

Scenic Hudson/Fishermen's Association Group & Judges Group

LIFE STORY

ROBERT BOYLE, 1928–2017

Fighting the Power Plant



HUDSON RISING

Robert Boyle was a writer for *Sports Illustrated*. As a boy, he attended boarding school in the Hudson Highlands, the spectacular stretch where the river narrows and curves its way through mountainous terrain. He developed his love of fishing there. In his early thirties, after living on the West Coast, he bought a house in the Highlands. He soon discovered that his beloved Hudson was in trouble. Raw sewage and industrial waste were pouring into the water legally, every day.

Consolidated Edison (Con Edison) was focused on a different problem. This **utility** company provided power to fast-growing New York City and Westchester County. In 1963, to meet the demand for electricity, Con Edison opened a nuclear power plant at Indian Point, just a few miles north of Robert Boyle's home in Croton-on-Hudson, New York. The same year, it applied to the Federal Power Commission (FPC) for a license to build a non-nuclear plant in the Hudson Highlands. The location was Storm King Mountain, near the town of Cornwall. Con Edison's 1962 annual report, published in 1963, included an illustration of the proposed facility (**Resource 6**).

Con Edison promised to contribute to the local economy. It offered to create a park on Cornwall's deteriorating industrial waterfront, and many people nearby supported the plan for this reason. But some did not. Several Hudson Valley residents formed a group called Scenic Hudson in 1963. They were concerned about the beauty, recreational uses, history, and culture of the area, and they opposed the proposal.

Robert Boyle joined forces with Scenic Hudson early on, as it worked to prevent the licensing of the Storm King plant. He also continued to fish in the Hudson, and he heard distressing stories from other fishermen. They said there had been large numbers of dead fish in the water at Indian Point since the plant opened in 1963. They told Boyle that Con Edison carted dead fish to the dump regularly and that more fish kept dying.

In April 1965, Boyle published "A Stink of Dead Stripers" in *Sports Illustrated*. In the article, he vividly described what was happening to fish near Indian Point. He quoted an angry fisherman's description of a photo he had taken in early March 1963 at the dump where Con Edison disposed of carcasses. "The fish seen here were supposed to be about one or two days' accumulation. They were piled to a depth of several feet. They covered an area encompassing more than a city lot."

Boyle did not know why fish were dying, but he suspected they were attracted to the warm water discharged by Indian Point's cooling system, and then became trapped under the dock. (In 1969, he wrote that excess heat would lower oxygen levels in the water, make pollutants more toxic, and endanger fish in many other ways as well.) He was convinced that striped bass, a favorite among recreational and commercial fishermen, were at grave risk. He refuted Con Edison's claim that striped bass, or "stripers," **spawned** north of Storm King and would not be harmed by a new power plant there. Boyle cited a 1956 scientific study showing that they spawn in the Hudson Highlands.

Kathryn Belous Boyle, *Robert Boyle*. Courtesy of Robert Alexander Boyle

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ALL GROUPS

LIFE STORY

ROBERT BOYLE, 1928–2017

Fighting the Power Plant (*continued*)



Fishermen, 1960s. Courtesy of Riverkeeper

Robert Boyle had studied fish biology and was a licensed New York State scientific collector for museums, universities, and laboratories. He wrote with authority when he warned in his article that striped bass eggs and young fish would be sucked into the plant's intake pipe and killed. And larger fish might die at Storm King, as they were dying at Indian Point. Both plants would use the same cooling technology, pulling cool water from the river and discharging heated water.

A month before Boyle's article appeared, the FPC granted Con Edison a license to build the Storm King plant. Scenic Hudson went to court to fight the decision. Con Edison claimed the plant was necessary, especially after a power outage threw

the entire Northeast and much of Canada into darkness on November 9, 1965. But Scenic Hudson won this round. The court ruled in late December that the FPC had to consider the environmental consequences of the plan, which they had not done. They had to assess the plant's effect on scenic beauty, recreational use, historical significance, and the striped bass. This ruling influenced the creation of the 1969 National Environmental Policy Act, which requires environmental review of federally approved projects. This law dramatically strengthened the hand of environmentalists in

future cases. But the battle over Storm King was just beginning.

For fishermen on the river, Con Edison posed one threat. Pollution posed another—sewage, industrial wastes and toxins from factories, oil released into the river by ships. “In 1962, my wife cooked a striped bass that was absolutely inedible. . . . It tasted like a refinery,” Robert Boyle wrote in his 1969 book, *The Hudson River*. Concerned about the river, a group of fishermen formed the Hudson River Fishermen's Association (HRFA) in 1966.

