

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative celebrates its 80th anniversary in 2019. Throughout the year, we will look back at our history — and ahead to our future — in this magazine, on our social media, on our website, at the co-op's Annual Meeting, in our Member Service Centers and in other ways. Keep an eye out for contests and requests for memories. Want to share a story about Bluebonnet, or electricity, back in the early days? Email us at lisa.ogle@bluebonnet.coop or call 512-925-5621.

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's 80th anniversary celebration starts with a look back at Central Texas in 1939

By Clayton Stromberger and Denise Gamino

If you were born at least fourscore and seven or so years ago, and grew up in these parts, you may remember what it was like in 1939.

No one was in a huge rush back then. The highway speed limit was 45 mph — lower for trucks. More than half the state was rural. Kids in the country rode a horse to confirmation class. Air conditioning meant opening a window or sitting on the front porch with a hand-held fan from church. Screen time was for when the mosquitoes came back.

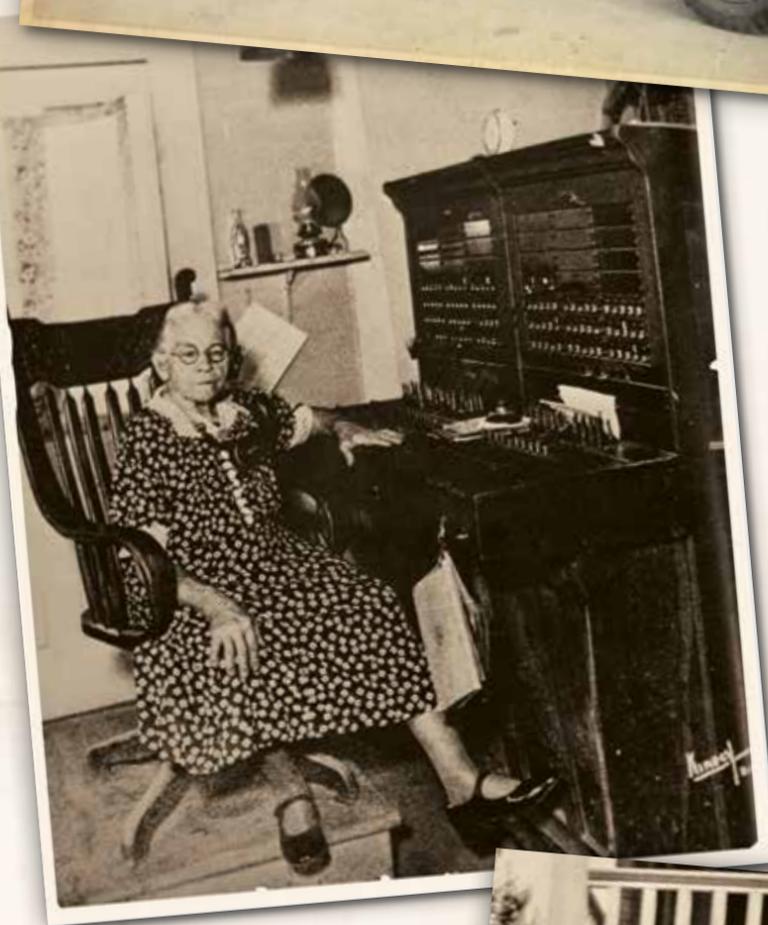
To communicate with faraway friends and family, you wrote long letters by hand and carefully saved the letters you received. To make a telephone call, you usually had to go through a switchboard operator — someone like German-born Selma “Grandma” Schwartz in Burton, who'd been on the job 29 years in her big wooden swivel chair and kept all the party lines straight with constant plugging and unplugging of cords and jacks. Folks read the local weekly news-

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John Crawford, born a slave on a Manor cotton plantation in Travis County, is immortalized in a book of more than 2,300 first-person slave narratives collected by a New Deal program and given to the Library of Congress in 1939. The oral histories of Crawford and other freed slaves reflect the dialect of that era. “Nobody ever larnt me my ABC's and I didn't git no chance at school,” Crawford told the Federal Writers' Project in the late 1930s at age 81. He remembered being freed and said plantation owner Judge Thompson Rector Sr. was too emotional to speak to the gathered slaves because he “hated to lose his slaves, I reckon.” According to Crawford, Rector's son-in-law said, “You folks am now free and can go where you wants to go.” Only two slave families stayed. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress



