

## **KEEPING THE LIGHTS ON FOR 70 YEARS**

The Rural Electrification Administration was established on May 11, 1935, by executive order of President Franklin D. Roosevelt as an agency of the federal government. Initiating, formulating, administering and supervising a program of approved projects with respect to generating, transmitting and distributing electric energy in rural areas was its purpose.

In referring to the Rural Electrification Program, it is often spoken of as one of the greatest success stories in America's history. Of the farms that existed in this country in 1935, only nine or ten percent had electric service. Those figures have changed dramatically in our day, and those changes could not have come about without the Rural Electrification Administration. Through the REA, funds were made available for electric facilities in rural areas. Because the REA is a lending agency, it does not engage in the ownership or operation of any electric facilities.

In 1945 Articles of Incorporation were filed in the offices of the Secretary of State and County Clerk of Box Butte County on April 5, 1945, organizing Panhandle Rural Electric Membership Association (PREMA). The goal of the organization being, "to provide electric service to every farm and ranch within our area".

In 1948, the REA approved PREMA's first loan in the amount of \$300,000 to build 400 miles of line in Box Butte, Garden, Grant, Hooker and Sheridan counties (known then as "Section A"). Construction of lines was a slow process. Many experts were consulted to determine the construction of distribution lines that would be sufficient in size, kind and quality to care for the energy demands made upon it; also, determination of types of materials to be used in construction had to take place. Availability of these materials was a major concern; in fact, the Association could only let bids for 121 miles of line in the beginning because of the aluminum conductor shortage. Eventually holes were dug, poles went in, line was laid and sources of power were obtained. On November 6, 1948 the first bills were sent out. In December of that same year, 95 applicants were admitted to membership in the Association, and that was only the beginning.

Today PREMA celebrates 70 years of "Keeping The Lights On". PREMA is also very proud of its high reliability rate and affordable service while maintaining 2,734 miles of distribution power lines, 3,769 total meters and serving approximately 1,600 members in its 10 county service area of Authur, Box Butte, Cherry Dawes, Garden, Grant, Hooker, McPherson, Morrill, Sheridan and Sioux Counties.