

The Iola Historical Society's Window

Quarterly Member and Activities Newsletter



Volume Five

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Summer 2012

Louie Myers' First Farm Electrified by CWEC

The year 2012 marks the 75th anniversary of the founding of rural electrification in the Iola area. On April 30, 1937, the five principals who emerged from various organizational meetings and discussions in the area signed the articles of incorporation creating the Waupaca Electric Cooperative, which was to be headquartered in Iola. The signers were Peter M. Johnson, Ed A. Leer, William Selmer, and Erick Solberg – all of rural Iola – and K.M. Sannes of rural Scandinavia.

The Waupaca Electric Cooperative merged with the Marathon-Portage Electric Cooperative in 1948, creating the Central Wisconsin Electric Cooperative. The CWEC continued to be based in Iola until early 2011,

when it moved to its new headquarters in rural Rosholt.

Rural electrification efforts took root in 1935 when President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed an executive order creating the Rural Electrification Administration. The REA became a permanent government agency by act of Congress the

by Arlyn G. Sieber

following year and also received authorization to issue low-interest loans for funding rural electrification projects.

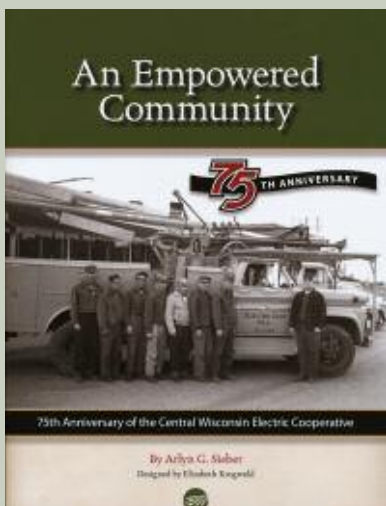
At first, it was thought that existing, private utilities would take advantage of the low-interest REA loans and bring their lines to rural areas. But the private companies showed little interest in serving the

widely scattered population. So rural residents turned to a backbone of their economic existence: cooperatives. Despite skepticism and outright ridicule from some, rural electric cooperatives took root in many parts of the nation, and the cooperative became a major means of delivering electricity to rural residents.

European immigrants brought the concept of cooperatives with them to this country. Its most notable early form in the United States was the National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry, established in 1867. "The Grange" allowed farmers to purchase equipment and supplies cooperatively, and was particularly strong in the Upper Midwest. Aided by favorable state legislation, Wisconsin saw a boom in the formation of cooperatives in the early 1900s. By 1930, it was estimated, there were 2,100 local cooperatives in the state, including cheese factories, creameries, and livestock shipping organizations.

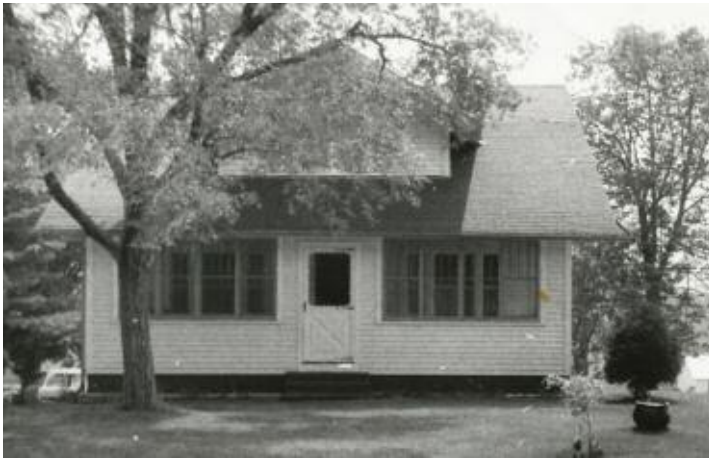
In September 1938, the Waupaca Electric Cooperative was approved for a \$151,000 REA loan at 2.73-percent interest for the construction of 143 miles of lines to serve 409 members. With funds now available, the cooperative needed a full-time superintendent to oversee construction work. The board of directors chose Louis R. Rasmussen, a native of Waupaca who had resided in Iola