Bluebonnet line workers in the 1940s take a break from their hazardous and backbreaking work in Giddings, original home to the co-op's headquarters. From left, William Proske, Walter Urban and Winslow Zwerneman. Bluebonnet photo



Selma “Grandma” Schwartz was an answering machine. In 1910, the same year this German-born mother of seven was widowed, she became the first telephone operator in Burton, running this communications command center. She worked the Burton Telephone Co.'s manual switchboard until 1940. Schwartz worked from a wooden swivel chair in a little clapboard building next to the Schwartz & Schwartz grocery store she built in 1922 at 400 N. Main St. Her sons Walter and Hugo ran the store. Rural residents with telephones shared party lines with 12 to 20 members. Eavesdropping happened — even when locals spoke German. And the telephone operator could always listen in, too. Schwartz had them at “Hello.” Photo courtesy of the family of Annie Maud



In 1891, the first basketball game was played with peach baskets and a soccer ball. A year later, the women at Smith College in New England were learning the new sport. In 1897, the first female teams were formed in high schools. Just over four decades later, these high school students in McMahan, a small community 10 miles east of Lockhart, were happily embracing the phenomenon of girls' and women's basketball — and winning a trophy. The population of McMahan gradually declined in the 1940s, and its schools were consolidated with the Lockhart Independent School District in 1949. Photo courtesy of Harry Annas Collection at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin

80th
ANNIVERSARY

THE WAY WE LIVED

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paper page by page, and each issue had a section to keep you updated on the important comings and goings around town (“Miss Martha Woodson, of Texas University, Austin, was home last week-end.” “Eben Price, of Waco, was a business visitor here Tuesday of this week.”)

Somehow everyone survived without Twitter and cell phones.

At the country store, or the town café, people would stand or sit around and talk with neighbors and strangers about the weather or politics or how the Aggies were doing — and they were doing well, working their way to a 20-0 Thanksgiving Day drubbing of the Longhorns and, by season’s end, the national title. On the radio, if you could afford one, you might listen to Jack Benny or Bob Wills or perhaps Fred Waring and his orchestra; everyone would gather around when it was time for one of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s “fireside chats.”

Kids buying comics at the town drugstore had new favorite characters to follow — Batman premiered in “Detective Comics” in May and “Superman No. 1” appeared in June.

The Great Depression, which had begun with the stock market crash a decade earlier, was slowly beginning to ebb and recede, and folks finally started to have a bit of pocket money. The minimum wage rose a nickel to 30 cents. Yams were two cents a pound at Dippel’s Food Store in Caldwell; a 28-ounce jar of Pure Apple Butter was 17 cents. When going into town, men wore hats and often a jacket and tie. Women wore hats, too, and dresses — nothing too fancy, and sometimes made at home, but they were part of what was considered proper attire for Main Street in the communities within the Bluebonnet service area. There was a lively bustle on weekdays and often on Saturdays as well. And it was a treat on a Friday night to see a movie at the Strand in Bastrop, the Sterling in Giddings or the Baker in Lockhart (showing the first week of January, 1939: “The Dawn Patrol” with Errol Flynn).

The theaters were segregated, as were the schools, the water fountains and lunch counters. Slavery and the Civil War were still in the living memory of the area’s oldest residents. Lifelong Travis County resident John Crawford, who was 81 in 1939, could still tell a visitor about his early days as a slave on a plantation in Manor. He was a child when word came of the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, but back in 1939, he had detailed memories of the day more than seven decades earlier.

In 1939, shiny new automobiles enticed passers-by at small downtown dealerships or glided by with their large graceful curves and Art Deco grilles. They made the occasional surviving beat-up Model A look

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F. C. Winkelmann immigrated to New York from Germany as a teen in 1890, caught a steamer to Galveston, and made his way to Brenham, where he worked for two years in a furniture factory. In 1894, he realized his dream of opening a photo studio. Winkelmann’s Studio captured the civic life of the Brenham area for the next six decades, from births to funerals. It became a tradition for brides and grooms in Washington County to make the trip into town and stand in front of Winkelmann’s camera. The couple at right is identified on the negative, taken in 1939, as Mr. and Mrs. Jose Ortega. Today the entire Winkelmann Collection of prints and negatives resides at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin — an invaluable window on the comings and goings of a community for almost a century. *Photos courtesy of Winkelmann Photo Collection at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin*



