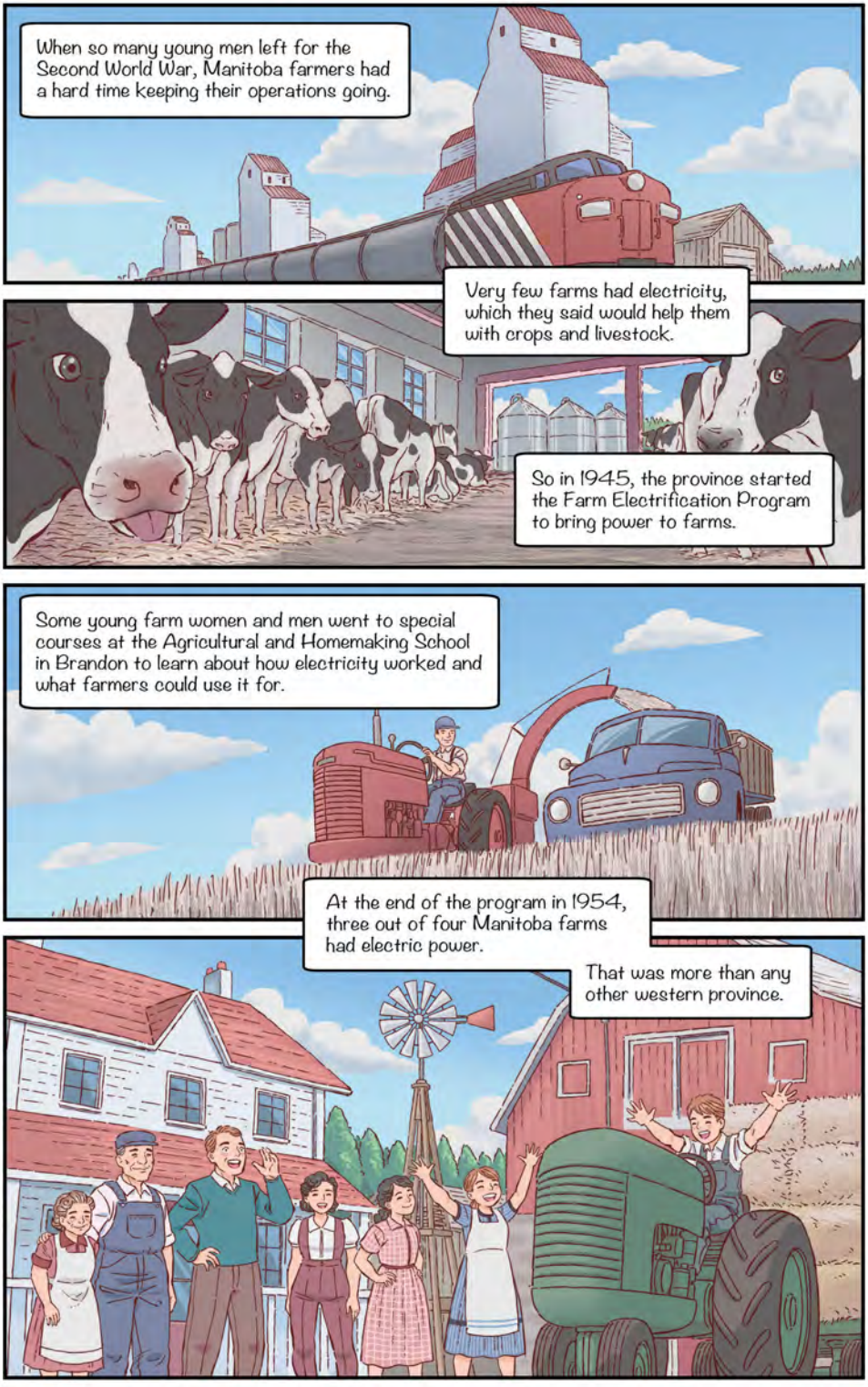



Electricity can't come soon enough for me! Imagine having a machine to do the milking...
Shouldn't you be getting ready?
Golly - you're right. The Morins will be here any minute. See ya, Pop!
We'll miss you while you're off learning about electric farming or whatever they're calling it.
Just think... heat lamps for new piglets when it gets cold!
No pipes freezing in winter!
No more cutting down trees for firewood.
Less work for you and Pop.
And us!
Andy Demchuk says when they got electricity a few years ago, it was like a miracle.
Did he happen to mention where to find the money for all these wonderful thingamabobs?