At an early HRFA meeting, Boyle suggested reviving two old federal antipollution laws to report violators. These laws mandated reward money for turning

in polluters, and the Fisherman's Association used the money to finance future efforts. Boyle soon became president of the Fishermen's Association and continued to write about the Hudson for *Sports Illustrated*. He was one of the first journalists to warn of PCB contamination in the Hudson and other waterways (**Unit 4**).

The FPC finished its environmental review in 1970. It claimed the Storm King plant “would not adversely affect. . . the natural beauty, the historical significance, or the recreational opportunities of the area. . . . The project will not adversely affect the fish resources of the Hudson River provided adequate protective facilities are installed.” Again, the FPC gave Con Edison the go-ahead to build the plant.

Scenic Hudson and the Fishermen's Association were working together by then, one advocating for the mountain and the scenery, the other for the river and the fish. Conducting studies of their own, they discovered that Con Edison had failed to consider the river's tides when calculating how many young fish would be sucked into the new plant. Presented with this new evidence, the appeals court ordered further studies of the striped bass, and in 1973 the project was again put on hold.

Finally, in August 1979, secret negotiations began between the two sides. The mediator was Russell Train, a former head of the Environmental Protection Agency who was known and respected by all involved. After 16 months of hard but civil bargaining, Robert Boyle was one of those who signed a compromise agreement nicknamed the Peace

Con Edison Group & Judges Group

RESOURCE 6

THE PROPOSAL FOR STORM KING MOUNTAIN

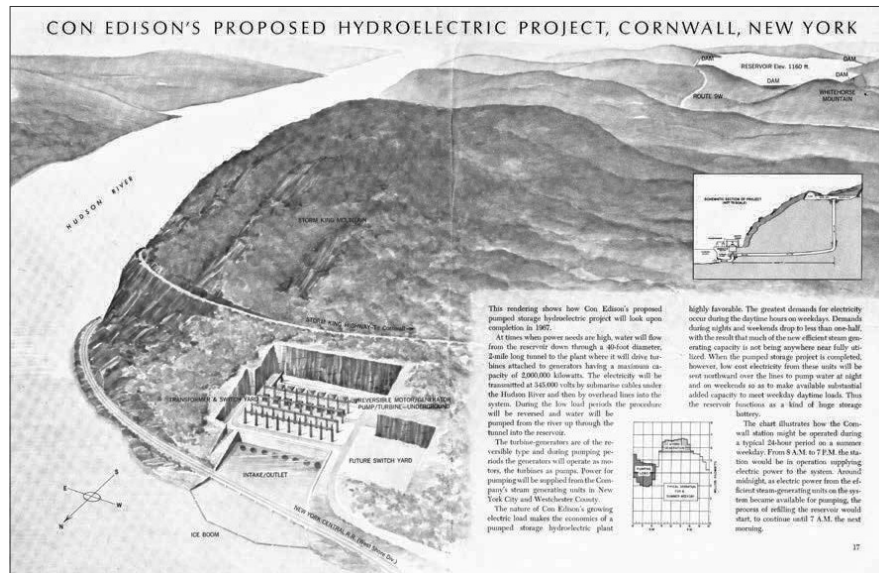
BACKGROUND

In 1962, Con Edison said it needed **peak-load capacity** to provide electricity, especially to New York City, 60 miles to the south. The **utility** was under pressure to prevent recurring **blackouts**. Its proposed power plant on Storm King Mountain would pump water to a storage reservoir high above the river. When demand was high, water would be released to rush downhill and generate electricity.

Con Edison referred to the proposed **hydroelectric** plant as the Cornwall project. The town of Cornwall is just north of Storm King Mountain. But the town did not appear in the **rendering**, and its location was obscured by the block of text.

The power plant would have extended 800 feet along the riverfront. The inset diagram shows the pipe leading up to the **storage reservoir** located southwest of the mountain. **Transmission lines** would have crossed the river just above the northern gateway to the Hudson Highlands, then run east through Putnam County, then south to New York City.

This rendering appeared in Con Edison's 1962 annual report, which was published in 1963. The audience was the company's shareholders, who stood to gain financially if Con Edison made good investments.



Rendering published in Con Edison 1962 shareholder's report, published in 1963. Marist College Archives and Special Collections, Poughkeepsie, NY

HUDSON RISING

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On THIS Day

This event took place on **November 9, 1965**, and was reported in The New York Times the following day.

Read the [full text of The Times article](#) or [other headlines](#) from the day.



Most of the fighting took place at such close range that American soldiers were often killed by their own fire. The fighting was so intense that the United States had to send in reinforcements to help with the fighting.



