

Way We Were

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Light up the night

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Throughout the early twentieth century, the Park Record would slip into its pages brief mentions of towns around the United States installing “white ways,” or electric street lighting. In 1930, plans for Park City’s own updated and top-of-the line white way kicked into high gear.

At a September 1930 city council meeting, council members proposed an investigation into the installation of a “white way” on Main Street. With the idea meeting approval, the council appointed a citizen’s committee to look into the feasibility and costs of the project. By November, the committee had details to present to the council and had designed a survey for Main Street business owners and Park City residents. The idea was met with strong support from the majority of the town.

A citizen’s meeting was called in December at which R.E. Bailey, manager of Utah Power and Light, outlined tentative plans for the installation of new lights and “civic improvement” of Main Street. The “new and much improved lighting system” would necessitate the removal of the current poles and wires, the cost of which, Bailey claimed, “would amount to not more than two cents a front foot per month for each property owner” over a period of ten years.

The 1930s were a tough decade for Park City and the rest of the United States. Metal prices had plummeted along with the rest of the economy and residents of this mining town acutely felt the effects of the Great Depression. Some even expressed worry that Park City was disappearing as a community, not long to become a ghost town. The installation of the “white way” was heavily favored not just because it would improve the state of Main Street, “but also because it would help very materially in aiding the unemployed of our city.” Should plans progress, the community demanded, the work should be carried out by locals.

In March 1931, C.W. Silver, of Salt Lake City, was awarded the contract for installation. His bid was a little over \$8,000 and he anticipated completion within sixty days. He hired a local crew who promptly got started on the preliminary work, with the main project kicking off in April. Forty-three new eighteen-foot poles were raised, alternating placement on each side of the street, from the railroad depot (now Zoom Restaurant) to Pezely’s Market (at the top of Main Street).

The day the lights lit up for the first time was a day of celebration complete with a parade and speeches. At 8:23pm on June 11, 1931, the mayor flipped the switch that turned on Park City’s “white way” and Parkites filled the streets with dancing, noisemakers, and confetti until the wee hours.

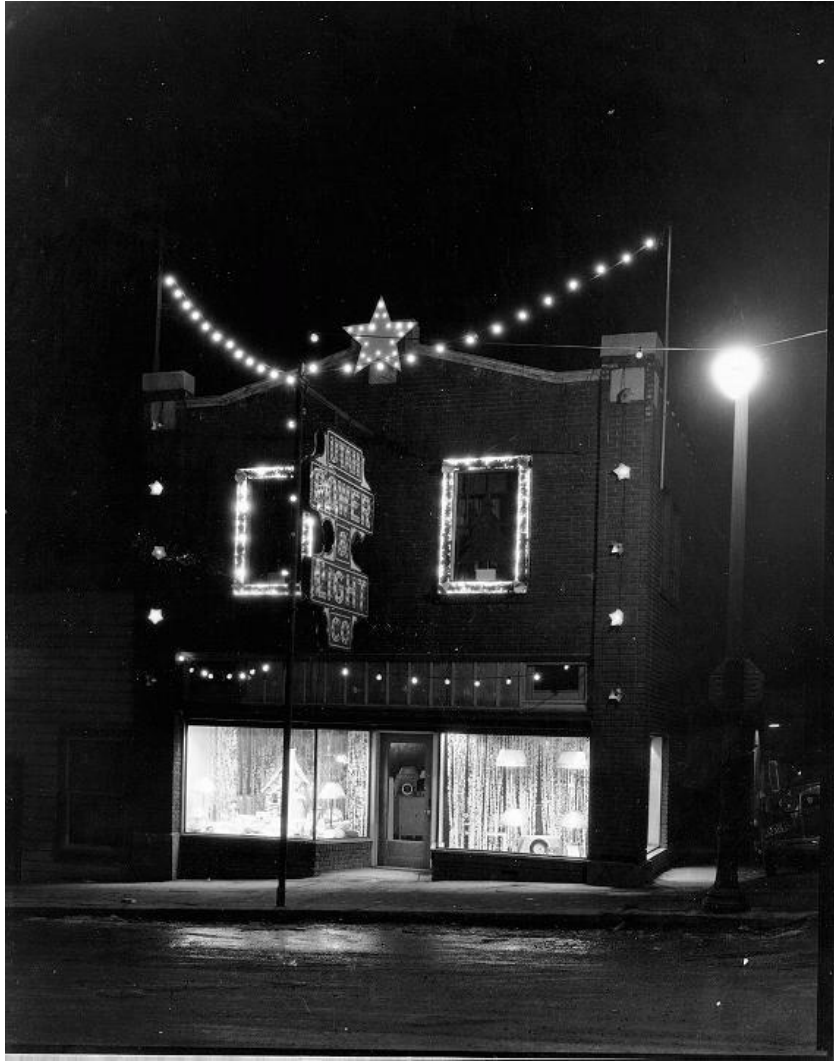


Image ID: 1987.2.50

Credit: Park City Historical Society and Museum, Pop Jenks Collection

Caption: Utah Power and Light, pictured ca.1937, was instrumental in garnering support for the installation of the "white way" down Main Street. One of the forty-three new lights can clearly be seen here on the right.