

WILLIAM STANLEY OVERLOOK

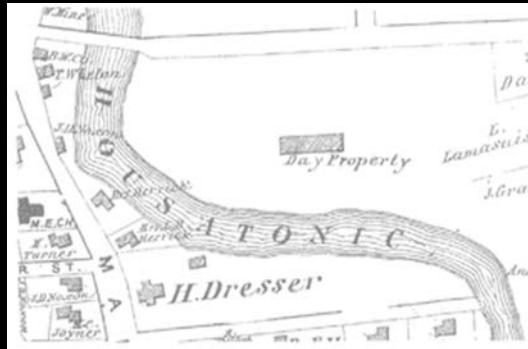
Housatonic River Walk



William Stanley Jr. in 1886 leased Horace Day's old rubberwear factory on Cottage Street for an electrical laboratory (*Great Barrington Historical Society*).

William Stanley (1858-1916) devised an innovative electric distribution system using an alternating-current transformer. His laboratory was in Horace Day's rambling, vacant rubberwear factory, the foundation of which is just visible on the opposite bank of the Housatonic River from where you stand. The evening of March 20, 1886, Stanley and his assistants L.L. Jenkins and Reginald Belfield demonstrated its practicality by powering lights in offices and stores on Main Street, Great Barrington. Stanley's innovation allowed efficient, long-distance transmission of power. "Crude as the apparatus was, with all its faults of design and construction, it operated in a marvelously beautiful manner, and thoroughly satisfied me that I had a system of distribution which was capable of indefinitely extending the limits over which electricity could be publicly served," Stanley said.

Simultaneous with Stanley's endeavor, heiress Mary Sherwood Hopkins had an Edison direct-current system installed at her new Kellogg Terrace on South Main Street, and provided power to neighboring businesses. Thus the town witnessed the first skirmish in what became a major battle of the currents. Stanley's mentor George Westinghouse and a-c ultimately prevailed. Stanley went on to establish a manufactory in Pittsfield in the 1890s which evolved into General Electric. Ironically a later innovation in power transformer production incorporated polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), reckless handling and disposal of which resulted in major contamination of the river. Stanley returned to Great Barrington in 1898 and built a factory on Church Street to make electric watt-hour meters and, later, all-metal, insulated Stanley bottles (which are still produced under the Aladdin brand today). This Stanley Overlook, a tribute to the community's industrial heritage, was dedicated in June 2006.



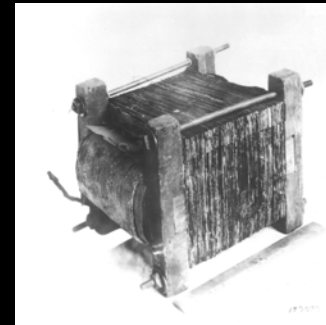
1876 map shows Day mill (rubberwear factory) on west bank

"Some people are a little puzzled by the term of this invention. It was called an 'induction coil' rather than a 'power transformer'. This may be because 'transformer' had not been a known term at the time. While it comes in all sizes and shapes, its most recognized form is the round garbage-can size device you see atop utility power poles. It solved a basic problem in that d-c, at the safe voltage of about 100 volts, could not be transmitted over long distances. So Stanley's transformer allowed power to be generated at places like Niagara Falls and easily sent to places like New York City. This made low-cost electricity available world-wide and opened the door to all the wonderful electrical devices we take for granted today."

- George C. Stanley, inventor's grandson, 2005



William Stanley sat for a formal portrait by Great Barrington photographer Alfred A. Costello



Transformer image printed from copy negative, Marie Tassone collection (*Great Barrington Historical Society*)