New Book Captures Cooperative Philosophy And History of CWEC



The Central Wisconsin Electric Cooperative has marked the celebration of this year's 75th anniversary with the publication of a 160 page documentation of its' service philosophy and history of service to the rural areas and communities largely concentrated north and west of Iola. Iola resident and freelance writer Arlyn G. Sieber was commissioned to author the work, which was released in conjunction with the cooperative's annual meeting held this past spring in Rosholt. A limited quantity of the volume has been made available to the Iola Historical Society for offering to the organization's members and friends upon remittance of \$25 donations, with all proceeds going to benefit its' historical preservation projects. Requests with remittance should be directed to the IHS at P. O. Box 412, Iola, WI 54945.

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While the barn on the Louie Myers farmstead is long since gone, having been destroyed by fire, the house remains occupied, with the view of the front exterior having changed little over the years from its electrification in 1939. Occupied until 1977 by Donald and Anita Faldet (left), who lived there for 20 years after purchasing it from the late Ray B. Wright, it is today owned by Eric Tautges (right). Originally fronting on County Hwy. G just north of the Tresness Road intersection, while the structure has not been moved, today the address is E2140 Lake Road.

CWEC 75TH ANNIVERSRY ***Continued from page 1***

for the past 13 years. He came to Iola as a local manager for Wisconsin Power & Light after that company purchased his privately owned utility that served the village of Scandinavia. He later worked as a wiring contractor.

An office was also needed. In December 1938, the board agreed to lease, with an option to purchase later, the former Olson Motor Sales building on South Main Street in Iola. The cooperative hired another full-time employee in April 1939. Ruth Olson, who later became Ruth Buchholz, was hired as a bookkeeper and stenographer.

In early April 1939, the cooperative received final approval from the REA to begin construction. Brush was cleared from the right-of-ways, and excitement built over the large shipments of materials that would arrive in the village on the Iola & Northern Railroad. In all, there would be 37 carloads of cedar poles arriving from the Pensacola Creosoting Company, 342 miles of wire from the Copperweld Steel Company, and 298 transformers from the Wagner Electrical Company.

In early May, the first shipment of 444 poles arrived on three train cars. About three weeks later, the “dirt started to fly,” according to the

Iola Herald. A crew of 17 men began digging holes by hand and setting poles with the help of a winch truck on May 25, 1939. Their initial work was on 4.5 miles of lines north of the village of Iola along State Highway 49 and county highways J and G. The first pole was part of a 25-pole run to the Louie Myers farm on J. Work also began on a substation located north of the village of Iola.

Amid the work, the Waupaca Electric Cooperative held its first annual meeting at 1 p.m. Wednesday, June 7, 1939, in the Iola High School gym. Attending were the cooperative’s 12 charter members, but only about half of the pending applicants for membership attended because of a rainstorm that afternoon.

By early August 1939, at least half of the distribution lines had been strung and much of the transmission lines were completed, the Iola Herald reported. The energizing of lines and delivery of electricity – finally – were not far away. But before that could happen, there was one more piece of administrative business to take care of.

At this point, the cooperative’s membership still numbered only 12. With the energizing of lines now imminent, it was time to accept those who had applied – some as long as two years earlier – into membership. Electricity could not be delivered to them unless they were

members.

The board of directors met on the evening of August 21, 1939, at the cooperative’s office on South Main Street in Iola to consider the pending applications. This resulted in a late night of work for the board, but at meeting’s end, 147 applicants had been added to the cooperative’s membership rolls.

Over the next six weeks, construction and testing of the system were completed. It took four days to install the meters at the first farms to get service. After a year of anticipating that rural electrification in northern Waupaca County was just around the corner, the big day finally came on Tuesday, October 3, 1939. The first meter to be pushed into the socket was on the first line of poles to be set – the Louie Myers farm, about a mile and a half north-east of the village of Iola. The Iola Herald reported that 83 of the 139 miles of lines constructed so far were energized on that day, and lights started coming on in the homes and barns of rural Waupaca County.

