

# CELEBRATING 85 YEARS STRONG

In anticipation of our 85th Anniversary this December, it's appropriate to recap some of our cooperative's history in the next few issues of County Lines. Here's the first installment.

## A LOOK BACK

Imagine a time when the countryside grew dark with each sundown. Only the flickering of kerosene lanterns lit rural homes and barns with dim circles of light. Imagine a time when water was pumped by hand and carried in buckets. A time before refrigeration, electric feed grinders or augers. There was drudgery in everyday home and farm chores.



## THE EARLY YEARS, AUGUST 1936 THROUGH 1956.

We are indebted to the pioneers of rural electrification for fulfilling their vision through grit and determination. Their accomplishments remind us of the power of people working together for mutual benefit.

On December 20, 1935, a powerful idea began to take shape. About 400 people attended a meeting held in the First Lutheran Church of Albert Lea to discuss the possibility of electrifying rural Freeborn County. After almost a year of preliminary meetings, **Freeborn County Light & Power Co.** came into existence on December 8, 1936.

Meanwhile, in Mower County, the idea of organizing an electric cooperative was also being explored. Twenty Brownsdale farmers were told they could only receive electricity from the Austin municipal power plant if they were able to obtain a loan to build their own system of electric lines. The Mower County group began working with the newly formed cooperative in Freeborn County. A year after the Freeborn County effort was incorporated, the two groups consolidated into **Freeborn-Mower Co-op. Light & Power Assn.**

**With a borrowed desk and an empty nail keg for a chair, the cooperative was in business.** With an initial loan of \$175,000 from the Rural Electrification Administration, the cooperative began construction of 175 miles of power line and secured a wholesale power contract with Interstate Power Co. Mr. Lewis Brown served as Project Manager from 1937 to 1953 when Arvid Waller took over as cooperative Manager.

The first office was located in the Home Investment Building in Albert Lea. The first line was energized on February 26, 1938. The Alfred Lunde farmstead, Hayward, was the first account to be energized. By March 1938, the cooperative served 34 members. The average bill was \$2.71 and average usage was 29.2 kWh per month.

On June 1938, the office relocated to the Arnold Plumbing Co. building in Albert Lea. On November 27, 1939, it relocated again, this time to the Northside State Bank building, Albert Lea. A two-man crew was established in Austin in mid-1941.

On April 10, 1941, the cooperative joined the Tri-State Power Cooperative as its generation and transmission source for wholesale power. Just days after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Tri-State and Wisconsin Power Cooperative merged to form Dairyland Power Cooperative. Member account number twenty thousand two hundred nineteen.

On April 1, 1942, the cooperative's 1,000<sup>th</sup> connected meter was in Freeborn County at the Lloyd Will farm near Myrtle. That same day in Mower County, the 877<sup>th</sup> meter was set at the Bert Godfredson farm near Adams.

In 1946, the cooperative occupied offices on the second floor of the Security State Bank in Albert Lea. Outreach throughout the 1940s and 1950s was important to grow the cooperative. Tent demonstrations familiarized farmers with expansion plans, as well as providing education about new electric home appliances and farm equipment. All office work was done by hand on paper ledgers.

In April 1952, the cooperative moved to a new office and warehouse facility on Hwy. 16, east of Albert Lea. This site was home to the growing cooperative until 2021 when operations moved to the new location on Bridge Avenue, Albert Lea.

