

Buffalo Tales

May/June 2015

Let there be Light: Rural Electrification in Buffalo County, NE (part II) By Janice Martin

As to the cost to each farm, the minimum electric rate was \$3.50 a month. This was an era of turning on lights only when someone was in that room and consideration for the kilowatts used by each added appliance. Many (most) farm families watched the meter carefully to try to stay within the 40 kilowatt hours for the minimum payment. Beyond the minimum rate, the rate was another 1.5 cents per kwh. There was a table of rates for certain larger usages, such as an electric stove, an irrigation well, etc. The first section of lines in Buffalo County was energized in December of 1938.

In 1939 Charles A. Palmer, followed Frank H. Wheeler as project superintendent in the Kearney office, then Virgil Triplett, and presently Garland Snow. The Kearney office was located at 617 E 25th Street until moving to a new location at the corner of 78th Road and Highway 10 in 1994.

Not all of Buffalo County received electricity at the end of 1938. The second contract was signed on November 9, 1928 for \$130,000 for construction of 60.5 miles of line to 32 customers. Bids were let on April 11, 1939. Another 70 miles of line was contracted in May, 1941, which was [for] the northwest part of the county. Some rural Buffalo County residents did not have electricity until 1945, or even 1950. Even after the lines were built, each farmer/owner had to decide whether or not to connect to the electric line. Also, the advent of WWII greatly limited the availability of many essentials and delayed progress in a number of areas of life.

The possibility of irrigation of crops was a prime mover of

CERTIFICATE OF ELECTION

STATE OF NEBRASKA

THIS IS TO CERTIFY

that at a General Election held on Tuesday, the 5th day of November, A. D. 1938, in the County of Buffalo State of Nebraska.

Earl Hammons

CERTIFICATE OF ELECTION

STATE OF NEBRASKA

THIS IS TO CERTIFY

that at a General Election held on Tuesday, the 2nd day of November, A. D. 1941, in the County of Buffalo State of Nebraska.

Earl Hammons, Gibbon, Nebr.

received the highest number of votes and was duly elected to the office of

Director, Buffalo County Public Power Dist.

and this Certificate is issued in compliance with Section 32-931 of the Compiled Statutes of the State of Nebraska, which provides that the County Clerk shall issue a certificate of election to each person having the highest number of votes for the several county, precinct and township officers, and members of the legislature.

In Testimony Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the seal of the said County this 12 day of November, A. D. 1941

Janice Martin
County Clerk

the enthusiasm of electricity coming to Buffalo County. For the final hook-up of the Buffalo County District's eastern line, 51 farmsteads and 50 irrigations pumps were being served and a potential for 31 more farmsteads and 25 wells in this area.

The McConnel Brothers' well was the first electric well for irrigation in Buffalo County, on March 16, 1939. On July 30, 1940, the 100th pump was installed on the Warren Reynolds farm. By 1941, there were 165 irrigation wells in service and 49 installations or contracts awaiting service in Sharon Township and in the Wood River valley from Kearney to Miller.

The Buffalo County board remained until it merged with Dawson County in 1941. At the time of the merger, the officers and directors of the Buffalo County district were: Earl W. Snyder, president, Harry E. Oliver, vice-

president, Cecil Wolford, treasurer, Justice Johnson, secretary, Earl Hammans, Alvah G. Zimmerman, and Clarence Sheen, directors. Other known Buffalo County REA

Board Memebers before the merger were: Mark McConnell, Colonel Arbuckle, and (possibly) Carly Berg. After the merger, no Buffalo County representatives were on the board. In 1946, the Buffalo County PPD board and others started action to either get the old district back, or have



Earl Hammans, 50 years later, at location of first REA pole

equal representation on the board with Dawson County PPD. After a long-sought battle, Buffalo County PPD gained equal representation on the Dawson County PPB board in April, 1952.