I wish I could go to Brandon to learn about 'lectricity.
And I wish we had an electric incubator so I didn't have to keep turning those silly old hens' eggs.
Right now you're going to turn your hand to some ironing, young lady.
And you can help your father move that hay.


This is swell!
You don't think the electricity will, you know... hurt anything?
I heard it can electrocute a cow!
And it zaps you every time you turn on a light!
Just stay away from the wires and you'll be fine.
I learned all about electric refrigerators and stoves and so much more!
I have a pretty good idea how it all works now, Pop.
I have big plans for this place!
How big is the price tag on those big plans?
You're all hooked up, folks.
Enjoy the electric age!


Five years later...


When so many young men left for the Second World War, Manitoba farmers had a hard time keeping their operations going.
Very few farms had electricity, which they said would help them with crops and livestock.
So in 1945, the province started the Farm Electrification Program to bring power to farms.
Some young farm women and men went to special courses at the Agricultural and Homemaking School in Brandon to learn about how electricity worked and what farmers could use it for.
At the end of the program in 1954, three out of four Manitoba farms had electric power.
That was more than any other western province.

ZAP!

Power up your electricity smarts at these energizing places.

LA CITÉ DE L'ÉNERGIE

Open from early June until late September, this museum in Shawinigan, Que., explores the history of the community and its industries. It also has a whole big section devoted to hydroelectricity and power generation in the province.

MANITOBA ELECTRICAL MUSEUM AND EDUCATION CENTRE

Check out how appliances evolved with electricity and learn how to be safe around power at this Winnipeg museum. You can also discover the real story behind this issue's comic about farm electrification in Manitoba.

Saskatchewan Science Centre

SCIENCE CENTRES

From Kamloops to Fredericton, Regina to Montreal, most biggish Canadian cities have a museum devoted to science, each of which usually has a section that's all about electricity. Bonus: They also have lots of games and other fun ways to learn about all kinds of other science stuff, too.

Alamy, Manitoba Electrical Museum, Saskatchewan Science Centre

IN 1883, THE WEAVE SHED AT THE CANADA MILL, A COTTON FACTORY IN CORNWALL, ONT., WAS THE FIRST INDUSTRIAL BUILDING IN CANADA TO BE LIT WITH ELECTRICITY. THOMAS EDISON HIMSELF FLIPPED THE SWITCH. THE MILL NOW HOUSES BUSINESSES AND APARTMENTS.

