

HISTORY FROM OHA

Crouse-Hinds: Lighting Up Our Lives

■ BY KAREN Y. COONEY

Eaton's Crouse-Hinds Business, credited with developing the first traffic light, had its beginnings when 24-year-old Huntington Beard Crouse met 51-year-old Jesse L. Hinds.

Crouse was introduced to Hinds by his distant relative, Jacob Crouse, a prominent Syracuse businessman. Hinds wanted to start his own business, but lacked capital, while Crouse was without a job, but had some money. On Jan. 18, 1897, the papers were drawn to formalize the partnership and Crouse-Hinds Electric Company was born.

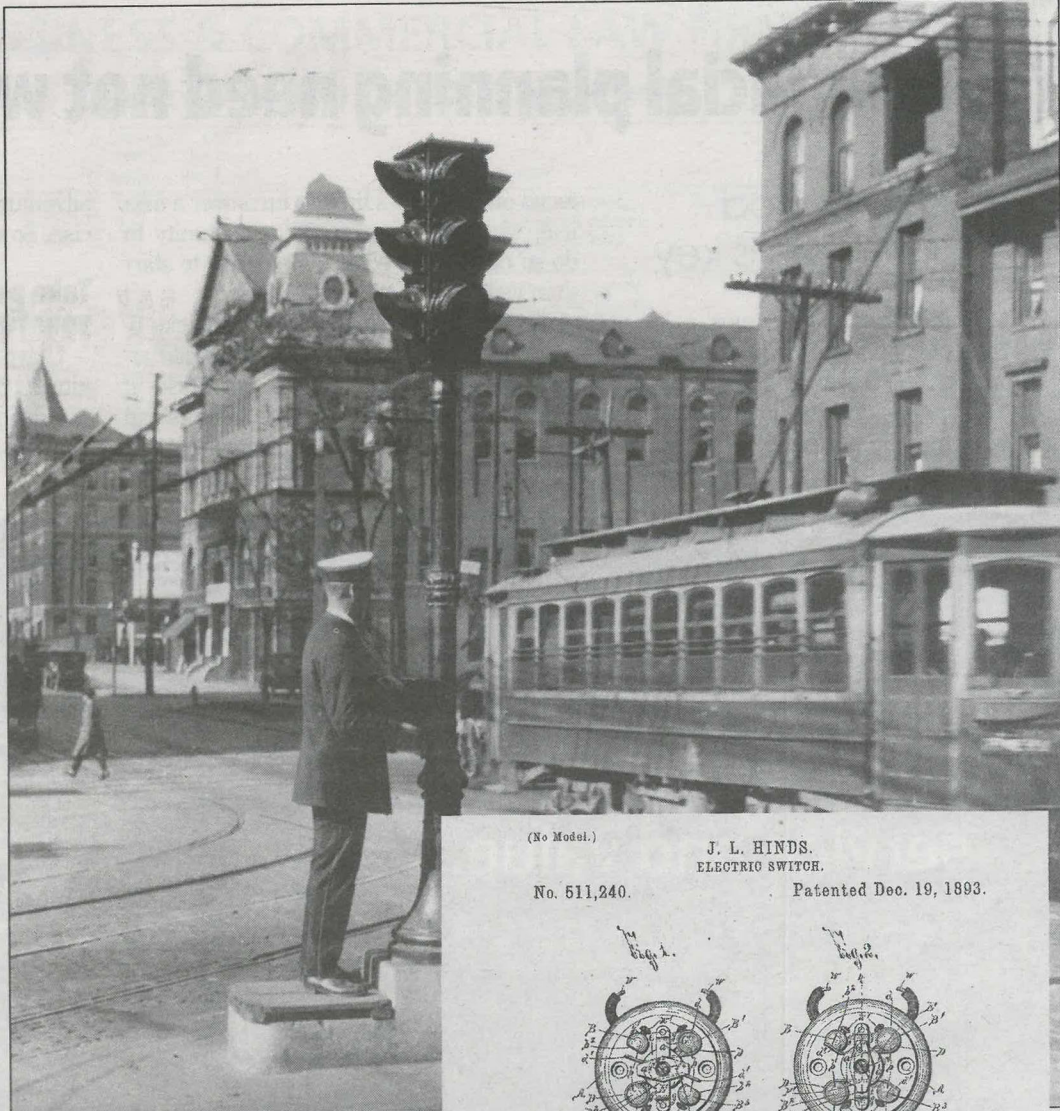
The partners leased a small space on East Water Street and began manufacturing electric panel boards, switchboards, and Hinds' own patented switch. Also occupying this building was the Changeable Electric Headlight Company. These lights were being manufactured for trolleys and could be used interchangeably on either end of the trolley. The owner convinced Crouse-Hinds to take over the manufacture and sales of the lights on a royalty basis. This new facet of the business proved to be extremely profitable and, in 1900, the company moved to a larger facility on West Jefferson Street where it established its reputation as a conduit (electrical devices used in connection with industrial wiring) manufacturing company. The business incorporated as the Crouse-Hinds Company in 1903 and continued to grow, necessitating another move. Eventually, it purchased 25 acres and built a large factory at the company's present location at the corner of 7th North and Wolf Streets.

