

An Electric Day

By H. W. Hillman,

(The owner and occupant of the house described)

Good Housekeeping, June 1906, pp 615-620.

The milkman rushing Through the driveway, and up the backdoor step, arousing Josie, the "domestic electrician." Glancing at the clock, and finding it is time to get up, she turns on the switch at the head of the bed, and the practical, "electric day" has once more begun. The switch has put into operation the electric cereal cooker in the kitchen, which is also a combination water boiler.

By the time Josie is dressed, washed, and ready to go to the kitchen, the water for the coffee is boiling. It is placed in the electric coffee percolator - the best of all devices, in my opinion, for making delicious coffee. No danger of delaying breakfast from this source, because in seven or eight minutes the coffee is ready for the table. The cereal and coffee attended to. the switch for the frying pan is turned on. One minute is sufficient, and then the bacon and eggs are started frying. Is it any wonder that the days go by pleasantly with Josie, and that she enjoys the title of "domestic electrician ?" It has been suggested by those who have not had any experience with electricity in the kitchen, that perhaps there is an element of fear in connection with handling the devices. This is far from true. In turning the switch off and on, it is the same operation as turning the electric light off and on. Practically the same kind of switch is used. There are no metal parts exposed in connection with which the operator could come in contact if a fuse should "blow." This is noticeable only by the absence of heat when the switch is turned on, and indicates the necessity of renewal, which is the work of about a minute, and does not require an experienced electrician. I am sure that any slight fear would soon be overcome after some experience in handling. and ample confidence would then be established.

After breakfast the dishes are washed, and soon the ironing is started. No more "ironing day"; it requires but a few hours to finish ironing with the electric flatiron. There was no necessity the night before to guard against the fire going out. Nor was it necessary the first thing in the morning to get the fire into good condition for a red-hot stove all day to keep the flats good and hot. Josie simply finished the dishes and then went to the laundry. She turned on the flatiron switch, and in three or four minutes started to iron. Later in the morning she desires to go into the kitchen to start the potatoes steaming, and begin to cook the boiled dinner. Leaving the iron with the switch turned off, it cools down slightly, but when she returns it is quickly available for continuing the work.

Just about this time the telephone bell rings. Mrs Hillman answers the 'phone upstairs (for convenience we have one downstairs and one upstairs). It is one of the neighbors asking in regard to the electric heating pad. It seems that one of the family has contracted a severe cold, and is having chills. She said Dr B— had just called, and suggested hot applications. Their hot water bottle leaked, and it was an annoyance, anyhow. Would we loan the heating pad until they received the one which had already been ordered? Mrs Hillman assures her over the 'phone that the device has a plug attached to it, which may be screwed into the lighting socket near the bed, and after it has been operating for a while at high heat, the heat can easily be readjusted to a medium or low degree, as desired. Before saying goodbye, the neighbor asks if this will run up their electric bill, to which the reply is made that it takes about the same amount of current as one incandescent lamp, when used at high heat, and only one-third of this amount when operating at low heat

In the meantime, the New England boiled dinner is cooking. A large, four- quart electric kettle, together with the potato steamer

and other utensils, gives the electric outfit the appearance of a full-fledged cooking equipment commonly used with coal and gas ranges. For a period of thirty months, electricity has been continually in service, and this particular "electric day" is representative of actual practice. If, instead of a boiled dinner, a roast beef were cooked, then the oven would have been in operation. This is equally convenient, being regulated by a three-heat switch. Your readers, familiar with housekeeping, will know what, it means to get the coal or gas oven good and hot, ready for baking. With the electric oven, the maximum heat is turned on for about fifteen minutes, and then the device is ready for work. The switch when turned on for any of the three heats, furnishes a regulation for the oven, which is not only convenient, but practical for all purposes. During the New Year's holiday season, for two consecutive years, I have personally seen a fourteen-pound turkey placed in the electric oven, and have had the pleasure of carving and serving it to a company of eight or ten persons. Such experience has led us to have a great respect for the electric oven.

On those mornings when we are favored with griddlecakes and steak, the aluminum gridiron and the electric broiler come into service instead of the frying pan. They are equally quick, and the character of the cakes and meat, brought to the table offers evidence of the satisfactory work which they are capable of performing.