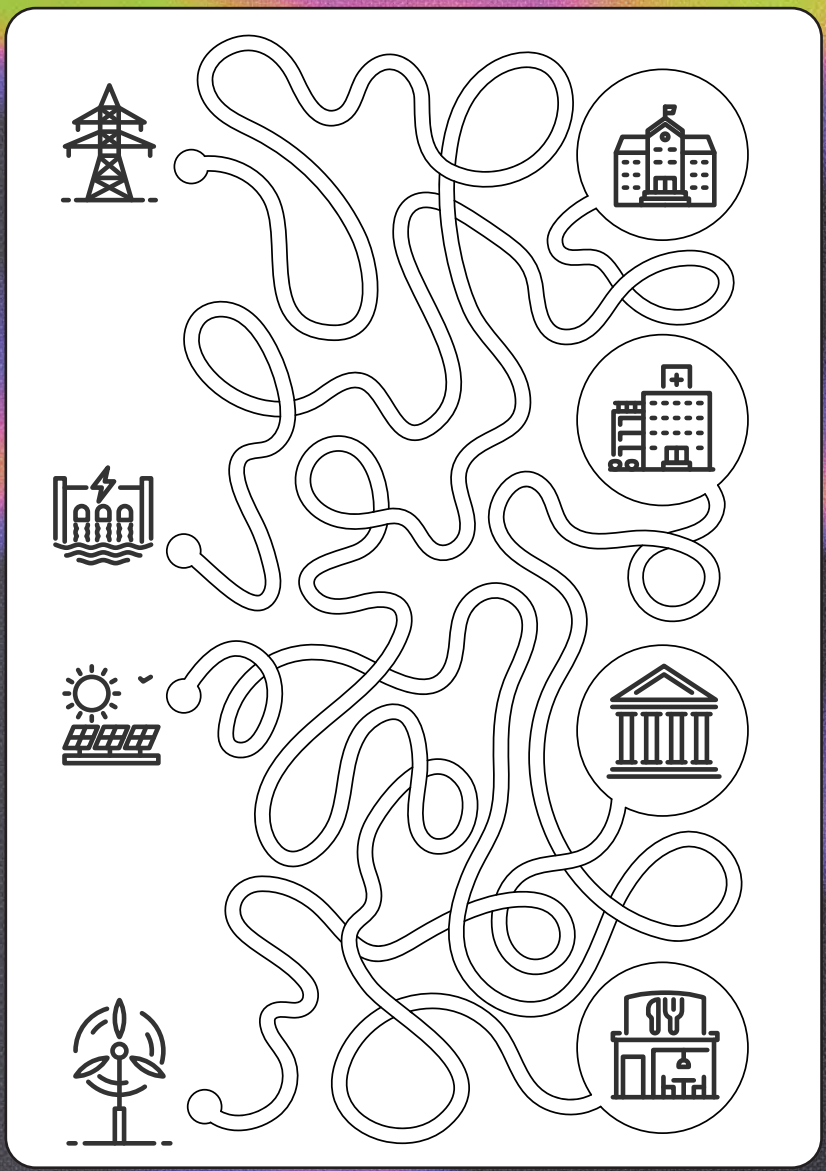
GENERATING INTEREST

All over Canada, you'll find national historic sites and plaques marking places where electricity has been generated. Just north of Mission, B.C., is the Stave Falls Hydro-Electric Installation, completed in 1912. The enormous generating station at the Carillon Canal National Historic Site west of Montreal was the first to be built under French-Canadian engineers and is the biggest on the Ottawa River. And if you're visiting Niagara Falls, don't miss the new Niagara Parks Power Station. Take the glass elevator, walk the tunnel (shown above) for a breathtaking view, and tour the first major power plant on the Canadian side of the river, created by the legendary Nikola Tesla (shown at right).

Alamy, Cornwall Community Museum

TANGLED WIRES

Can you follow each power source from the station to the right building?



Answer on p. 30.

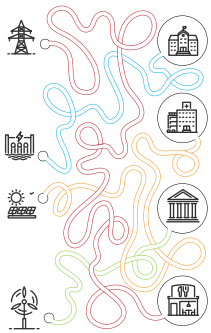
HIDDEN PICTURES

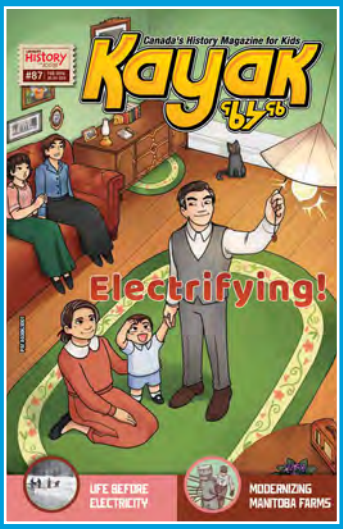
How sharp-eyed are you? See if you can find each of these objects or images in the comic Manitoba TransFARMation that starts on p. 20.

Answers on p. 30.

ANSWERS

TANGLED WIRES P. 28





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TEACHER'S CORNER

You can find classroom material in both French and English to go with this issue of *Kayak*. Just visit *CanadasHistory.ca/electrification* or *HistoireCanada.ca/electricite.*

Cover Illustration: Nickia McIvor

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Choose one way that electrification greatly changed life in Canada.
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Editor Nancy Payne
Art Director James Gillespie
Designer Leigh McKenzie

Digital Media Director Tanja Hütter

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Program Coordinator Community and Outreach Jean-Philippe Proulx

Program Coordinator Youth and Education Brooke Campbell

Historical Advisers Catherine Carstairs, Brittany Luby, Laura Madokoro

Fact Checker Nelle Oosterom

Special Thanks Rebecca Dolgoy, Ruth Sandwell

CANADA'S HISTORY **CanadasHistory.ca**

President & CEO Melony Ward

Circulation and Marketing Manager Danielle Chartier

Finance & Administration Director Patricia Gerow

Administrative Assistant Belle Lau

Founding Publisher Deborah Morrison

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Email: info@KayakMag.ca

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Kayak Magazine, PO Box 699 Stn Main, Alliston, ON, L9R 1V9

Phone: 1-888-816-0997
Email: members@KayakMag.ca

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