ON A TRAIN, GOING NORTHWARD, 4,000 workers waiting on subway in Times Square area. Picture was made in 1904.

As far south as Washington, a Potomac Electric Power Company spokesman reported a power "gap" at 1:28 P.M., lasting less than a minute and virtually unnoticed in the nation's capital.

Accidents Through Back
The American people are enjoying a period of peace and prosperity, but they are still suffering from the effects of the war. The American people are still suffering from the effects of the war.

U.S. Orders City's Glitter Goes But Not Its Poise

An Inquiry
President Calls for a Study of Power Failure in East

By JOHN B. PORTER
WASHINGTON, Nov. 16.—President Johnson today ordered a study of the power failure in the Northeast. The President's order was a direct result of the power outage that struck the Northeast last night.

Food Is Sent To Subways

10,000 Are Stranded Long After Most Are Led Out

By SANDER KAPLAN
NEW YORK (AP)—The city's subway system today was a chaotic scene of confusion and frustration. Food was being sent to the subways to help sustain the thousands of people who were stranded there.

Miss Liberty Shines Through Blackout

Light as Her Fair
The Statue of Liberty, the symbol of freedom and democracy, shined brightly through the city-wide blackout last night. Her torch and tablet were illuminated by a special lighting system.

Man, 22, Immolates Himself In Anticair Protest at U.N.

By THOMAS BUCKLEY
A 22-year-old man today immolated himself in a protest against nuclear weapons at the United Nations. The man, who was identified as a student, set himself on fire in front of the UN building.

How City Met the Emergency: Off-Duty Men Are Mobilized

The city's emergency services were mobilized to deal with the aftermath of the power outage. Off-duty police officers and firefighters were called in to help manage the situation.

Power Failure Snarls Northeast; 800,000 Are Caught in Subways Here; Autos Tied Up; City Gropes In Dark

Snarl at Rush Hour Spreads Into 9 States

10,000 in the National Guard and 5,000 Off-Duty Policemen Are Called to Service in New York

By Peter Kihss

The largest power failure in history blacked out nearly all of New York City, parts of nine Northeastern states and two provinces of southeastern Canada last night. Some 800,000 square miles, in which perhaps 25 million people live and work, were affected.

It was more than three hours before the first lights came back on in any part of the New

RELATED HEADLINES

How City Met the Emergency: Off-Duty Men Are Mobilized

Food Is Sent to Subways: 10,000 Are Stranded Long After Most Are Led Out

York City area. When they came on in Nassau and Suffolk Counties at 9 P.M., overloads plunged the area into darkness again in 10 minutes.

Striking at the evening rush hour, the power failure trapped 800,000 riders on New York City's subways. Railroads halted. Traffic was jammed. Airplanes found themselves circling, unable to land. But the Defense Department reported that the Strategic Air Command and other defense installations functioned without a halt.

National Guard Called Out

Five thousand off-duty policemen were summoned to duty here. Ten thousand National Guardsmen were called up in New York City alone. Other militiamen were alerted in Rhode Island and Massachusetts, as well as upstate New York.

The lights and the power went out first at 5:17 P.M. somewhere along the Niagara frontier of New York state. Nobody could tell why for hours afterward.

The tripping of automatic switches hurtled the blackout eastward across the state--to Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Utica, Schenectady, Troy and Albany.

Within four minutes the line of darkness had plunged across Massachusetts all the way to Boston. It was like a pattern of falling dominoes--darkness sped southward through Connecticut, northward into Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine and Canada.

Sputtering at 5:27

At 5:27 P.M. the lights began sputtering in New York City, and within seconds the giant Consolidated Edison system blacked out in Manhattan, the Bronx, Queens and most of Brooklyn--but not in Staten Island and parts of Brooklyn that were interconnected with the Public Service Electric and Gas Company of New Jersey.

City's Glitter Goes But Not Its Poise

U.S. Orders an Inquiry:
President Calls for a Study of Power Failure in East

OTHER HEADLINES

Johnson Restates Goals in Vietnam

G.I.'S Score Big Victory:
Vietcong Force Almost Wiped Out by U.S. Airborne Unit

Man, 22, Immolates Himself in Antiwar Protest at U.N.

The darkness probed outward into northern New Jersey, up into Westchester and Rockland Counties, eastward into Long Island.

As far south as Washington, a Potomac Electric Power Company spokesman reported a power "dip" at 5:30 P.M., lasting less than a minute and virtually unnoticed in the nation's capital.

In Pennsylvania, the blackout spread through Pittsburgh and Reading into parts of Philadelphia and then into New Jersey along the coast above Atlantic City.