Newspaperdom, a trade journal for newspapers in the early 1900s, was captivated by the kind of flatbed printing press owned by the Deutsches Volksblatt weekly in Giddings: “Any printer who sees the Monona Leverless will be quite certain to fall in love with it.” The paper, founded in 1899, bought the press in 1907, and its “printer’s devil” (a printing apprentice), Albert Miertschin, did indeed fall for it. Miertschin taught the press to speak three languages: German, English and Wendish. He was the only person in the country who could hand-set type in Wendish, which was spoken in Serbin, southwest of Giddings. The Deutsches Volksblatt was a German-language paper with a few columns in English and Wendish. In 1938, the paper was sold to Miertschin, above right with his trilingual Monona Leverless, and Theodore Preusser, left, who became editor. In 1940, they founded the English-language Giddings Star. Miertschin would set German type Monday through Wednesday, and English type on Thursday and Friday. The Deutsches Volksblatt shut down in 1949, and Miertschin and Preusser sold the Star in 1954. The fluent press became scrap metal. *Photo courtesy of the University of Texas at San Antonio’s Institute of Texan Cultures*

Henry August “Hank” Hausmann, at left, of La Grange was a sure shot with a shotgun. He was the 1939 Texas State High Overall Champion, setting a world record for trapshooting. This Texas Trapshooting Hall of Famer won multiple state and national trapshooting contests. Locals paid to watch him shoot in 1934 to raise money for a Fayette County machine gun to defend against outlaws Bonnie and Clyde (who were fatally shot by police in Louisiana three weeks after La Grange got its weapon). Hausmann was a daredevil. At 20, he charged gullible locals 25 cents to watch him “fly” an E-M-F automobile off a 200-foot bluff above the Colorado River on April 24, 1916. He built a ramp for the car, but stood on the running board to steer and jumped off just before the car hurtled off the cliff. Refunds were requested. *Photo courtesy of Hank’s grandson, Pete Hausmann*

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like a raggedy scarecrow in comparison. The new model Chevy pickups were touted in ads as “big, brawny,” with improved “Supreline styling” and front windows you could crank open.

While filling up at Arbuckle Oil in Elgin, you might pull up alongside one of everyone’s favorite vehicles — the Blue Bell Creameries delivery truck, a refrigerated 1933 Chevy model that chugged up and down the country roads to deliver 5-gallon cans of “B.B. Ice Cream” to Lotta Cream counters in drugstores across the area. Lotta Cream booths — created in 1935 by Blue Bell General Manager E.F. Kruse to sell scoops inside local establishments — were your places to go for relief on a broiling summer weekend, all for a nickel a cone. On a typical Saturday in August, customers at the Lotta Cream #1 inside Mr. Schmid’s Savitall grocery store in Brenham consumed 110 gallons.

Life moved at a calm pace, but changes were just around the corner. In parts of Central Texas where the night had long been lit only with moon glow, candles and kerosene lamps, electricity was coming. The Lower Colorado River Electric Cooperative (later renamed Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative) received a state charter to provide electricity to residents east of Austin in Washington, Fayette, Austin, Lee, Bastrop, Travis, Williamson, Caldwell, Hays and Guadalupe counties, thanks to the relentless work of a young Texas congressman — and future U.S. president — named Lyndon Baines Johnson. (Later, parts of Burleson, Colorado, Gonzales and Milam counties were added to the Bluebonnet service area.)

In rural Fayette County, Isabel Albrecht saved up and bought a washing machine when the electric grid finally reached her cotton farm in Willow Springs, 22 miles east of La Grange. That’s where she and husband Oscar also raised cattle and chickens. But even after home electricity, she still preferred to scrub clothes on a washboard.

War was coming, too, though that was still just a rumble in the distance. In July, an article in Life magazine asked a group of prominent journalists just returning from Europe, “Will there be war?” No, reassured Amon Carter of the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, and his colleagues agreed. But in September, as Fred Quitta (seen in the photo at right, top row, fifth from the left) and Edward “Toad” Smith (third row, second from left) suited up for their Smithville Junior High Tigers football game, German tanks were already rolling into Poland. Five years later, those two young men would join the heartbreaking list of those who had given their lives in the defense of freedom. Quitta died in the battle to take the island of Leyte in the Philippines from the Japanese, and Smith lost his life at Saint-Georges-d’Elle, France, just three weeks after D-Day. Tiger teammate Carl “Rusty” DeLoach (top row, fourth from right) served on the destroyer USS Black, survived