Lunch having passed, and the ironing having been entirely finished, the "domestic electrician" is free for the afternoon. About 3 o'clock the doorbell rings. Several friends have come to talk over with Mrs Hillman the entertainment for the next meeting of the musical class which is a very popular branch of the Woman's club of Schenectady. After divesting themselves of their winter cloaks, and getting seated in the music room, the luminous radiators are put into operation. These radiators are particularly adapted for

such service, as they produce heat, immediately, and serve the purpose of imparting a cheer and warmth to the room which are pleasant, to say the least. These ladies represent a committee to consider what facilities are available for serving tea and light refreshments, also the color of the dining room walls, fixtures, etc, and the shade of gowns to be worn by those serving. The electric dining room table is called particularly to their attention. It is a small table fitted with electric wiring receptacles and switches suitable for operating two or three devices such as coffee percolators, chafing dishes, or water boilers for serving tea. This table is finished in quartered oak, matching the oak finish of the room.

While the ladies are here, a desire is expressed to see some of the other electrical devices. A visit to the upper floor brings forth much favorable comment.

The sewing room in particular is considered very attractive, with its electric motor attached to the machine, the small, nickel-plated flatiron ready at a moment's notice for the many uses which it is capable of performing, and a second luminous radiator for auxiliary or intermittent heat in case the furnace fire gets low during the winter days, or for fall and spring seasons when the furnace fire may not be in commission. The three-pound iron attracts much attention, especially when it is learned that it can be placed in any of the sockets anywhere in the house, and is always carried with us on a journey for the purpose of pressing clothes more or less wrinkled during such a trip. The married ladies express the opinion that their husbands would much prefer to have such a device at home for ironing their silk hats, to the delay and expense of sending to the local hatter.

The electric lighting of all closets with the switches outside the door was noted as a great convenience, and when the electric

shaving mug was inspected, there was no further doubt about the necessity of all the husbands making an early investigation of the electric household utensils which are so convenient and necessary for "good housekeeping."

In regard to candle power of lights: In the clothes closets, four candle power incandescent lamps are used; also in the furnace room. In the bathroom are two ten candle power lamps, one on either side of the mirror. In the dining room, the reflector type of lamp is installed, eight of them together, two on each side in a cove ceiling. These lights are controlled by a side wall switch, with four buttons controlling two lights each. I have about fifty to sixty lights installed, and my lighting bill last month was only \$4.20. I attributed the small size of the bill to careful arrangement of the light for proper distribution, and the use of low energy lamps quite generally.

We have called this an "electric day." It suggests that we are passing through an electric era, which bids fair to attract the attention of the entire world to the matter of up-to-date housekeeping. A business man comes from Chicago to New York on the latest "limited." The train is lighted by electricity. Cool breezes from the fan motor are furnished by electricity. In addition to the fixtures on the car ceilings for general illumination, there are tiny incandescent lamps at the back of each seat, designed to provide better light for reading, as well as furnishing light in the berth. As, the Grand Central station in New York is approached, the tremendous engineering plans for electrifying the road lead him to think more and more about electricity, and he has a desire to use it in his home if the expense is not exorbitant. At the present writing, there are doubtless thousands of homes where these convenient miscellaneous devices would be used if the people were acquainted with the reasonable costs of operating. The easiest way to become

conversant with the matter of costs is to compare the electric with the coal and gas range systems of cooking, baking, etc.

The writer used a coal stove for about ten years, and a gas stove for six years. With coal at an average price of \$6.50 per ton, and gas at about \$1.30 per thousand, our monthly bills averaged about \$6 in a family of five. The average monthly cost of the same character of work by electricity has amounted to \$6.09 for twenty-four consecutive months, or slightly higher than the coal and gas. The figures in neither case, it should be added, cover lighting bills.

