

OPERATING COSTS PUBLIC UTILITIES TO REACH NORMAL LEVELS, SAYS COMMISSION'S REPORT

INDIANAPOLIS, Ind., Dec. 16.—Operating costs of public utilities have reached the peak and in some cases the highest level has been passed, according to the annual report of the public service commission, which has just been completed.

A year ago costs were constantly increasing, the report points out, but at the present time conditions have changed.

"During the past year," the report says, "there has been no decline in operating costs to utilities. Until quite recently operating costs continued to increase. At this time the commission is inclined to believe that the peak has been reached and passed, and that the price of materials and fuel will reach more normal levels."

One of the chief factors entering into the increased operating costs of utilities, according to petitions which have been filed with the commission in rate cases, has been the excessive cost of coal. This item, according to the statements of the utilities, has soared so as to present a serious problem under normal times. The commission, according to the report, is of the opinion that coal costs will come down during the next year.

"It is likely," says the report, "that coal costs will be less burdensome during the coming year."

Decline Noted.

A marked decline in the prices of many of the materials used by various utilities is noted by the commission.

"Copper, which is used in large quantities in electric bus bars," says the report, "and electric transmission and distributing systems is offering a marked drop and apparently will soon reach a point as low as before the world war. Cast iron pipe is extremely high, and continues high, with no immediate indication of a fall in price. However, we are anticipating a sharp decline in its price, although there are no signs at this time which would indicate that."

Cedar poles have continued to go upward in price, due to depletion of the supply and the continued market demand, but apparently even the price of poles has reached the top, for there is rumor among the trade of an impending drop in the price. Prices of crossarms are expected to take a 20 per cent drop soon.

Efficiency Increases.

"Wages have not fallen, but we have noted a tremendous increase in the efficiency of labor due to the fact that there are more men than jobs and also to the fact that now managements can choose their own men instead of being forced to take what they can get."

"As replacement and depreciation require labor and material at present day prices, we believe that the time is coming when we will be able to observe a decrease in the costs of operation in so far as the depreciation item and the general labor item may contribute to the operating costs."

"It is fair to say that while we see no immediate possibility of decrease in operating costs, we can take some satisfaction in indications that the top has been reached. In some cases even passed. This observation is made with pleasure both for the owners of public utility plants and for consumers of public utility plants and for consumers of public utility service, especially since we have passed through four years of frenzied increases in

prices of everything entering into the costs of public utility operation."

Rates Are Difficult.

Great difficulty has been experienced by the commission, according to the report, in establishing utility rates which would meet the high costs of operation and at the same time not be prohibitive for consumers.

"The commission was constantly confronted," says the report, "with the difficulty of establishing rates which would be sufficient to prevent the absolute breakdown or abandonment of service, and at the same time would not be so disproportionate to the value of the service to the consumer as to cause a loss of patronage. In the case of central heating station utilities, whose operating costs mounted rapidly with, and in proportion to, the increased coal costs, the commission had to deal with the perplexing problem of making possible heating service for the winter, and in order to do so, was forced to authorize rates which would eventually prove uneconomical from the consumers' standpoint."

Artificial flower making is an art in which the Japanese excel.

Pittsburgh Schools Buy Coal for \$5.50 Per Ton

(By Associated Press)

PITTSBURGH, Dec. 16.—Pittsburgh public school buildings which a few weeks ago were closed because of their inability to obtain a bituminous coal supply at \$6 a ton, were today storing quantities of coal at the nominal rate of \$5.50 a ton.

The bottom fell out of the market when a wholesaler notified Carl M. McKee, superintendent of supplies that he had 1,600 tons in cars on a convenient siding, but he had to get rid of it because the railroad company was demanding demurrage. The bargain was soon made and the coal was not only delivered at the needy school buildings, but was carefully packed away in the cellars by the unhappy wholesaler at the rate fixed by the superintendent.

COUNTY ASSESSORS CONVENE

(By Associated Press)

INDIANAPOLIS, Dec. 16.—County assessors from all parts of Indiana met for their conference on the administration of the tax law with the consideration of difficult problems that will soon confront them. Besides considering their technical questions, the assessors heard several addresses on various phases of the tax law. Sessions were held both morning and afternoon.

OFFICERS ELECTED BY 6 EATON LODGES

EATON, O., Dec. 16.—Organizations of a fraternal character and otherwise in Eaton have elected officers for the coming year.

Eaton Lodge, No. 30, Odd Fellows, has elected C. R. Wehrley noble grand; Orville Stanton, vice grand; H. E. Dalrymple, recording secretary; J. W. Cook, financial secretary; William Gard, treasurer; Ira Brower, trustee.

Preble Encampment, No. 54, Odd Fellows, has elected O. H. Palmer chief patriarch; J. W. Cook, high priest; C. R. Wehrley, senior warden; John Davis, junior warden; H. E. Dalrymple, scribe; Orville Stanton, treasurer; Henry Kelly, trustee.

Rachel Lodge, Daughters of Rebekah, has elected Wynona Barnes, noble grand; Mae Shaffer, vice grand; Mary Lane, recording secretary; Jennie Reed, financial secretary; Sadie Young, treasurer; Ada Hippie, department superintendent; Nellie Glick, musician; Ada Hippie, captain of degee staff.

Waverly Lodge, No. 143, Knights of Pythias, has elected Walter Cohee, past chancellor; Benjamin Pence, chancellor commander; Harry Shaffer, vice chancellor; Roy Kelly, prelate; H.

FIRE DESTROYS BARN OF LOUIS PAOLINI

R. Spiller, keeper of records and seal; C. O. Fisher, master of finance; Roy McNeal, master of exchequer; Ray Benjamin, inner guard; Walter Cohee, outer guard; F. E. Overholser, trustee.

The Woman's Relief Corps has elected Julia Murray, president; Alice Kline, senior vice president; Lovina Burch, junior vice president; Florence Jones, secretary; Roberta Stroh, treasurer; Mary Plummer, chaplain; Pearl Monesmith, conductor; Mary Fukis, guard; Minerva Kirkpatrick, patriotic instructor; Madge Kline, musician.

Eaton Grange, No. 2250, has elected John Benham, master; Henry Kelly, overseer; Florence Worley, lecturer; Charles Plummer, steward; George Swope, assistant steward; Howard Hart, chaplain; H. C. Mitchell, treasurer; H. E. Dalrymple, secretary; Wilbur Chrismann, gatekeeper; Eva Thomas, Ceres; Elizabeth Newkirk, Pomona; Fred Bailey, Flora; Grace Swope, lady assistant steward; Ruth Hildebrand, pianist.

The flames had gained considerable headway before they were noticed.

Firemen were able to keep the blaze from spreading to the bakery which is close by. The damage was estimated at about \$1,000 which is covered by insurance.

The fire virtually destroyed the barn of Louis Paolini, baker, 612 North Twelfth street, early Wednesday evening. A horse was burned to death, and a wagon and automobile badly damaged. The origin of the fire is unknown.

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