

Distributing Electricity

Post Street Substation



Avista's Post Street Substation has distributed power to downtown Spokane since 1909. The substation, still identified by the Washington Water Power signs on its roof (the company changed its name in 1999), is a prominent part of Avista's living history.

"THE POST STREET SUBSTATION... IS MOST LIBERALLY DESIGNED AND WILL SUFFICE FOR THE DEMANDS OF THE SYSTEM WHEN THE LOAD HAS INCREASED TO SEVERAL TIMES ITS PRESENT VALUE." – ELECTRICAL WORLD, JUNE 1912

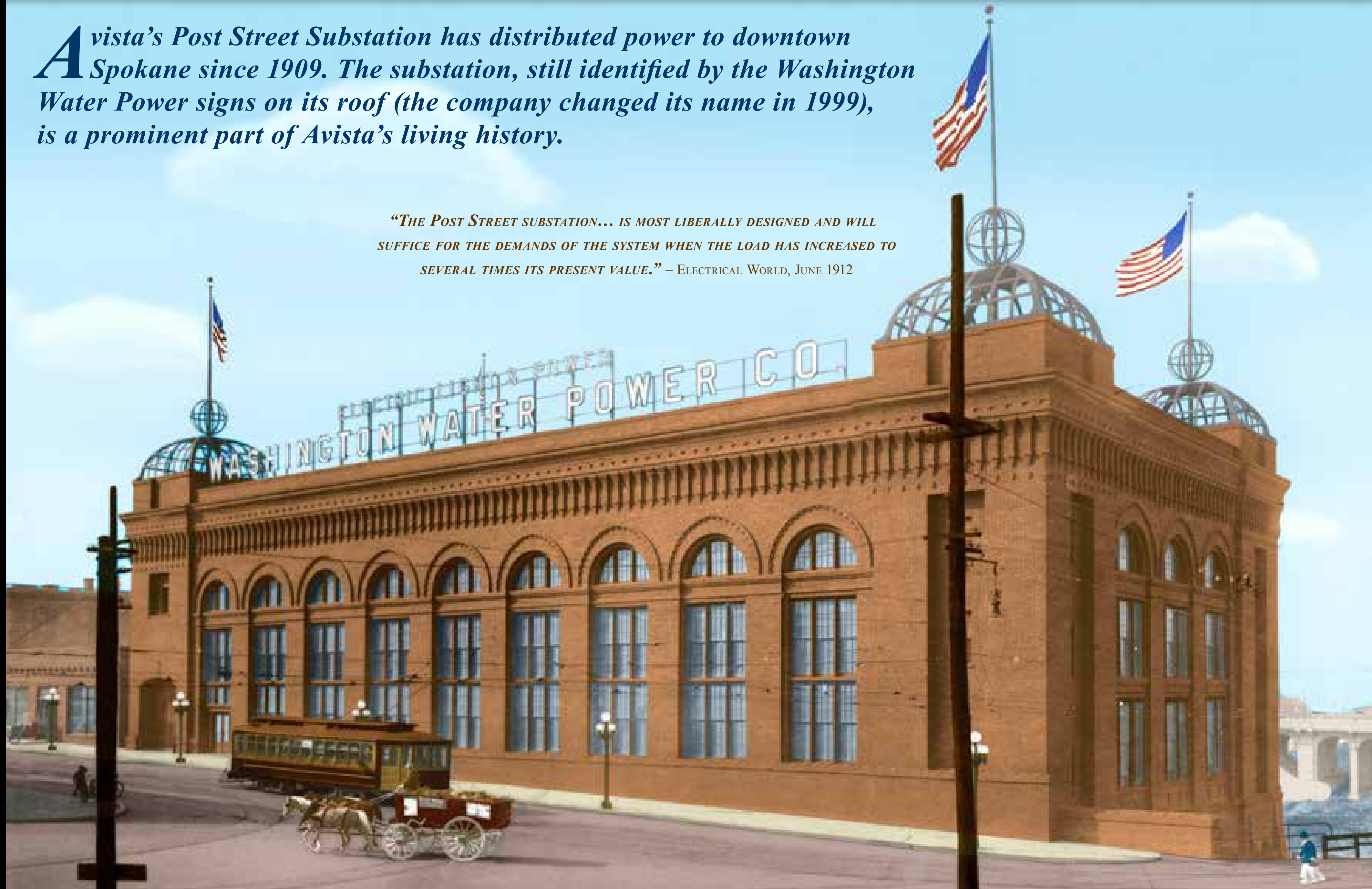


Photo courtesy of the Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture/Eastern Washington State Historical Society, Spokane, Avista Collection.
View of the substation in 1912.



Photo courtesy of Avista.
The substation's large, open interior allowed various equipment configurations and dissipated machine-generated heat. Equipment in this 1913 view provided AC and DC power at various voltages.



Photo © 2009 John D. Moore, CPP.
Avista's Post Street Substation has been an integral part of Spokane's waterfront since 1909.

The Post Street Substation receives electricity through underground transmission lines from Avista's nearby Monroe Street and Upper Falls power plants and distributes it throughout the company's electrical system. The substation also serves as the control center for Monroe Street and Upper Falls and houses personnel who oversee operations at both plants.

Over the years the substation has served many other purposes. Originally, some of the station's alternating current (AC) power was converted to direct current (DC) for city streetcars, lighting and industrial uses. "Standby" batteries in the basement were charged at night and used to supplement electricity needed during the day. City streetlights were controlled from the substation, where operators manually switched lights on and off. A streetcar track ran into the building so trolleys could be serviced and sheltered.

Built in a Romanesque style with large, recessed arch windows, the substation is an excellent example of Spokane's early industrial architecture and is included on the National Register of Historic Places. Designed by Spokane architects Kirtland Cutter and Karl Malmgren, the substation matches the heroic scale of Spokane's lower falls. Its massively-built corners were once capped with bulbous iron domes, which were donated to the U.S. government for scrap metal during World War II.