In The Window

Standing beside the Waupaca Electric Cooperative’s first vehicle, a 1938 Plymouth pick-up, is first operating superintendent Louis Rasmussen.



Another **STRAWBERRY** Sunday

The Iola Historical Society extends its deep appreciation to the many individuals, businesses and organizations that provided volunteer and material contributions towards the success of the 28th annual Iola Strawberry Fest. Our particular thanks go out to all our community friends and neighbors who attended the fundraiser and those who supported the raffle drawing.

We deeply appreciate the contribution of Caroline Adams in handcrafting the "Field of Daisies" summer quilt grand prize offered in the raffle drawing. Other drawing prizes were donated by the following businesses and organizations; BP/Mortenson Oil Company, Community Insurance Associates, Crystal Cafe, First National Bank, Iola IGA Foodliner, Iola Old Car Show, JD's Corner Bar, The Millstone, Jo Jo's Little Norway, Premiere Community Bank, 44th Annual Scandinavia Corn Roast, Silver Lake Lanes, Soul to Sole, State Farm Insurance/Dan Tap, and Sweet Medicine Prescriptions Plus.

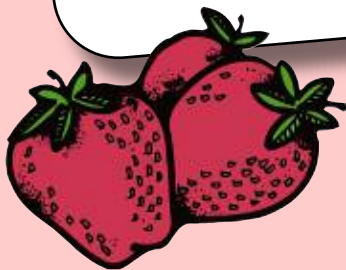
We are also indebted to those individuals who gave of their time to share their Lost Arts and crafts talents with attendees; Kay Holz, old time music; Gerald Johnson, rag rug weaving; Linda Kasten, rosmaling; Pat Kirchner, gemstone jewelry; Claire Nordness, spinning yarn; Donna Rierson, crafting; Caroline Adams, Mary Bowman, Barbara Ische and Joanna Rheingans, quilting.

We are likewise highly appreciative of member Joel Edler and those individuals who gave of their time to share their knowledge of antique and collectible items with attendees in the Appraisal Fair area of the event; Colin R. Bruce II, George Cuhaj, Brent Frankenhoff, Kurt R. Krueger, Robert Lemke, Thomas Michael, Maggie Thompson and Eugene Voie.

The generosity of member Robert Stanstad in sponsoring the Strawberry Shortcake serving tent is greatly appreciated. We are likewise particularly appreciative of the volunteer hours contributed by the hard working member crew who worked under the tent; Kathy Bestul, Martha Cook, Lola May Dalland, Anita Faldet, Betty Finch, Sue Halverson, Donna Hooker, Phyllis Morris and Sharon Peterson.

And, to the other members and friends who assisted in ways big and small, with the planning, setup, hosting or closedown activities, which the acting president failed to make note of, so rather than risking overlooking anyone, we'll just close by expressing a big

Thanks To Everyone Involved



President's Corner

With another half year consigned to history where the Iola Historical Society is concerned, I'd like to take a look back at what we've accomplished, over the first six months of 2012. While our organization has, by most measures, accomplished much thus far in this year and in our history, our opportunities and challenges are virtually limitless.

We started out the year by setting forth on the development of a formalized organizational structure intended to better facilitate the spreading of membership responsibilities and involvement. With the leadership of vice-president Bob Stamstad, this initiative has advanced significantly, although much remains to be achieved. While the IHS boasts a dedicated cadre of volunteers, we need more individuals to fill gaps and lighten the loads for those presently engaged.

