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Douglas Electric Cooperative, Inc., Has Done A Meritorious, Outstanding Job Of Electrifying Rural Douglas County

From a small beginning in September, 1938, as the West Douglas Electric Cooperative, the Douglas Electric Cooperative, Inc., is now supplying 3,154 electric consumers with low cost electrical energy—Today, the farmers are able to enjoy the same modern utilities as their urban neighbors.

By R. KENNETH EVANS

Electricity is a basic necessity in this electronic age. It ranks with water, land, and raw materials in importance among the foundations upon which the nation's economy is built. Modern living and modern industry, alike, are inconceivable without electricity. Out where crops are grown it is generally recognized that the electrification on most American farms has come from the impetus supplied by the public power movement and, the system of rural electric cooperatives, such as the Douglas Electric Cooperative, Inc., with the help of federal loans. Everything would come to a dead standstill if the flow of electric energy, which is taken for granted by the rank and file, should be interrupted.

A group of far-sighted farmers, in Douglas County, realized the advantages of electricity to the point where they joined together and formed the West Douglas Electric Cooperative, Inc., Sept. 2, 1938. H. C. Kelley was president with Wm. O. Sanderson, vice president, L. M. McCaffrey, secretary-treasurer and R. L. Richter, Fred Charles Wilson composed the board of directors. A loan was secured from the federal government for \$132,000 and a distribution system of 165 miles was constructed to serve electricity to the region composed of Lookingglass, Ton-mile, Reston, and Camas Valley. The system was energized by California-Oregon Power Co. from a sub-station located at Brockway. There were, originally 209 consumers consisting of farmers, rural stores, schools and Grange halls. This was the beginning of rural electrification in Douglas County.

Coming Into Electronic Age

American farm people, including those in Douglas county, were just coming into the electronic age. But, electricity has become a necessity to farmers, in spite of the fact that almost 800-thousand of them in the nation, still have to do without it. For instance, a Douglas county farmer or his hired man would have to work for 3 cents per hour to compete with electricity for pumping and hauling water. An electric milking machine doubles the size of the dairy herd that one man can take care of—at a cost of about a nickel per cow per month. A one-horsepower motor can do the same amount of work in one hour, at a cost of a few pennies, as a man can do with his muscles in a ten-hour day. Electricity for the farmer's wife is an even more obvious blessing. Consider the time, the energy, the spirit, that is saved by an electric washing machine, an electric range, or a hot water heater.

These facts were demonstrated when the West Douglas Electric Cooperative, Inc., was established and the distribution system energized back in 1938. It is a matter of record that 17 years ago, American agriculture did not have electricity. The advantages of rural electrification in Douglas County soon became known and, in 1941 the North Douglas Electric Cooperative, Inc., was organized to serve the region surrounding Umpqua, Tyee, Kellogg, Sutherlin, Oakland, and Yoncalla.

The following year, 1942 the two electric cooperatives were merged into the Douglas Electric Cooperative, Inc. and the California-Oregon Power company holding, comprising 410 miles of distribution system, was purchased. Additional power arrangements were made and purchased from this company through the sub-station at Oakland, to supply 1,131 consumers—in the majority farmers.

Quiet During The War

Very little development was experienced by the Douglas Electric Cooperative, Inc., during the war years due, in a measure, to the shortage of materials and the vital interests manifest in the preparedness programs and activities.

Following the cessation of hostilities plans again came to the fore for the expansion of rural electrification in Douglas County and the Pacific Northwest. The executives and directors of the Douglas Electric Cooperative, Inc., were fortunate to be able to avail themselves of the services of Harold Backen, Jr., as the manager with a valuable background in the field of electricity. Harold Backen Jr., came to Roseburg and took the management Oct. 1, 1946. For several years he had been employed by the Montana Power company.

To widen his education in the electrical field he enrolled in an electrical engineering course at the Montana State College, Bozeman. He was graduated as an electrical engineer in 1935, and, was employed as the junior engineer for the Anaconda Copper company mine at Great Falls, Mont. He was employed in that capacity for three years when he joined the corps of army engineers at Fort Peck Dam where he was employed until 1939, when he was made manager of the Flathead Electric Cooperative at Kalispell. He enlisted with the armed-forces in 1942 serving in the field of radar and electronics with the air-corp. Harold Backen Jr., did his bit and was discharged in 1946 with the grade of Major and, has retained his rating in the reserves. Energized by BPA in 1945.

During the year 1945 the Douglas Electric Cooperative distribution system was energized by Bonneville power, at Drain, through the Bonneville Power Administration. In 1946, after Mr. Backen took over the management, the system was increased by the addition of 415 miles of distribution lines, and serving 1,381 additional customers.

From that small beginning in 1938, this rural electrification cooperative has grown until, today, there are 775 miles of distribution lines in operation and 17 miles of transmission line from Cottage Grove to Drain. The sub-station near Oakland and the sub-station at Lookingglass are both owned by the Douglas Electric Cooperative and are both rated 2,000 KVA. Bonneville power is also taken from the Sub-Station serving the Drain and Reedsport region.

The 3,154 consumers that are supplied electrical energy by the Douglas Electric Cooperative, Inc., include 1,855 farms; 618 rural suburban residences; 234 town residences; 2 street and highway lighting; 105 irrigation systems; 216 small commercial and industrial institutions; 22 saw-mills and 2 unclassified services.

Valuation of the plant, less depreciation, is \$1,861,000. Total federal loans have been made to the Douglas Electric Cooperative amounting to \$2,450,000 of which \$2,131,000 embrace the total allocations that have been made. The balance of \$319,000 is held as reserve for new construction if and when it might be needed. There has been \$227,000 paid from earnings, on these loans and, \$64,000 has been paid in advance of the current date that the payments are due.

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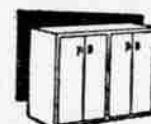
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