Just prior to this move, Jesse Hinds announced his retirement. (Huntington B. Crouse continued on as the president until his death in 1943, at the age of 70.) The manufacturer had expanded to produce traffic signals, floodlights, searchlights, and airport lighting. In 1921, the company developed one of the first electrically interlocked, synchronized traffic light systems in the country and it was installed in Houston, Texas,

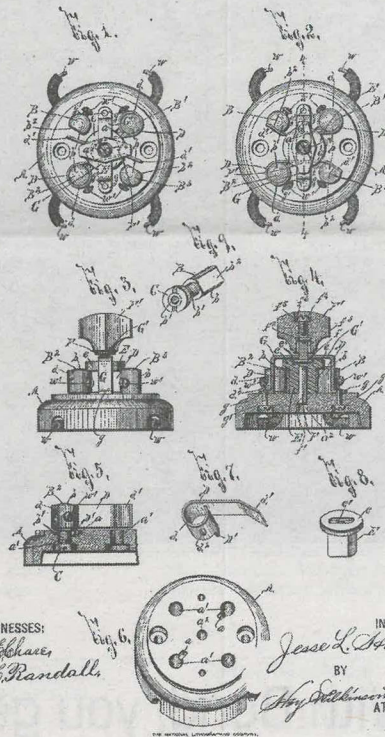
per the request of the newly elected mayor. Mayor Oscar Holcombe had promised during his campaign that a system of this kind would be implemented if he was elected. Syracuse installed its own traffic light at the corner of James and State Streets in 1922. This traffic signal was operated manually by a policeman standing alongside it. As traffic increased through the years, the company developed and manufactured pedestrian warning lights to increase safety while crossing busy streets. Crouse-Hinds began manufacturing airport and stadium lighting in 1927. Syracuse University's Archbold Stadium was one of its early customers. It also fabricated searchlights for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and, in the 1950s, produced a new line of electrical receptacles and connectors for use in space.

Crouse-Hinds management placed strong emphasis on the well-being of its employees and their families. The company published a monthly newsletter highlighting employee accomplishments and arranged social gatherings such as company picnics, holiday parties, and annual clambakes. Over the course of their history, Crouse-Hinds sponsored several sports teams from angling to volleyball along with a very popular chorus. Research revealed an early HR directive that used a novel approach to control a particular employee's problem with alcohol. A memo sent to that worker in the early 1900s stipulated, that despite issues with alcohol on the job, he would be allowed to remain in the employ of the company. His wages would be increased from \$1.75 to \$2.00 per day when sober, but drop to \$1.50 when he was not. Once the company had confidence in his sobriety, it would again restore his regular wages.

In 1981, Cooper Industries pur-



(No Model.)
J. L. HINDS.
ELECTRIC SWITCH.
No. 511,240. Patented Dec. 19, 1893.



chased Crouse-Hinds and all its worldwide subsidiaries. In the spring of 2012, it was announced that Eaton Corporation had bought Cooper Industries, renaming the company Eaton Crouse-Hinds Business. Eaton is a company that specializes in explosion-proof electrical equipment for communications systems that operate in any type of harsh and hazardous environments. Despite its many changes through the years, Crouse-Hinds continues to be a beacon for Onondaga County.

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