By the early 1950s, most of the farms in Buffalo County had electricity. The northwest portion of the county was the last to receive REA service. The sub-

station at Miller served the remaining portions of Satoria, Armada, Scott, and Harrison townships and the lines westward into Dawson County.

Dawson County PPD paid off its original loans in 1973. The combined district's name did not

change until 2007 when the word "County" was removed. Today, Dawson PPD has 5,470 miles of line and serves 22,145 electric meters. Its territory includes all of the rural areas in Dawson and Buffalo counties and parts of

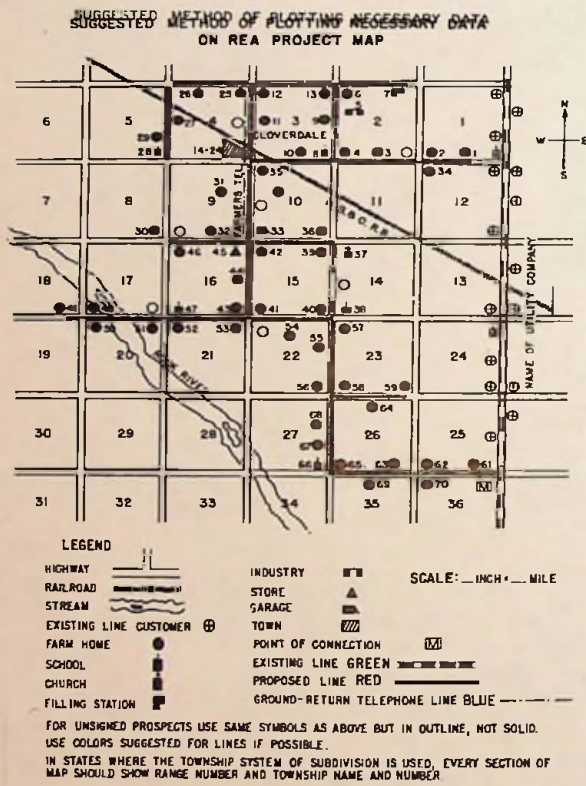


1942 Board of Directors
Carl Berg, unknown, Mark McConnell, Earl Hammans

Gosper, Lincoln, Custer, Sherman, and Frontier Counties and serves several villages.

After 1952, Buffalo County board members serving on the Dawson County Public Power District or Dawson Public Power District were: Milton Webb, Lester Gross, Dale Stubblefield, Brian DeBrie, John Ludden, Dan Dwiggins, Don Mulbach, Bob Stubblefield and Dan Mercer. The latest elected Buffalo County board members were: Don Mulbach, Brad Brodine, Dave Dwiggins, and Craig Wietjes.

What invention had the most impact during your lifetime? Many rural people in Buffalo County would respond that bringing electricity to their homes and farms was the invention which most changed their lives.



References:

- Original Minutes of the temporary committee by Earl Hammans, secretary Letters, forms, photos, and notes from Earl Hammans collection
- “Rural Electrification” By Alice Howell, Buffalo Tales April 1990
- Kearney Hub, February 22-23, 2003
- Gibbon Reporter, June 2, 1938
- Rural Electric Nebraska, April 1985, October 1989, June 1992, and October 2013
- Dawson Public Power office, Lexington, NE

Explore the Holocaust



Explore the history of the Holocaust in an all-inclusive 11-day study abroad trip to Germany, Poland, and the Czech Republic departing in May 2016. Course credit and financial assistance available for students. All ages and the general public welcome as well.

For more information, contact Ross Huxoll, Dept. of History, huxollrd@unk.edu (Picture and ad submitted by the UNK History Department)

2015 Calendar of Events

Sunday, June 7: 8th Annual 1/2 Marathon: Buffalo County Stampede-registration is at 6 am-race begins at 7am

Saturday & Sunday, June 13 & 14 9-5 each day: Prairie Blacksmith Association Free Hammer-In held at the Trails & Rails Museum's new J.C. Marlatt blacksmith shop. This event is free and open to the public.

