

# Electricity brought changes, Norwood farm family recalls

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NORWOOD TWP. — Aladdin gas lights put out a nice light, better than normal gas mantle lamps and much better than the old kerosene lanterns, but even the Aladdins were nothing compared to electric light bulbs.

It's been almost 50 years, but Bill and Bertha Parsons still recall what life was like on the farm before electricity reached rural areas.

Rural electric service came to Northern Michigan in

the late 1930s and life on the farm hasn't been the same since. Top O' Michigan Rural Electric Co. formed in 1937 to extend electric service to Northern Michigan's rural areas.

Bill signed up for the electrical cooperative in 1937.

"They solicited for membership. You had to pay them \$5," he explained, noting that \$5 came hard in those days.

In August 1938 electricity arrived at the Parsons' farm south of Charlevoix and changes came rapidly.

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Bertha and Bill Parsons

# Couple recalls days before power

## COUPLE

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Electricity allowed farmers to do more, to see what they were doing and to save what they produced.

Bertha says the advent of electricity meant no more filling and cleaning lanterns and the end of the constant and often annoying hum of gas mantle lamps.

While electric lights illuminated the house, down at the barn electricity was changing the way chores were done.

"We got the first surge milking machine in Charlevoix County," Bertha said.

"We got electricity in August of 1938 and put the milker in the next spring," Bill recalled.

Along with the milking machine, the Parsons also got an electric motor for the water pump. Bill said it was a lot easier to flip a switch than to put gas in a motor that sometimes wasn't anxious to start on cold mornings.

Electricity also brought refrigeration to rural areas so meat and vegetables could be frozen and kept

fresh.

"When we were first married, we had no way to keep food cold except in the basement," Bertha said.

At the time most basements had dirt floors and no furnaces. Consequently they were cool and moist. Vegetables kept well, but meat had to be canned.

"You know, they talk about the good old times," Bill said, "but we've got it a lot better now. There's no comparison."

When the rural electric cooperative started, the county extension agent spoke at meetings at the Grange hall and at churches and other clubs to explain the program.

The Parsons say the rural electric cooperative started slowly.

"People were afraid it was going to cost too much," Bertha says.

Initially, many homes just had the bare necessities, one light bulb and one outlet.

World War II also slowed expansion.

"There was very little expansion during the war," Bill explained, "The government had a curtail on copper."

Bill has been actively involved with the cooperative since its inception. He served on the Top O' Michigan board of directors from 1956 to 1980 and also was on the national rural electric cooperative board.