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The mission: Bring a pastor and youth director to four rural congregations of the Reformed and Evangelical Church in the German farming communities of Mound Prairie, Birch, Gay Hill, and Lyons in Burleson County. The team was led by Lone Star Parish leaders the Rev. Martin Ernst (standing to right of map) and Ms. Leona Poppe (left of map), who moved to Somerville in 1939 and stayed until 1943. In a 1961 thunderstorm, lightning struck the steeple at Birch and the old church burned to the ground, prompting an eventual consolidation of the four churches into one congregation in Lyons, which lives on today as the Evangelical United Church of Christ, led by the Rev. Darrin Holub. *Photo courtesy of Winkelmann Photo Collection*



1939 THE MUSIC

- When the Saints Go Marching In** — Louis Armstrong and his Orchestra
- Over the Rainbow** — Judy Garland
- God Bless America** — Kate Smith
- Moonlight Serenade** — Glenn Miller and his Orchestra
- Strange Fruit** — Billie Holiday

- The Lion Sleeps Tonight** (aka Mbube) — Solomon Linda's Original Evening Birds
- Lester Leaps In** — Count Basie's Kansas City Seven
- Begin the Beguine** — Chick Henderson
- Beer Barrel Polka** — Andrew Sisters
- Beautiful Brown Eyes** — Roy Acuff

A moment of innocence in the fall of 1939 was captured in the annual football team photo of the Smithville Junior High Tigers, below. War was approaching, and in September, as the boys suited up for their first game, German tanks were rolling into Poland, ushering in a war that would affect them all. Several of them served in World War II, and two made the ultimate sacrifice for their country. *Photo courtesy of the Smithville Heritage Society*



Feeding turkeys until they were stuffed was just one of Isabel Heinsohn Albrecht’s chores in 1939 at “Wayside Manor,” the Fayette County poultry, cotton and cattle farm she owned with her husband, Oscar, on land that had been in his family since 1866. Before rural electrification, her house was powered by a Delco-Light Plant. Albrecht died in 1966, but Trinity Lutheran Church in Frelsburg, 19 miles southeast of the old farm in Willow Springs, still displays an altar cloth intricately crocheted by her. *Photo courtesy of the Albrecht family*

1939 THE MOVIES

- Gone with the Wind** — Starring Clark Gable, Vivien Leigh, Thomas Mitchell, Barbara O’Neil and Hattie McDaniel. Directed by Victor Fleming, George Cukor and Sam Wood. Eight Academy Awards: Best Picture, Best Actress, Best Supporting Actress, Best Director, Art Direction, Cinematography, Film Editing and Screenplay
- The Wizard of Oz** — Starring Judy Garland, Frank Morgan, Ray Bolger and Bert Lahr. Directed by Victor Fleming, George Cukor, Mervyn LeRoy, Norman Taurog and King Vidor. Academy Awards for Best Original Score and Best Song, “Over the Rainbow”
- Mr. Smith Goes to Washington** — Starring James Stewart, Jean Arthur, Claude Rains and Eddie Arnold. Directed by Frank Capra. Academy Award for Musical Scoring and Best Original Story
- Stagecoach** — Starring John Wayne, Claire Trevor, Andy Devine and John Carradine. Directed by John Ford. Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor

the war, and returned to Smithville to work on the railroad and marry his high school sweetheart Juanita. DeLoach died in 2013 at age 86; Juanita, who had been by his side for 65 years, died 12 hours later in her sleep.

The Great War, known then as “the war to end all wars,” had started just 25 years earlier, and some of its veterans living in Central Texas were still in their early 40s. In fact, that terrible conflagration received a new name in June of 1939, when Time magazine grimly dubbed it “World War I” with a gloomy eye to “World War II” building in Europe.

Other changes, as a tumultuous decade entered its final year: On Jan. 17, radio host and flour mill owner W. Lee “Pappy” O’Daniel was sworn in as the state’s 34th governor with great hoopla at Memorial Stadium in Austin with 37 marching bands and an attendance of 60,000. O’Daniel replaced James V. Allred, who late in his second term was nominated by President Roosevelt to a federal district judgeship.

In Giddings, a new mural was unveiled on the wall of the U.S. Post Office. The artist hired by a federal New Deal jobs program had painted cowboys opening mail at a rural mailbox, including one who received a package of red cowboy boots. The painting shows mountains in flat Lee County, but the postmaster called the mural “a first class job.” New Deal post office murals were also completed in 1939 in Elgin, Lockhart, Smithville, La Grange and Caldwell. In Lockhart, the young men of the Civilian Conservation Corps were busy building a swimming pool next to Clear Fork Creek that later would become part of Lockhart State Park. Additional New Deal workers were building Bastrop State Park and Buescher State Park near Smithville.

