



Mechanical auger bores into a northwestern Arkansas hillside as linemen prepare to install a new pole near Hogeeye. On such stonebound terrain, the Ozarks Electric Cooperative upgrades service for its 31,000 members along 4,810 miles of line.

When the Rural Electrification Administration was created 50 years ago, only one American farm in 10 had electricity. Now only one in 100 is without the power that revolutionized rural life.

Electrifying The Hills: A Half-Century Of Light

By KENNETH C. DANFORTH
National Geographic News Service

HOGEYE, ARK. — A water-filled ditch and a high bank lay between the road and the place where Jackie Pergeson had to put up an electric pole. He has to get his truck over there, somehow, or he and his crew would not be able to use its big auger to drill the hole, nor its long mechanical arm to wield the new pole into place.

Pergeson sought out a farm woman and asked if he could drive across her fields. She readily gave him permission.

"People usually cooperate," said Pergeson.

As well they might. Pergeson is a line foreman for the Ozarks Electric Cooperative, which is upgrading service to its 31,000 members in nine Arkansas and Oklahoma counties. The members own the co-op, so when they're helping its workmen they're helping themselves and their neighbors.

Darkness Fell Early

A lot of people around here still don't take electricity for granted. Fifty years ago, these rugged hills and much of rural America got dark when the sun went down. Only 10 percent of the nation's farms were electrified. There were no poles to "change out" around Hogeeye; there were no poles.

Then, in May 1935, President Roosevelt signed an executive order creating the Rural Electrification Administration, the first salvo in a revolution that brought electric power to rural America and Jackie Pergeson to Hogeeye.

Pergeson drove through the farmer's gate. To get to the new pole site, he had to circle the barn, a steep climb. The rocky terrain looked solid, but it had rained hard the day before, and the thin soil was like black grease beneath his tires. Their deep treads just spun around.

Without so much as an oath, Pergeson got down out of the truck, took a cable from a winch on the front bumper, and trudged 100 feet up the hillside with the cable over one shoulder. He fastened the cable around a white oak, then returned to his truck to winch it up to the tree. To get up the hill he had to use three separate trees, winching from one to the other.

And so, working their way north from Bug Scuffle, Pergeson and his crew inched toward Hogeeye changing out about eight poles a day. (Down in a

valley, where the rocks aren't such a problem, they can set 20 poles in a day.)

Until the REA was set up, farms, nonfarm country households, and rural businesses all toiled without the light or the machines that could have lifted them from a life remarkably similar to that of their pioneer forebears.

Rum Before Butter

Yet, electricity was an established and easily available necessity in cities. Little Rock got electric lights in 1883; five of the first nine customers were saloons.

Nationwide, in cities, bright lights and electric trolleys, washing machines, stoves, irons, vacuum cleaners, fans, and movies had been taken for granted for a generation and more. They lured young people away from the farms and helped to create two nations — urban consumers who could make wonders with the flick of a switch, and rural producers who fed everyone at the cost of a lifetime of beastlike drudgery.

The farmers wanted electricity. The stockholders-owned power companies would not give it to them because there was no profit in it. They could get more customers in a city block than in 100 square miles of farmland. Cows were milked in the darkness and the milk spoiled because there was no refrigeration. Women were stooped before they were 40 because they had to haul thousands of gallons of water from wells and springs.

Kitchens were infernos in the summer, when fruit and vegetables had to be canned just as they ripened; and someone had to cut the wood for the stove and empty the ash box. There was little escape from the boredom that settled in at nightfall; reading by a flickering kerosene wick is ruinous to the eyes.

The idea behind the REA was that country people, who were used to helping each other with construction, planting, and harvest, would be encouraged to band together in cooperatives to bring themselves the power that electric companies had denied them.

Today, Ozarks Electric Cooperative is one of more than 1,000 rural electric systems in the 46 states where the REA is active. Although the rural systems average fewer than five consumers per mile of line, their lines stretch across 70 percent of the country's landmass. The REA itself has no electricity to sell; its function is to lend money to independent local cooperatives at favorable rates.

Not everyone is pleased with the way the co-ops go about their business. Roy Reed, a Hogeeye cattle farmer, teacher, and writer, complains: "I'm still sore at that bunch. It took 'em three months to get electricity up from the road to my house. They wanted to cut right across my homestead without any regard for aesthetics. I wanted them to go a longer way where they'd have to cut down fewer trees. When they found out I wouldn't budge, they gave me a real good lettin'-alone."