The membership has also debated and embraced a new formalized collections and archival development policy to guide our ongoing practices in building, enhancing and maintaining our historical archives and displays in keeping with an objective of collecting, preserving and exhibiting materials relating to the history of Iola and the surrounding townships and communities. These objectives need to be pursued on a controlled basis, as like most historical societies we have neither the resources or the physical space to preserve every historical artifact or

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Officers

Clifford Mishler, Acting President
Robert Stamstad, Vice-President
Tom Fucik, Treasurer
Board of Directors
Greg Loescher, Stella Strand,
Doug Watson
e-mail address:
iolahistoricalociety@tds.net
Phone: (715) 445-IOLA (4652)

record that might become available.

In April we presented our first Spaghetti Luncheon fundraiser, a modestly successful event which we plan to emulate in the future, with a participation turnout of our friends, neighbors and members that numbered somewhat more than 100. The proceeds from this fundraiser were in excess of \$400 and earmarked for the historic 1894 Iola & Northern Depot restoration project which got underway last fall. We have member Sharon Peterson and her cooking crew to thank for this contribution to our financial coffers.

The last Sunday of June found uncounted hands on board conducting the 28th annual Iola Strawberry Fest & Antique Appraisal Fair, an undertaking that captured the interest of perhaps 400 or so, with a really vibrant crowd from around noon-time until about two o'clock. It was undoubtedly a record turnout, one that contributed nearly \$3,000 to our financial underpinnings. Enumerated elsewhere in this issue are the participants in the main teams that made it an enjoyable event for our visitors.

In May the Society had hosted the Waupaca County Historical Think Tank, an informal gathering focused on building a greater level of interaction and visitorship between

the historical units of Waupaca County. Inaugurated by the IHS in 2009, this is the third or fourth time these informal assemblies have been hosted in Iola. Board member Doug Watson has marshalled the development of these occasional events and associated communications, which are slowly taking hold with those kindred organizations.

Events Schedule

Saturday, July 21

1:00 pm Indian Artifacts Program

Saturday, July 28

9:00 am Host IHS Hilltoppers
Reunion

10:00 am Booth at Reunion

Monday, July 30

6:00 pm IHS Board Meeting
6:30 pm IHS General Meeting

Saturday, August 11

12:00 noon to 3:00 pm
Scandinavia was a Railroad Hub

Saturday, August 25

IHS Closes for Season

Monday, August 27

6:00 pm IHS Board Meeting
6:30 pm IHS General Meeting

Monday, September 24

6:00 pm IHS Board Meeting
6:30 pm IHS General Meeting

Saturday, October 6

Taste of Norway & Lost Arts Fair

Donors & Loaners

April • May • June

ARCHIVAL DONATIONS: Dorothy & Donald Berg, Joel Edler, Irene Garbe, Dr. N J. Hollero, Rural Women's Club of Iola (historical archive), Stella Strand, Phil Wemmer.

DONATIONS FOR CASH AND IN-KIND: Caroline Adams, Lee & Joan Bestul, Central Wisconsin Electric Cooperative, Betty Finch, Trey Foerster, James Forseth, Joanne Hansen, Chester L. Krause, Lashua Excavating, Dr. James Maus Family, Joan Paulson, Estate of Harold & Nola Peterson, Susan Pilewski, Premier Community Bank, [Correction from Spring 2012; IMO Ella (Mrs. Harry) Rowe by Helene Furst], David & Ruth Strand, IMO Robert Strand for Depot Restoration by Scott & Sheila Olson, Estate of David A. Wesley by Charles Thompson.

2012 Supporting Members

The Iola Historical Society wishes to extend special recognition and thanks to the following individuals and organizations for the extra financial support provided to our activities through their status as 2012 Supporting Members: Mary Bennet, Scott & Kari Bestul, Bob & Bev Ellingson, DeRonda & Patricia Engebretson, Leonard & Irene Haroldson, Iola & Rural Fire Fighting Service, Lee and Ruth Johnson, Duane & Darlene Louison, Thomas Martin, Phyllis Morris, Joan & Richard Niemiec, Robert Roels, Susan Shambeau, David & Ruth Strand, Roger Voie, Willard & Jacqueline Wilker.