

Our 'Little' Co-op Magazine

Over the Years, Co-op Magazine Has Reflected the Times

How much do you know about this magazine Belfalls Electric Cooperative sends you each month? Here are some facts and a brief history of *Texas Co-op Power*, the "little" magazine with the largest circulation in the Lone Star State!

It costs your electric cooperative a whopping 34 cents to send you this issue of *Texas Co-op Power*. You can find your co-op's local news in the center pages of each edition, so always check those pages for important information!

Your magazine was originally a newspaper tabloid called *Texas Cooperative Electric Power* that began in July 1943. In 1945, the name was shortened to *Texas Co-op Power*.

Charles Curfman, who was manager of Farmers Electric Cooperative in 1944, had this to say about the fledgling publication in an article called "The Baby Is Born":

"The first issue of *Texas Cooperative Electric Power* marks a distinct milestone in the progress to completely electrify rural Texas.

"With the advent of this healthy and husky baby among Texas newspapers there will no longer exist that vacant, uncultivated space within the garden of printed and published facts.

"There are no facts which the REA cooperatives want hidden. There are no bugs under the cooperative chip. The co-ops want the full white spotlight of public knowledge turned upon them. They want the public fully informed of what they have done, what they are doing, and what they plan to do.

"There is a butcher, a baker, a banker and a groceryman in your town who has been wondering why, during the past few years, the farm has so suddenly become such a desirable place to live. Of course, rural electric power is the answer.

"You should see that a copy of your

publication gets into their hands that they may learn of this electric farm economy. With all city conveniences now available, plus the soul-cleansing atmosphere of the country, with elbow room, with a cow and chickens and a garden of their own, they may decide to move to a small farm while continuing their businesses."

From 1944 through 1949, *Texas Co-op Power* experienced considerable growth, expanding circulation from 30,000 to 125,000.

Many stories were written in those early issues detailing the shenanigans of a group called the National Tax Equality Association (NTEA), which spent millions of dollars in a public relations campaign to bash electric cooperatives. NTEA turned out to be financed by for-profit power companies who were a lot more interested in the threat of competition than they were in ideals.

Each early issue of *Texas Co-op Power* detailed the rapid expansion of cooperative lines, various struggles with power companies, and the variety of "new" uses for electricity on the farm and in the household. Refrigerated locker plants were a popular news item, too, as co-ops built the plants, many at co-op headquarters, for people to use for keeping food frozen, curing pork, and aging meat and game.

Throughout the 1950s, electric cooperatives continued to expand their service territories and won numerous political battles despite poor relations with then-President Eisenhower. In Texas, the biggest political battles were over territory, with investor-owned power companies seeking the exclusive right to serve the most attractive service areas. After losing a court battle in 1957, several hundred co-op members showed up at the Texas Capitol and helped co-ops pass a bill that restored

co-op rights to serve their areas.

In August 1956, President Eisenhower vetoed the Kerr bill, considered the most extreme anti-rural electrification action taken by the president, resulting in 40 percent rate hikes for some co-ops in the Southwest.

In the early '60s, *Texas Co-op Power's* circulation topped 200,000. During that same time, West Texas Utilities, Texas Power & Light Company, and Houston Lighting & Power Company launched public campaigns against electric cooperatives. *The Abilene Reporter-News* reported in 1963 that Cal Young, the president of West Texas Utilities, said the threat of electric cooperatives invading urban areas was so great that there would "be no investor-owned power companies within 10, 15 or 20 years."

By the late '70s, high electric rates and power supply were the publication's main issues. The rising cost of electricity—due mainly to higher fuel prices—drew a lot of attention. Inflation. Recession. Unemployment. High interest rates. Dependence on foreign oil. In the face of these ills in the nation's economy in the 1970s, rural electric leaders from throughout the U.S. equipped themselves to cope with these threats to the flow and cost of electricity to rural Americans.

In the 1980s, energy problems continued to be serious, the fuel supply was critical and affecting almost all prices, the crude oil supply was short, and synthetic fuels were being studied by the Carter administration. The REA was constantly in peril with the Republican administrations, and Congress was called on repeatedly to come to the aid of rural electric co-ops.

Electric cooperatives in Texas began moving to the lead in the search for alternative energy that might take the "bite" out of America's energy crunch. Two of the most discussed exotic energy forms—solar and geothermal—



This is the staff of the Texas Electric Cooperatives Communications Department that produces *Texas Co-op Power* magazine.

were the subjects of a two-year study sponsored by Texas co-ops to determine power generation potential.

“By 1990, electric cars will dominate America’s roads,” predicted Sen. James McClure of Idaho, who believed there would be 10,000 such vehicles in use by 1985. “That figure will be in the millions by the year 2000.”

In the 1990s, the supporters of the REA were saying, “Here we go again.” The first Bush administration renewed its attack on the REA and federal power program, trying to phase out the REA loan program. In 1993, President Clinton and Congress slashed the government’s cost to fund REA by 43 percent with an understanding that no

further significant cuts would be attempted for five years.

Beginning in February 1992, *Texas Co-op Power* changed to a magazine format, printed on better-grade paper. Walter Richter, who had been writing “Poor Richter’s Almanac” since April 1973, retired his column after 211 installments.

A nationwide survey by the Roper Organization showed rural Americans worry about the nation’s future but associate favorable characteristics with the countryside—a strong sense of family, friendliness, honesty and strong work ethic. The drawbacks included poorer health care, police protection, public transportation,

entertainment, and arts and cultural opportunities. Bill Lewis, retired editor of *Texas Co-op Power*, accepted the George W. Haggard Award for the best rural electrification publication in the nation in April 1993.

In 1996, Peg Champion took the reins of Texas Electric Cooperatives’ communications department and *Texas Co-op Power*. Under her leadership, the magazine’s circulation has grown to more than 1.2 million subscribers and has won more national awards than space here permits listing.

We hope you find the magazine one of the best “perks” you have as being a member of your electric cooperative. We think it is!

IN EMERGENCIES

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