These moments and so many others live on in the black-and-white photos taken that year by photographers such as F.C. Winkelmann in Brenham and Harry Forrest Annas in Lockhart, who each had downtown studios for decades in their communities. They documented countless weddings, babies, funerals, group photos and civic events both grand and intimate. We are fortunate to have their images as we look back and wonder what life was like then.

Although the people in these hand-printed black-and-white images are frozen in time today, they lived these moments in color. For them, the days of 1939 slipped by one at a time, a bit quicker than folks wanted them to.

What was to come was uncertain. They didn’t know how the story would end, but their contributions live on in this particular patch of Texas that stretches from the San Marcos River in the west to the Brazos in the east. □



The federal New Deal job programs during the Great Depression produced recreational treasures in Central Texas state parks. In Lockhart, the Civilian Conservation Corps built the pool in what is now Lockhart State Park. It was 93 degrees on the Fourth of July, 1941, opening day for the pool next to Clear Fork Creek. The pool’s proximity to the creek caused persistent problems: flooding after heavy rains and the occasional snake. Lifeguards had to shovel mud into buckets and throw it back into the creek. The pool closed in the early 1970s. The old pool site now is a grassy area with picnic tables where the bathhouse once stood. *Photo courtesy of Harry Annas Collection at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin*



Central Texas has a smokin’ hot reputation for outstanding slow-cooked barbecue, with a pedigree that dates to German and Czech settlers who arrived in the mid-1800s. Back then, local meat markets would wood-smoke meat that had not been sold to prevent spoiling. The oldest barbecue shop in Central Texas is Southside Market in Elgin, above, which opened in 1882. By 1939, Southside and several other barbecue joints were so popular they remain open today, including two in Lockhart: Kreuz Market (opened in 1900) and Black’s Barbecue (opened in 1932 under a different name). By 1941, Giddings had City Meat Market, which is still serving today. Central Texas barbecue continues to lure world travelers to those famous 5-star spots as well as ‘younger’ barbecue shops across Bluebonnet’s service area. After all, different smokes for different folks. *Photo courtesy of Southside Market*

Co-op board seats up for election in 2019

Bluebonnet members interested in serving on the co-op’s Board of Directors can run for one of four seats up for election during the Annual Meeting on May 14, 2019.

Candidates can be nominated either by presenting an application for nomination with at least 50 signatures from co-op members in their respective districts or by paying a \$250 filing fee.

Bluebonnet’s Board is made up of 11 directors who serve staggered three-year terms. The four seats up for election in 2019 are for District 1, Caldwell, Gonzales, Guadalupe and Hays counties; District 3, Bastrop County; District 5, Burleson County; and District 7, Washington County.

To run for the Board, candidates must be at least 21 years old, a co-op member in good standing, agree to a background check and meet other qualifications outlined in Bluebonnet’s bylaws.

Nomination application forms are also available at the co-op’s member service centers in Bastrop, Brenham, Giddings, Lockhart and Manor.

All candidates’ petitions, filing fees and application for nomination forms must be submitted at any Bluebonnet member service center by 4 p.m. Feb. 13, 2019.



Details, bylaws and nomination applications are online at bluebonnet.coop: Click About, then Leadership, then Becoming a Director. For more information, call a member service representative at 800-842-7708. *(Sarah Beal photo)*

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JAN. 18, 2019

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APPLICATION DEADLINE:

MARCH 8, 2019

Find out more at bluebonnet.coop (click Community, then Scholarships) or by contacting Karen Urban at karen.urban@bluebonnet.coop or 512-332-7961



CONTACT US

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Member services: 800-842-7708, email memberservices@bluebonnet.coop or visit one of our five member service centers in Bastrop, Brenham, Giddings, Lockhart and Manor.

REPORT AN OUTAGE

At 800-949-4414, bluebonnet.coop or via our mobile app.

OFFICE CLOSING

Bluebonnet offices will be closed Jan. 21 in observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Jan. 24 for a company meeting. Report outages at 800-949-4414, bluebonnet.coop or via our mobile app. Pay your bill any time online, on our mobile app or by calling member services at 800-842-7708.

BOARD MEETING

Bluebonnet’s Board of Directors will meet at 9 a.m. Jan. 22 at Bluebonnet’s Headquarters, 155 Electric Ave., Bastrop.

MAGAZINE QUESTIONS?

Contact Lisa Ogle at 512-332-7968 or email lisa.ogle@bluebonnet.coop.