

1930s – Humble Beginnings

Midwest Electric Cooperative is Born

On May 11, 1935, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 7037, establishing the Rural Electrification Administration, or R.E.A. In Fisher and Scurry Counties, most folks were wary of rural electrification, believing it was an unaffordable luxury that would never arrive. Members of the Hobbs School Board, led by Fisher County rancher Sterling Willingham, pursued REA loan funds to begin an electric cooperative. Aided by agriculture teacher Cleveland Littlepage, Willingham hosted two county-wide meetings to publicize the venture and ask for donations to help the cause for rural electrification. A total of \$13.11 was collected when Littlepage passed his hat.

Joe Fender, a young Fisher County attorney, worked with Littlepage toward securing a charter for the cooperative, with the understanding that he would not be paid unless the charter was granted. On September 23, 1938 in Austin, TX, Fender and Littlepage were granted the charter for Midwest Electric Cooperative, so named for its location the Midwest portion of Texas.

The first Board of Directors consisted of President Sterling Willingham of Hobbs, Vice-President Homer Aaron of Rotan, Secretary Louis Singley of Rotan, Treasurer O.O. Hollabaugh of Roby, Ernest Kiser of Sylvester, James Beavers of Camp Springs, and Julius Edwards of Rotan.

The first few months, a struggle to complete the loan application ensued. After the official incorporation in October 1938, each director was assigned an area in which he would visit the residents and try to sign them up as members, collecting a \$5.00 deposit – an amount which many families did not possess. The co-op began with 132 members and set out to build 43 miles of line in January 1939, upon receipt of \$137,000 in loan funds at 2% interest from the Rural Electrification Administration .

February 14, 1939, a building adjoining the First National Bank in Rotan was rented as the first Co-op office; until that time, the board met at Rotan City Hall. W.A. Jones was hired as Project Superintendent to oversee construction of the first lines, which began in July 1939 and was completed that same October. Once people realized rural electrification was a reality, membership numbers grew rapidly.

Stamford Electric Cooperative is Born

Adapted from Stamford Electric Cooperative, Inc.: The First Thirty-Seven Years by C.M. Lester

The “Original Five”: G.J. Smith, H.L. Osment, Hugo B. Haterius, W.H. Overton, and H.G. Andrews, Sr., began working without pay, toward the goal of bringing electricity to the rural areas around Stamford. Confronting all hindrances, the Articles of Incorporation of Stamford Electric Cooperative, Inc., were approved March 8, 1939, and the organization’s Charter was granted six days later. The first official board of directors meeting was held March 16, 1939. Board members were: Hugo B. Haterius - President, W.H. Overton – Vice President, G.J. Smith – Secretary/Treasurer, H.G. Andrews, Sr. – Attorney, and E.W. Carlson, Ed Newquist, E.E. Link, Arche Pardue, and Ted Willoughby.

The first office for the co-op was at the southeast corner of McHarg and Ferguson streets, a shared space which was offered rent-free by the Stamford Production Credit Association in the old Hardy Motor Company building, until it became feasible for the co-op to have its own office building.

In April 1939, H.L. Osment was hired as Project Superintendent for a salary of \$150.00, with car and travel expenses to not exceed \$50.00 per month. He would oversee construction of the “A Section,”

which was 136 miles of line that went north from Stamford almost halfway to Haskell, then to Paint Creek, Rockdale Community, New Hope, Swan's Chapel, just north of Anson, Hanna Community, just beyond Tuxedo, and to Sagerton. That July, Mrs. Cleo Hughes was hired as the cooperative's bookkeeper and stenographer for a salary of \$80 per month.

Also in July, the REA approved Stamford Electric Cooperative's \$158,000.00 loan application for the A Section at 2.69% interest on a 25 year term. Upon the loan approval, construction on the A Section progressed rapidly and on November 23, 1939, the line was energized. Between that date and December 31, 1939, 369 members were billed for an average of \$1.72 for an average use of 15 kWh.

In the latter months on 1939, Osment resigned and T.L. Evans was hired to take his place. Another employee, Walter P. Rogers, was hired as maintenance man for \$125.00 per month, and preparations for "B Section" were made. A half-ton Chevrolet pickup truck was purchased for \$580.00, and Miss Jean Russell was hired for \$2.00 per day. In December, the Board authorized Christmas decorations for the office... an expenditure that was not to exceed \$10.00.

Use Midwest & Stamford ec original logos, photos of each original office