



# Connecting you to your Co-op

A Special Quarterly Newsletter for AEC Members for the Year 2015 • Winter Edition

## IN CELEBRATION of 75 years of **Service** To our members

Grainger • Hamblen • Jefferson • Sevier

*Although it improved life for everyone in rural East Tennessee, few people would have had a greater appreciation for the difference electric power made than the average homemaker. "Women's work" back in those days was never-ending—and often involved back-breaking labor. The days were long and the nights were dark for rural families. Most of these hardy folks lived in relative solitude, so far out in the country that many of them were quite isolated. The typical farm wife and mother back in the 1930s began her day's chores long before the sun came up...*



Greg Williams, AEC General Manager

As 2015 gets underway, everyone here at the Co-op is excited about the opportunity we have to commemorate a very special occasion: the 75th anniversary of our founding in 1940. As part of this recognition, we plan to engage with our members in new and meaningful ways—one of which is the publication of this newsletter. In this first issue, we take a look back at how women's lives were changed for the better as a result of the arrival of electricity. The spring edition will focus on how farming operations in our area were impacted by electricity. By looking back, we can all appreciate the difference electric power has made (and that it continues to make) all across our service area, every single day. And that's something worth celebrating.

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## The transformational power of electricity: Housework would never be the same

Upon rising, she lit a kerosene lamp in the cold, dark house. The circle of light it cast was small—only the equivalent of about 25 watts. She would have dressed hurriedly and made her way to the kitchen, where her first task would have been to build up the fire in the woodstove—a source of heat and the means by which she would cook a hot breakfast for her growing family. The cookstove was hard to start up and even harder to keep going. The damper that vented the firebox created only a small draft even on a breezy day; without a draft, the fire would often flicker out. Smoke blackened the walls and ceilings. The ash box had to be emptied twice a day and the stove could not be left unattended. While baking those biscuits for her family's breakfast, she had to keep a constant watch on the fire and even then the stove didn't keep an even temperature. Every time the heat began to decrease, she had to throw logs or corn cobs into the firebox.

Without electricity to power pumps, water had to be carried from a stream or lifted one bucket at a time from a well. With the men in the field, much of the hauling was done by women. After wrestling the heavy wooden lid off the well, she cranked a bucket (weighing around 30 pounds when full) upwards of 50 feet or more to the surface.



Plenty of "extra" water was required, of course, for wash day. No matter the weather, the wash was done outside. A huge kettle of boiling water was suspended over a roaring fire. She scrubbed the clothes by hand, using a washboard and a rough bar of lye soap, bending over a zinc tub. After wringing out each piece of clothing (lucky housewives had a hand-cranked roller

mechanism that helped with this process), she placed them in the big kettle of boiling water and stirred them with a wooden paddle. Using the same paddle to lift each

heavy wet piece of clothing out of the scalding water, she placed them into a second tub for rinsing—and sometimes a third tub for “bluing” and occasionally even a fourth for starching.

There were several rounds of clothing to be washed each time, always beginning with white shirts for church on Sunday and finishing with the grimmest overalls that had been worn all week in the field. The water had to be changed in between each round. After more hauling buckets, more boiling, scrubbing, wringing, stirring, lifting, and rinsing, she hung each piece on the line with hands that were raw and swollen by this time—and had to hope it didn't rain before they were dry.

Besides cooking and laundry (and caring for the children), she had to conserve enough strength and stamina to handle many more types of household work—none of which could be neglected simply because she was “too tired” after taking care of all her other chores.

From home canning on a sweltering summer day to preserving food by salting and drying, is it any wonder that she longed for the day when electricity would be available? Her husband showed up at the meetings demonstrating support for the idea, and in late spring of 1940, Appalachian Electric Cooperative was officially incorporated. Not long afterward, the first poles were set, the power lines were run, and the services were connected. When the lights finally came on out in the country, life forever changed for these hardy farm women.

It didn't happen overnight, of course. Not surprisingly, it took a while for most families to save up for the purchase of a major appliance. But they scrimped and “did without” and the day eventually came when there were more than just bare light bulbs in the farmhouse.



New electric appliances revolutionized life for housewives throughout communities in rural East Tennessee. This image from AEC's archives shows an oven temperature check at the B.A. Creech, Jr. home in Rutledge. The Co-op helped women in our area learn how to operate these new-fangled pieces of equipment, hosting “home demonstration” club gatherings in the ultra-modern kitchen at AEC's headquarters building in downtown Jefferson City.

A stove and an oven that got hot with the push of a button—and *stayed* hot. A well pump that meant running water—no more hauling buckets. A refrigerator instead of a block of ice covered with burlap sacks down at the spring house. A washing machine that replaced the roaring fire and the hand-scrubbing.

Membership in the Co-op (and the electric service that came with it) meant a reprieve from the daily reality of unceasing and often back-breaking labor. With the advanced electronic technology of today's digital kitchens (everything from coffee-pots that brew according to a pre-set timer to “smart” refrigerators), it's hard for us to conceive of what a dramatic difference the availability of electricity actually made for these women.

Because Appalachian Electric Cooperative came to the country—where they grew up and married and bore children and worked and cared for their families—their lives were made easier and better. Almost, you might say, with the flip of a switch.

## Co-op time capsule: the evolution of metering

AEC Meter Shop Supervisor John Turner, left, holds a vintage electro-mechanical meter (the kind with dials and a spinning disk) that was installed on our electric system back in the early 1940s, while Meterman Jesse Cline is shown with one of the technologically advanced digital meters in use today throughout our service area. The Co-op's Automated Metering Infrastructure uses radio frequencies to electronically communicate kWh use to AEC headquarters. This technology also provides outage information, thus enabling faster power restoration response times.



**What's new  
at the Co-op**  
and how you can be a part of it

Now available



Residential members are invited to participate in the Co-op's new eScore program, designed to make energy efficiency more affordable.

Visit [www.aecoop.org](http://www.aecoop.org) to get started!

**February**



“Love my heat pump!” promotion.

Active members may register by email or in our offices each week of the month for a chance to win \$75.

**March**

Residential members receive a special incentive of an extra \$75 with the installation of a Marathon water heater through our eScore program.

Free do-it-yourself weatherization workshop held at Lowe's in Jefferson City.

Learn/practice how to caulk and seal air leaks in your home.

Take home a free kit with project supplies.

**Coming up in April**



Electronics collection/recycling  
Earth Hour event  
Green Power promotion

Watch for dates and more details in the Spring issue of the newsletter.

**Here soon**

Co-op FlexPay is headed your way! This new payment option allows you to manage your energy budget “as you go.”

Call us at 865.475.2032, ext. 1880 for more information about any of these programs or events