June 17-21: Chautauqua-community wide event hosted by the Frank House and sponsored by Humanities Nebraska

Saturday, June 20 from 10-1 pm: 30th Annual Wagons West Celebration-Live music, delicious food, exhibitors, demonstrators, archive researchers, kids' games, and contests (including, back by popular demand---the BEARD contest). FREE admission/donations are appreciated.

Friday, June 26 and Saturday, 27 at 7:30 pm each night & Sunday 28 at 2 pm: BCHS is sponsoring a FREE movie at the World Theatre to help them celebrate their 3rd birthday. Join us to see the original "The Muppet Movie" from 1979!

Friday, July 10 at 7 pm and Saturday, July 11 at 2 pm: "Wash your Troubles Away" melodrama by the Academy of Children's Theatre Alumni group. This event is at the Trails & Rails Museum and is free and open to the public. Free will donations are appreciated.

All of November: Christmas Decorating (during regular business hours)

First two weekends in Dec. (Dec.5/6 and Dec. 12/13) from 1-5 pm: Open to the public: 28th Annual Christmas Tree Walk *** **Saturday, December 5 from 12-1pm: Members Only Preview of the 28th Annual Christmas Tree Walk***** check out dozens of trees decorated by area not-for-profits that tie their mission into this year's theme. **Santa's Workshop.**

Education notes:

Trails & Rails Museum **closed** April 28 through May 9 for Kearney Public Schools.

Listen to Mardi Anderson on KGFW 1340 AM at 9 am on the last Friday of each month for a fabulous story about Buffalo County!

Fabulous Fridays are held on the 2nd Friday monthly at 2 pm. Locations vary, so check the web site.

January: Place Names in Buffalo County

February: The Dust Bowl Days

March: The Art of Weaving

April: National Sod House Society

May: On the Road to _____

June: Chautauqua

July: Teas from Native Plants

August: Tea Party

September: 100 Years of 4-H

October: History of Canning Jars

November: History of WWI Poppies

December: Sing along with Jim Cudaback

Volunteers, chairpersons, and sponsors are still needed. Please contact the office for more information on supporting your Buffalo County Historical Society!

PO Box 523, 710 W. 11th St., Kearney, NE 68848

(308) 234-3041 www.bchs.us bchs.us@hotmail.com

We hope you enjoy these stories about Buffalo County. We would love to have a stock pile of Buffalo Tales ready so they can go out in a more timely manner. Please submit your memories and stories to us by e-mailing them to bchs.buffalotales@hotmail.com or sending them to the post office box: BCHS, PO Box 523, Kearney, NE 68848.

We appreciate your support!

Director's Report

This June has been one of the busiest months at Trails & Rails Museum in recent memory. My staff and I have been very busy preparing for events like the Buffalo Stampede 1/2 Marathon and 5K, Prairie Blacksmith Association Free Hammer, Humanities Nebraska Chautauqua, Wagons West Celebration, in addition to our regular day-to-day duties at the Museum. My staff and I greatly appreciate all of the wonderful volunteers who have helped us organize and put on these great events!

Be our friend on Facebook: "BuffaloCountyHistoricalSociety"

BCHS Gold Engineers

Frank Cepel	Janice & Bill Martin
Ron Eckloff	Sharon & John Martin
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A Huge Thanks to our Silver and Gold Engineers

for their support of the BCHS/Trails & Rails Museum

(Contact Trails & Rails Museum for more information on becoming an Engineer)

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Katherine Wielechowski, Editor

2014 Annual dues, payable January 1, are:

Student.....	\$10.00
Individual.....	\$35.00
Family.....	\$40.00
Institutional Membership.....	\$50.00
Supporting Membership.....	\$75.00

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Term expiring June 1, 2016: Dr. Roger Davis, Lance Hehner, Matt O'Callaghan, Jan Rodehorst

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Secretary.....	Corene Phillips
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Trails & Rails Museum



Buffalo County Historical Society

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