

Rural electric

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paper as an incorporator of Adams Electric, the head of the company came and offered to extend the line to his home at no cost. Schwartz recalls with a laugh, "I said, 'wouldn't that be a hell of a way to let down my neighbors?'"

Brown recalls that he sometimes had to go back four or five times to persuade people to sign the membership application. Then, once enough signatures were secured, he had to return to get rights of ways signed. Brown said that the cooperative took the shortest route across fields to save money.

He said, "Some people didn't like the idea of the lines running across the land, and thought they should keep to the roads, but they cut the mileage in half that way." Schwartz added that building lines as the crow flies saved corners and guide posts.

Brown pointed out that not everyone along the proposed route signed up, so some lines had to be built later. He said most people who didn't sign up wished they had.

It took many hours and many visits to talk to prospective cooperative members, and Brown says, "I wonder how I had the time." Rainy days were good ones to visit, he said, and pointed out that he did it because "we were working for the community and for the farmers. Most people would sign up to help their neighbors."

There was to be a minimum monthly charge of \$3 and Schwartz's daughter, Eva Jane, recalls, "Most people thought they weren't going to use much." Of course that quickly changed as they saw the many uses of electricity.

Brown remembers that they were threshing on his dairy farm when the electricity was first turned on. His wife, Elizabeth, was visiting her sister in the hospital, and requested that all the lights be turned on so that she could see them when she turned in from the main road.

Light bulbs then were mostly 15 and 20 watt bulbs, but they were considered "big," according to Eva Jane. The light provided from a single, naked bulb was tremendous compared to the

lanterns being used

There is an anecdote about a storekeeper of a general store boasting of his new electric light for a month before discovering it was only the night light over the cash register. When a co-op employee showed him how to turn on the rest of the lights, he was speechless with amazement.

Elsewhere in the country the turning on of lights brought similar expressions of wonder and awe. There is a story told by a Kentucky farmer about the day the lights came on in his farm home. There were just bare bulbs in each room and when his father pulled the chain to turn on the light in the kitchen he said, "Carl, come here and hang onto this so I can turn on the light in the sitting room." The farmer recalls telling his father to stop holding the chain because it would stay on. He said, "He finally let go, and then looked kind of foolish."

Brown said that the change in the daily life of the farmer came gradually. "A lot couldn't afford to jump into it all at once." Furthermore, many people had already owned generators, and while electricity made the job of getting power a lot easier, it didn't change their lives completely.

Brown said that he continued to cool the milk in the spring long after the electric lines were in to save money. An electric milker was purchased primarily because they didn't have a hired man.

One of the things made possible by electricity was indoor plumbing since water could be pumped. Washing machines, electric water heaters and other appliances came along slowly.

Eva Jane recalls that the cooperative always gave electric appliances as door prizes at its meetings, and they often sold appliances to make it convenient for people to acquire them. Local stores did not carry a big selection of electric appliances.

There can be no question that the rural homemaker benefited from electricity as much as or more than her farmer husband. No longer did she need to do her canning over the wood stove in the heat of the summer. No longer did she scorch shirts and iron with "sadirons," heated on the wood stove. And she didn't need to use an icebox anymore. All of the appliances for the home made her life much easier.

Eva Jane pointed out that the

cooperative used home economists to help promote the use of electricity and to help people understand it.

In the early days of rural electrification there were many outages. Schwartz recalls, "Trees were the main problem." People accepted these many interruptions of service as an inconvenience to be tolerated. Eva Jane says, "People were more patient then. We kept a coal oil lamp on each floor so it was handy if the lights went out. We lived a much quieter life then."

Schwartz maintained an active role in the cooperative, serving as a director until he was 85 years old. 32 years from his first year as an incorporator. He said the biggest

challenge facing the cooperatives today is the education of its members, few of whom remember the days when the countryside was dark.


Today Pennsylvania's 13 rural electric cooperatives serve 600,000 members. Adams Electric will celebrate its 50th anniversary in 1991

Like most people looking back on the struggle to bring electricity to the countryside, Brown says, "I'd hate to start over."

Indeed, most rural people would not like to go back to the days of no electricity. Though they lived

without it for many more years than their city cousins, it was electricity that increased agriculture's productivity and attracted industry to rural areas.

Rural electric cooperatives, made possible through that order signed by President Roosevelt 50 years ago, truly have changed the face of the countryside. The hard work of the men and women who brought electricity to themselves and their neighbors in cooperation with the government is a remarkable success story. The day the lights went on was a day which changed rural lives forever.



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