President Johnson, in Austin, Tex., ordered the full resources of the Federal Government thrown into an investigation by the Federal Power Commission. The Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Defense Department and other agencies were ordered to report "at the earliest possible moment."

Some Fear Sabotage

Asked whether there was any belief that sabotage might have been involved, Bill D. Moyers, the President's Press Secretary, would say only that "all of the resources of the Government" were being invoked in the investigation.

Later Mr. Johnson was advised that utility officials were "pretty well agreed upon the belief that there is substantially no chance of sabotage." Mr. Moyers said one theory was that the failure had been in automatic frequency control equipment.

Power companies, stripped of the protection of interconnected grids that would guard against minor failures, moved to isolate their areas to restore energy on their own. This was how the Ontario Hydro Electric Commission, a Government-owned utility, cut away after loss of power for six million persons. It began bringing power back at 6:15 P.M.

In New York City, the Ravenswood plant in Queens, which provides 1.8 million kilowatts out of the 7.6 million produced by the city's Consolidated Edison plants, began sending smoke up from its stacks, as auxiliary steam power began to build up for its generators.

At 7:15 P.M. smoke began curdling up also from the Hudson Avenue station in Brooklyn. It was from Hudson Avenue that the first power was restored here: Five feeder cables of 27,000 volts each sent light back into Coney Island at 8:42 P.M.

An hour later Consolidated Edison reported 17 of the city's 60 feeder lines in operation. But company officials indicated it would be many hours before the entire city's electricity could be brought back to life.

About 1:30 A.M. today, Consolidated Edison informed Police Headquarters that it expected partial restoration of power in Manhattan by 4 A.M. The company reported that 75 per cent of the power had been restored in Brooklyn and in parts of Queens and the Bronx.

And a spokesman for the Federal Power Commission--its acting regional engineer in New York, John H. Stellman--said he did not know "whether Consolidated Edison could carry the peak load of New York City around 7 or 8 A.M., when people start getting up and going to work."

Through the night, Consolidated Edison broadcast appeals to New Yorkers to shut off all appliances except radio sets to ease the burden on lines coming back to service.

A matter of seconds may have stood between the city's being blacked out and its escaping trouble, William O. Farley, coordinator of public affairs and publications for Consolidated Edison, said.

Operator Notices Trouble

Mr. Farley said a systems operator at the company's energy control center at 128 West 65th Street had noticed on his metered recording devices that some difficulty appeared to be starting on the interconnecting system with upstate utilities.

The operator "immediately got on the phone with the Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation to tell them that he was about to separate from the interconnecting system," Mr. Farley said.

While he was trying to telephone his warning upstate, Mr. Farley said, the reserve demand for power from the stricken upstate area surged so high that automatic switches triggered protective equipment here.

"And the system was down," Mr. Farley said.

In Austin, President Johnson was told by telephone at about 8 P.M. by his science advisor, Dr. Donald Hornig, that the best information available at that hour was that the failure had started at a switching point somewhere in the service area of the Niagara Mohawk Power Company.

Canada Finds No Flaw

In Toronto, a spokesman for Ontario Hydro said, "To the best of our knowledge, the failure was in the United States." He said, "we have checked every aspect of our system, and it is in order."

The Ontario utility isolated itself from the United States system but found its power going on and off twice before it was able to restore service to metropolitan Toronto, an area of 2 million persons, about 8 P.M.

At 10 P.M., a New York State Power Authority official in Rochester said his agency believed the original break had occurred along the authority's 345,000-volt line between Rochester and Baldwinsville, a town north of Syracuse. Crews looking for the break were reported accompanied by agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The Consolidated Edison system is directly connected from the energy control center here with five other power companies--Niagara-Mohawk, the Central Hudson Gas and Electricity Company, the Orange and the Rockland Utilities and the Connecticut Light and Power Company.

Last Failure in 1961

The last major power failure to hit New York City took place on a 96-degree day--June 13, 1961. Five square miles of Manhattan were blacked out at that time for periods ranging from two and a half to four and a half hours at the start of afternoon rush hour. Subway service was either halted or slowed.

The blackout was ascribed to failure of circuit breakers because of faulty insulation, and it was followed by a \$25 million construction program here that included the building of three new power substations.

Yesterday's trouble struck again, when the homebound rush was under way, but on an autumn day when twilight was nearly past and night was closing in.

The Transit Authority estimated that 800,000 persons were riding in the subway systems. Many trains managed to creep into stations in time. Stranded riders on others had to make their way along tunnel catwalks, shepherded by employees with emergency lights.