The rate of charge for electricity in Schenectady is 15 cents per kilowatt, with a discount for quantity, which averages a net cost of about 10 cents per kilowatt. This refers to electricity for lighting. The local electric company makes me a price of 5 cents per kilowatt. for the heating device circuit, because the devices are used so much during the daytime, and because they secure an income of over \$100 per year from my residence instead of only \$35 or \$40 per year, which I would pay them for electric lighting only. I am sure that many families of five or six persons throughout the country spend as much as or \$7 per month for gas or coal in connection with cooking and baking, ironing, etc, without considering lighting. Where families do not spend so much money because of economy, or low price of coal or gas, then many of the small miscellaneous electrical devices would interest them instead of the larger cooking and baking articles. The electric cigar lighters, heating pads, percolators, curling irons, shaving mugs, baby milk-warmers, and many other interesting devices may be attached to the electric wiring socket, and being used intermittently the cost is small, the convenience pleasing, and the experience most interesting.

Electric lighting companies throughout the entire country are manifesting a desire to acquaint the people with such devices. It is necessary that the house should be wired, and recently I have seen

an advertisement by a large electric lighting company, offering to wire houses at an exceptionally low price. Architects are also making a special study of the subject, with the view of favoring those clients who exhibit an interest in the subject. If it is desired to use simply the small miscellaneous devices, then the extra wiring is exceedingly simple. Lighting wires of ordinary size can be used with the proper arrangement of circuits to meet insurance rules. Such wiring will offer the opportunity to use small devices freely without unscrewing the incandescent lamps every time one desires to use a heating device.

Many of your readers will doubtless be curious to know how much it cost me for the extra wiring, which is used in connection with so many devices, including the entire system. I am pleased to state that I omitted the kitchen chimney when building; also excavated for a cellar under part, of the house only. The foundation for about half the house extends simply down to frost line. Neither kitchen, coal bin, nor wood bin was necessary. I had two sets of plans drawn by a Boston architect, and upon receiving bids found that there was a saving, due to the omissions, amounting to several hundred dollars. Extra heavy wires are installed all through the house, and the extra cost for wiring, not including lighting wires, amounted to about \$125 to \$150. Readers who have had experience in building will appreciate that this is a very small amount when considering the erection of a \$10,000 or \$12,000 house. Architects will also appreciate this point fully, when they know that the house is 57 feet long on one side with a 35-foot music room, two bathrooms, a 20-foot living room upstairs, and five bedrooms. The cost of electrical devices represents a nominal figure. For illustration, a flatiron, \$3 or \$4, depending upon size; cigar lighter, \$1.75 to \$2; shaving mug, about \$3.50; baby milk-warmer, the same. The cost of an electric kitchen outfit will vary from \$50 up, depending upon the character of table, and size of family in the same manner as a coal range varies in price according to the size,

and a combination coal and gas range will vary according to the size, ornamentation, etc.

When building, special attention was given to the heating of the kitchen and laundry, from the hot air furnace. The extra initial cost, is only slight, while the winter cost of operating is almost negligible. A hot water front was placed in my furnace at an extra cost of about \$8. which furnishes hot water from October until May, a period when the furnace fire is being operated. During the summer months, electric immersion coils furnish plenty of hot water without adding greatly to the expense, regarding which I have spoken fully in the foregoing.

Space will not permit of lengthy explanation in regard to troubles, durability of devices, etc. Suffice to say that all the devices are heat-insulated; in fact, they are so well insulated from heat that they can be operated upon a highly finished surface without, destroying its appearance. Occasionally a porcelain plug breaks, or the wire cord may need renewal. But a spare cord and plug on hand avoids any annoyance from this source. The devices are of a most durable character, and combined with reasonable costs of operating, great, convenience in handling, neatness in appearance, and the interesting experience, I am sure that we should look with disfavor upon ever again going back to old methods for cooking, baking, ironing, etc.

(Searchable PDF version of text prepared by David Hyde - pseudonym 'David de la Hyde')

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Residence of H.W. Hillman, Schenectady, N.Y. Exterior View - 1905



View from Piazza, residence of H.W. Hillman - 1905



The living room in Mr Hillman's home, which, by the way, is one of the Craftsman houses designed by Gustav Stickley



Electric Kitchen - Residence of H.W. Hillman - 1905



Electric Kitchen Outfit - Mr H.W. Hillmans home - 1905



View of Sitting Room, showing Luminous Radiator, Electric Iron and Sewing Machine Motor - Residence of H.W. Hillman - 1905