Hill People Made Do

A few mountains away to the east, Mildred Gullede recalls that it was 1948—after World War II halted rural electrification—before she and her family got electricity. They lived, as they do now, in Davis Hollow. Mrs. Gullede was 8 then.

"There was already electricity running up the highway, but the people that lived off the road like we did had a harder time getting it. There was three families that lived in this holler, and we all had to sign up that we would take the electricity. Otherwise they wouldn't run it up here.

"Until then, well, we had what you had to have if you didn't have electricity. It was real exciting to see them setting those first poles and to know we were actually going to be modern. But the most exciting thing, I think, was the refrigerator, once we got the lights."

Summer Reading Is Slated

Registration is now underway for the Warren County Memorial Library Summer Reading Program.

"Imagine...Just Imagine" is the theme for this year's program, and children throughout the county are invited to join their friends in reading about anything that catches their imagination, according to Mary Louise Limer, librarian.

The program, which structures at-home reading for children, begins June 17 and concludes August 12.

Each participant will receive materials featuring symbols designed to stimulate the imagination, such as magic, fantasy, science fiction, humor, travel, animals and science.

Those completing the reading requirements of the statewide program will receive a certificate signed by Gov. James Martin, who has endorsed the program along with State Superintendent of Education Dr. Craig A. Phillips.

Dorothy Day of Greensboro Public Library has designed colorful program materials, including a reading record, poster, certificate, activity sheets and bookmarks featuring symbols from a child's imagination.

Prizes and free books will be given at the conclusion of the program in August, Mrs. Limer said.

Also featured again in this year's program is Storytime. Although the Summer Reading Program focuses on reading in the home, Storytime will take place in the library each Friday beginning July 12 and ending August 16.

Storytime for children who will be entering kindergarten this fall will be held from 10:30 to 11 a.m. A session from 11:15 a.m. to noon will be held for children in first grade and up.

"I want to encourage parents who are interested in enrolling their child in the program to stop by the library for full details of what will be offered," Mrs. Limer said. "Although the program is structured, especially for Storytime, we try to be flexible and to work with parents as best we can to enable their children to participate."

The Summer Reading Program is co-sponsored by the State Library, a division of the Department of Cultural Resources, and is funded through Title I of the Library Services and Construction Act.



Pictured are the recently installed officers of the Warren County unit of the North Carolina Association of Educational Office Personnel. Membership in this organization is open to all persons employed as office personnel in all the educational systems in North Carolina. The local officers are, left to right, president, Anne Mulchi; vice president, Brenda Bobbitt; secretary, Amy Myrick; and treasurer, Mildred Alston.

Shearin Completes Young Executives Course At UNC

Ray M. Shearin, Jr., corporate quality control manager at Harriet and Henderson Yarns, Inc. in Henderson, received the certificate of completion at the Young Executives Institute graduation exercises held Friday, May 17, at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Business Administration.

Fifty-two executives from North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Virginia, Ohio, Maryland and Alabama were awarded certificates by UNC Chancellor Christopher C. Fordham III. Dr. William Bigoness, associate professor and director of the Young Executives Institute, presided and Dr. John P. Evans, dean of the business school, presented the candidates.

The class is the 15th to graduate from the program, which was cited in Business Week as one of seven outstanding middle management courses in the country.



Wife: "You've been drinking beer. I can smell it on your breath."

Hubby: "No, I've been eating frogs' legs. What you smell is the hops."

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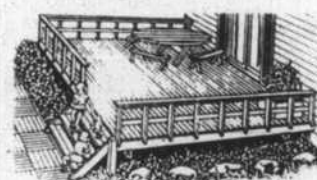
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Two From Here Given Degrees In Ceremonies

Two students from Warren County were among those receiving doctorate degrees from Duke University in Durham during recent commencement exercises.

Receiving the degree of medical doctor was John Lawton Capps of Arcola. He is the son of Mrs. Amos L. Capps.

The Rev. Jerry Clinton McCann, Jr. was awarded the doctor of philosophy degree. He and his wife, the Rev. Mrs. Nancy Rowland McCann pastor Presbyterian churches in Warrenton and Roanoke Rapids.



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