

FILE IN MEMBER

FOLDER

1381

Alex Dow Is Dead

Detroit Edison ex-president, chairman of executive committee, leader of electric utility industry, was active in his work until his fatal illness of less than a week

Alex Dow, chairman of the executive committee, The Detroit Edison Co., outstanding figure in the electric utility business for half a century, died of pneumonia March 22. Up until less than a week before his death Mr. Dow was at his office regularly. He would have been 80 years old on April 12.

For 27 years, from 1913 to 1940, Mr. Dow was president of The Detroit Edison Co. He joined the Detroit utility in 1896 as vice-president and general manager of its major predecessor, the Edison Illuminating Co. In the three years before that he designed and supervised the construction of the original public lighting plant in Detroit. This assignment resulted from his employment, 1888 to 1893, as installation electrician and later district engineer in the Chicago office of the Brush Electric Co., maker of street lighting systems. From 1882, when he came to the United States, until 1888 Mr. Dow was employed first by the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad in various capacities and then by the Baltimore & Ohio Telegraph Co. in line and instrument maintenance and in some construction and experimental work. He was born in Glasgow, Scotland, and went to work at the age of 12 as a junior clerk in Liverpool, from where eight years later he emigrated to this country, of which he became a naturalized citizen in 1895.

Rose to Rank and Honors

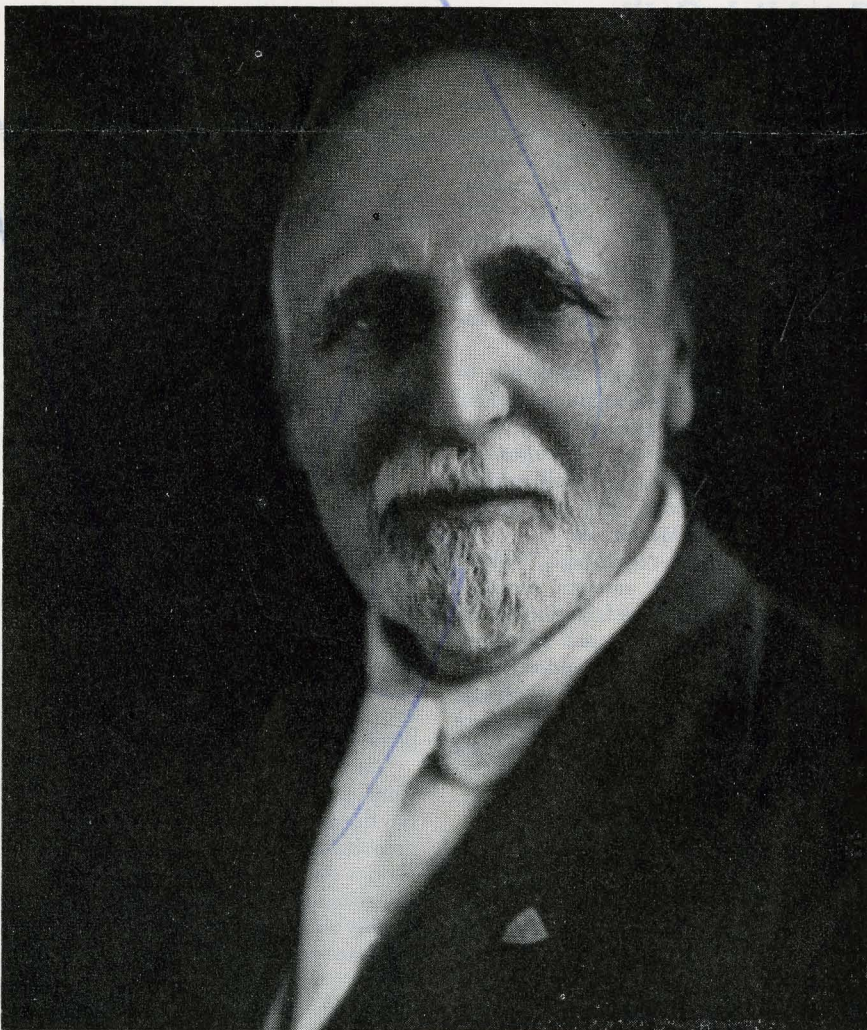
Alex Dow was a conspicuous exemplar of the self-educated man. Beyond the primary grades he had no formal schooling. Nevertheless, he not only rose to the ranks of the leaders in engineering and business but also was the recipient of highest academic honors. From the University of Michigan he received the degrees of master, then doctor of engineering; from the University of Detroit, doctor of science, and from Wayne University, doctor of arts and business administration. In his professional and business activities Mr. Dow rose to high places. He was a past-president of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers and of the Association of Edison Illuminating Companies, a fellow of the American Institute of Electrical Engineers which in 1936 awarded him the Edison Medal, a member of the American Society of Civil Engineers and of the Institution of Electrical Engineers of Great Britain, and a founder of the Detroit En-

gineering Society. From 1932 he had been district chief of ordnance of the U. S. Army.

Of all Mr. Dow's contributions to the electric utility business, his work in the formulation of rate philosophy was probably the most important. As member and chairman of the rate committee of the National Electric Light Association, he was a strong influence in the development of electric rate forms and schedules. He was an early exponent of the demand type of rate now generally accepted as most logical and fair. The first step in the development of the now common automatic substation was said to be his plans for a distant-controlled rotary converter of 1,000 kw. He pioneered in the working out of many operating problems of electricity systems—parallel lines, high-react-

ance transformers for secondary banking, high-voltage ring or loop transmission, high-voltage cables, interconnection of generating stations, load center generation and fly ash precipitation.

With an eye keen to discern the shape of the future, Mr. Dow foresaw the great and rapid growth of electric service. He expressed his vision, "I believe that the proper policy of electric light management . . . is to sell electrical energy to every possible user in any shape that the user requires, and at the lowest price that will pay a reasonable profit on the capital invested." This large view impelled him to undertake projects that at the time seemed risky to less forward-thinking minds. When 600 to 750 hp. boilers were considered large, Mr. Dow built a power plant with boilers of 2,350 hp. To fire these boilers he had to venture into unexplored regions of coal burning and thereby was the first to adopt the underfeed stoker for large installations. Much of the early development of that later widely adopted method of boiler firing is to be credited to his enterprise and faith.



Alex Dow