Immersion Heater, Wash Boiler and Electric Flat Iron, in Laundry of H.W. Hillman Residence 1905



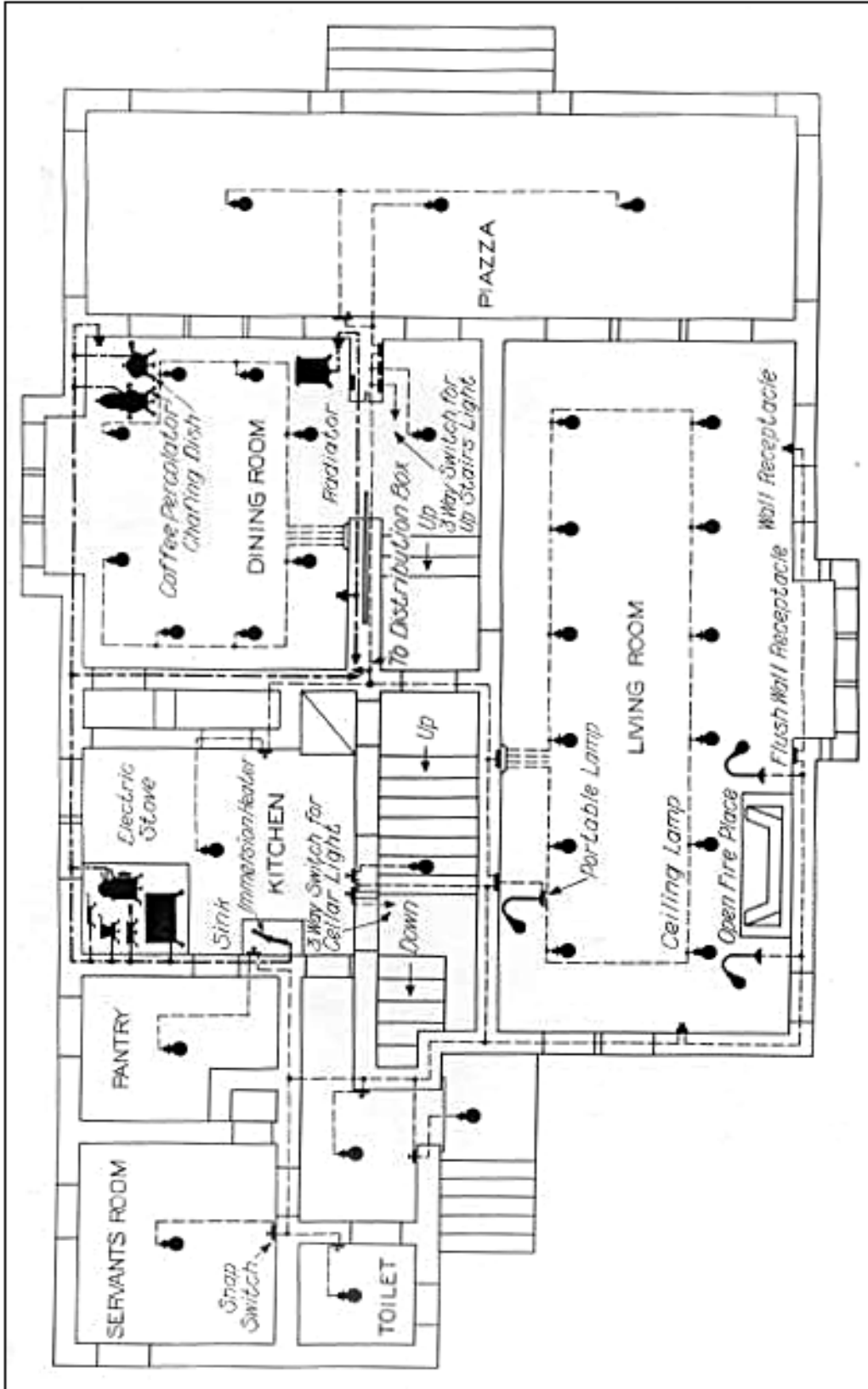
Bed Room showing Flat Iron, Luminous Radiator and Heating Pad - residence of H.W. Hillman - 1905