Thousands Walk on Bridges

Thousands of persons hiked across the Brooklyn and Queensboro Bridges. On the Queensboro span, cars crawled behind the trudging pedestrians. At 8:40 P.M., police halted motor vehicle traffic on the Manhattan bridges' lower level, to permit persons who had been caught on BMT trains on the bridges to get off and walk.

Long lines of homegoing New Yorkers searched out and queued up for buses. The Transit Authority reported 3,500 of its complement of 4,000 vehicles operating.

Tremendous traffic jams block the city's streets. The Franklin D. Roosevelt Drive on the East Side and the Miller Highway on the West Side were still clogged more than five hours after the blackout started.

The Brooklyn-Battery and Queens Midtown Tunnels were closed because the power failure had cut off their ventilation. The Lincoln and Holland Tunnels and the George Washington Bridge to New Jersey remained opened.

Railroads Suspend Service

Railroad lines from Grand Central Terminal and Pennsylvania Station went out of service, forcing commuters to search for alternate transportation.

Some taxi drivers were demanding \$10 to \$15 for rides between points in Manhattan.

Thousands of New Yorkers were caught in elevators in the city's skyscrapers. Many of the city's elevators are equipped with safety devices to take them down to the next floor, where doors can be opened manually in the case of power failures.

In the Pan-Am Building, the city's largest office structure, 14 passengers were trapped in three elevators for hours after the blackout. Shortly before 11 P.M. workmen cut out a section of a fifth-floor wall to extricate five of the trapped persons. They expected to have to dig into other walls to rescue the remaining nine.

Kennedy International and LaGuardia Airports were shut down within minutes of the power failure until about 8:30 P.M. Two hundred planes were diverted to fields in Philadelphia; others went to Newark and Hartford, and the Defense Department ordered its military fields to accept any emergency air traffic.

Tens of thousands of airline passengers were involved.

The New York Telephone Company reported it had provided service in all its central offices through emergency power.

The Fire Department's radio was out of service from 5:30 to 8:30 P.M. Dispatchers kept in touch with firehouses and vehicles by telephone.

Walkie-talkies were used for some Fire Department communications. The department was said to be taking advantage of panoramic views of the city from flying helicopters.

The Police Department summoned 5,000 off-duty patrolmen by broadcasting the order over the municipal radio station WNYC. Off-duty firemen were also called in.

The extra policemen were directed to report to precincts in their home districts if they were unable to reach their regular stations.

Armories Become 'Hotels'

Civil defense workers were called to duty over WNYC by Robert E. Condon, city director of civil defense. Their auxiliary policemen helped free subway passengers and directed traffic.

Police Headquarters said that four Manhattan armories had offered overnight accommodations for persons stranded in the city. These were at Park Avenue and 66th Street, Park Avenue at 34th Street, Lexington Avenue and 26th Street, and Fort Washington Avenue and West 168th Street.

Most of the city's hospitals had emergency power supplies of their own. Emergency generators from the civil defense organization and private companies were delivered by the police to a half- dozen hospitals.

All nine television channels in the metropolitan area were forced off the air. Radio stations were silenced by the initial blackout, but at least eight came back on their own auxiliary power in 10 to 15 minutes.

WNBC broadcasts with five kilowatts and WCBS with 10; both normally use 50 kilowatts.

Broadway Theatres Shut

Broadway theatres and movie houses were shut, but off-Broadway the show went on by searchlight at Theater East, 211 East 60th Street, where three performers played Arkady Leokum's two one-acters, "Friends" and "Enemies" before an audience of seven humans and two dogs.

The self-sufficient transistorized radios had their finest hours, supplying the only information for millions of persons otherwise cut off from the news.

Virtually every hotel room in the city was taken and there were reports that some stranded commuters had climbed 30 stories for a night's haven.

National Guardsmen Mobilized

At first all National Guard commands throughout the state were alerted by Governor Rockefeller, but as power was restored upstate only 10,000 guardsmen, most of them from the 42d Infantry Division, were ordered to report to armories in the city for emergency duty last night. The armories reported that guardsmen responded "in fair numbers," although many had transportation problems.

Five hours after the blackout, the police reported five arrests on looting charges, all in the Brownsville and Bedford-Stuyvesant sections of Brooklyn. There were also some reports of minor vandalism, but generally New Yorkers appeared to have been on their best behavior.

In the suburbs, a bright spot in the Hudson Valley was the town of Walden. Five thousand residents got light from a Wallkill River hydroelectric station that had been idle for some time.

The New York State Electric and Gas Corporation had sought to abandon the plant as no longer economically feasible.

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