

Eighty years ago in the 1940s, while most of the world was caught in the thick of World War II, the well-loved cartoon Tom and Jerry made its debut, the first of many McDonald's fast-food restaurants opened in California, and radiocarbon dating was discovered at University of California Berkeley, signifying a major stride in scientific development. The forties marked a turning point in history, not only for war, pop culture, quick-bite franchises, and science, but for the developing world of electricity. Alongside these urban, mainstream advances was the creation of electric cooperatives that signified a new era of progression and development within rural America.

Following the much-anticipated end to the Great Depression that depleted America of both its funds and spirit, newly elected President Franklin D. Roosevelt sought to reinvigorate the people and pocketbooks of America with the project of electrification. In May of 1935, President Roosevelt signed an executive order creating the Rural Electrification Administration (REA), which would bring the first electric cooperatives to rural areas (BCEC). In the 1930s and 40s, 90% of urban areas had electricity while rural America was falling behind at 10%. Moreover, only one in ten farms had electricity, stunting both agricultural and cultural progression (Roosevelt Institute). This new initiative allowed rural community members to open locally-owned, not-for-profit cooperatives that would supply electricity to its members with the use of federal funding. The benefits of electric cooperatives included an improved quality of life for rural community members, the usage of modern appliances and technology, and the expansion of economic opportunities such as job creation and sponsored community initiatives.

Electric cooperatives were designed to be democratic in nature and community-focused, which they remain to this day.

Fast-forwarding to the year 2020, now over 900 electric cooperatives serve millions of Americans nation-wide (NRECA). Eighty years prior, if viewed on a map, the only electrical occurrences were peppered among larger cities. Today, America is a beaming light of easily accessible electricity because of the efficiency of electric cooperatives. Over this eighty-year time period, the electricity industry has grown exponentially, servicing over 19 million companies, schools, and homes; it is no secret that our population has become dependent on the services of electric cooperatives (NRECA). In addition, the agricultural industry has changed significantly since the 1940s, with a large portion of cultivation, marketing, and the production of animal and food products relying heavily on industrialized machinery and serviced power from cooperatives. Likewise, rural homes, businesses, schools, and even community centers have benefited from the expansion of electricity over time as well as the economic support that cooperatives have supplied.

Electricity has become imperative in the daily lives of many across the nation, whereas it only impacted a select few eighty years ago. If you take a good look at the progression of industries within small-town America, it becomes obvious how imperative electric cooperative services are in the bigger picture. The backbone of America is the workers, the agriculturists, the small business owners, and of course, the cooperatives that power it all.

## Sources

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