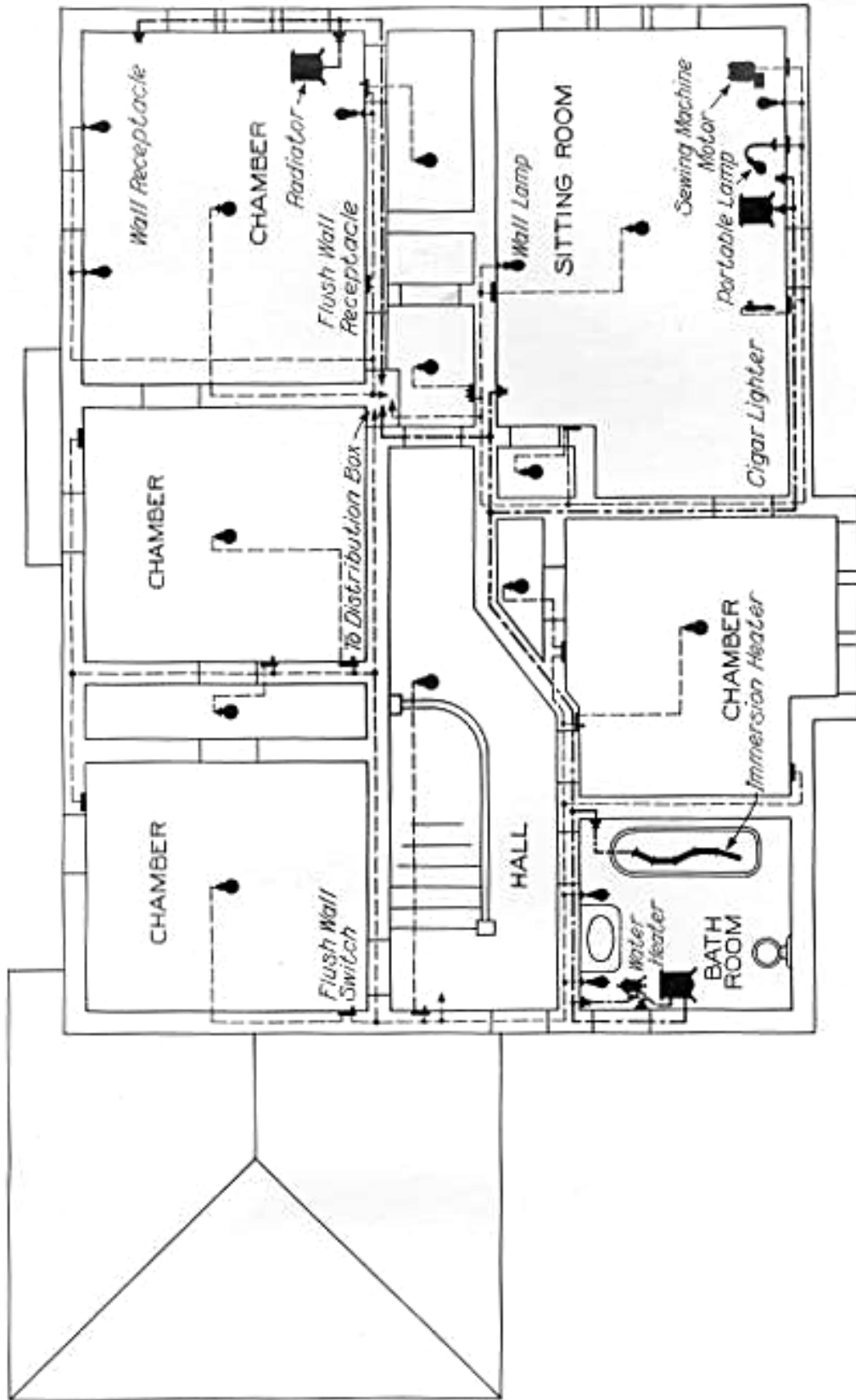
**Bathroom showing Luminous Radiator, Water Heater and Massage Motor
- Home of W.H. Hillman - 1905**



**Bathroom showing Immersion Heater and Luminous Radiator -
Home of W.H. Hillman - 1905**



Plan of wiring - First Floor - Mr. Hillman's House - 1905



Plan of wiring - Second Floor - Mr. Hillman's House - 1905