

Living without Electricity in 1818



We have all been there, most of us have experienced it, suddenly the power goes out and we are in the dark. We reach for the light switch, but nothing happens; momentary panic to find our way around the house to find the flashlight, or some other light source.

We open the door to the refrigerator to a dark compartment, then realize there is no power, so close it quickly to save the cold to preserve the food.

Imagine what it would be like to lose power for a week, or more. How would you go through a normal day to do the everyday tasks that need to be done? How would you adjust? What are your memories?

Thinking this way can prepare us for understanding what it was like to live in Manchester 200 years ago. Electricity had not yet been invented:

- No electric lights
- No telephone
- No internet
- No cars
- No grocery stores
- No hot and cold running water
- And so much more, not yet available!

Let's look at the way people did things 200 years ago. How could they live without electricity and all of our modern marvels? In 2018, our conveniences are a way of life for us as we gradually acquired them through the years. Around the world today, most people do not have reliable electricity or reliable water source. 200 years ago the "conveniences" they had, were very different from what we have today. The average person had a well, oil lights, better kitchen devices, but no electricity, were a way of life for them in 1818 as well.

Let us see what was done *in the place of* an electrical appliance or convenience:

- **electric lights** - oil lamps, candles, daylight, moon light or fireside
- **telephone** - talking face to face
- **internet** -
 - Reading books,
 - Face to face discussions,
 - Storytelling,
 - Remembering things
 - Writing things down
 - Creativity of all kinds
- **Facebook and other social networking** –
 - Talking face to face and
 - Community socials,
 - Church events
- **Video games and television** –
 - Playing outside with friends or by yourself,
 - Reading books,
 - Talking with people,
 - Telling stories,
 - Hobbies and projects
- **Email** –
 - Post rider
 - Walking to someone’s house
- **Recorded music or Youtube** –
 - Singing together
 - Telling stories
 - Acting out stories
 - Sharing skills in person
- **Cars and trucks** -
 - walking,
 - horseback,
 - donkey,
 - carts and wagons pulled by animals
- **Grocery stores** – (did not exist until 1950)
 - Self-sustaining by growing and producing your own,
 - Knowing the people who did and
 - Storing enough ahead to get you through the winter
 - in root cellars
 - hung in lofts, or pantry
 - stored in crocks and jugs
 - drying, salting, curing foods as they were harvested

- **Hot and cold running water –**
 - A well was dug near the house.
 - Water buckets were lowered into the well to gather the water,
 - And then was carried by bucket to the house where it would be
 - Heated on the hearth or wood stove.
 - Some wells had a hand pump to fill the buckets outside.
 - Few people had a pump in the house at that time.
 - Baths and showers were **not** frequent

The following list of appliances we use is an illustration of how we have become dependent upon our electricity today and may give us some ideas of how to reduce our dependence on it in the future.

- **Refrigerator –** (the ice industry did not start to be available until 1830 and was expensive and limited to urban areas like New York and Boston)
 - A root cellar year round,
 - In the summer butter, milk and cream could be placed in a container of water to keep them cool,
 - Or set in a shallow stream outside
 - Meat would be hunted in the fall and hung in a cold shed, after processing, through the winter.
 - Eggs from the summer would be stored in root cellars or crawl space in a lateral hole in the cool soil, or in a crock of lime water
- **Washing machine –**
 - A large tub, or two, with a scrub board
 - Homemade soap
 - A large caldron of water over a fire
- **Clothes dryer –**
 - In the summer a close line outside,
 - Or laid out over bushes
 - In the winter hung in the house
- **Vacuum cleaner –**
 - Broom
 - Hang rugs on a line or rail
 - Hand held rug beater
- **Coffee grinder –**
 - Hand grinder
 - May be used to grind small quantities of grain also
- **Blender –**
 - Knives to chop
 - Fork or spoon to mix

- **Dishwasher** –
 - Dishpan,
 - Homemade soap,
 - Hand washing with a rag and towel
- **Oil heat or electric heat** –
 - Fire in the hearth
 - Warm cloths
 - Blankets
- **Electric blanket** –
 - Hot stone or brick wrapped in a towel to take the chill off
 - Quilts on the bed
- **Electric alarm clock**
 - Rooster
 - Sunrise
 - Sunset
- **Hair drier** –
 - Towel dry
 - Air dry
- **Cash register and adding machines** –
 - Figuring in your head
 - or on paper with a pen or pencil
 - or chalk and chalkboard

These and many other convinces we have today can be replaced by these old style ways, or finding more modern “non-electrical” ways of doing things. We save money, electricity costs and have a more healthy relationship with our families by adopting some of these alternative lifestyles.

The Cheney homestead is a living museum of the way of life lived without electricity and is open every second Sunday of the month through the year. We are able to show what the life experience was through each season of the year with timely dress and furnishings both inside the homestead and outside in the better weather. Consider visiting us to learn more about the time period of an average rural family of 1818. This was before the mills and the industry of the next generation.

Also find us on Facebook at “Cheney Homestead Museum”, or the “Manchester Historical Society” Website to see other videos, documents and photos of 1818 lifestyle and methods

Think of these alternatives, the next time the lights go out...