

The 1970s--The Years of Conservation

The 1970s continued the trend of declining farm population and increased sales, and in order to keep up with this growing demand, the Newtown Substation was energized on March 13, 1970.

The growing demand for electricity was rising so rapidly that the power producers could not keep up with the demand. Although our power supplier had the foresight to build power plants before they were needed, the east and west coasts were suffering "black outs" and "brown outs". The oil market went wild, gas prices skyrocketed and consumers had to wait in long lines to fill their cars with gas. Operating costs went up, and so did FEM's rates. The world was now beginning to see the need to conserve all forms of energy. The promotional statement of the 1970s became "Conserve Energy!" Although they were not entirely new, microwave ovens became more widely accepted because of their energy efficiency.

Legislation also played an important role in the operations of utilities during the 1970s. Effective January 1, 1973, the National Electric Safety Code required ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) be used on all construction sites. In 1973, for safety purposes, SD legislators passed the Proximity Law making it illegal to be within 6 feet of an electrical distribution line. In 1975, legislators passed an act addressing territorial problems, establishing set electric utility service area boundaries.

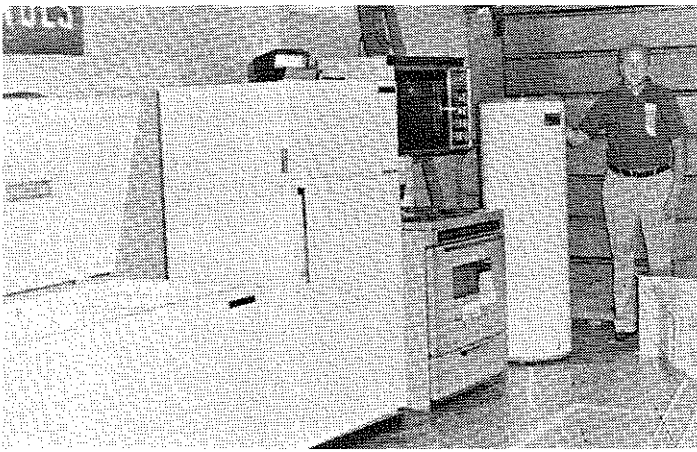
It was also during President Nixon's Administration in the 1970s that Congress first started looking at legislation to "do away with the REA". Some people felt that all rural Americans were receiving electricity so the program had served its purpose. Rural Americans banded together to convince Congress to preserve the REA program. The REA loan program survived the battle, but little did we realize at the time that the war was just beginning.

With the constant loss and consolidation of farms, the number of active services continually decreased and, in 1972, an idle service fee of \$2.00 per month was put in place to reduce the number of idle services. With the steady increase in sales, FEM found it necessary to introduce the "Double Zero" method for meter readings in 1973. This method allowed us to record the costs for higher KWH users on the rate schedules without making the rate schedules longer or using smaller print. In 1974, FEM Electric received its first Safety Accreditation Award for safe man-hours worked, and we installed our first computer system in the office.

On August 19, 1976, the rural electrification program lost a highly respected advocate when FEM Board President, Albert C. Hauffe passed away. Mr. Hauffe had the distinction of serving many years on the boards of directors, and was elected president of the boards of FEM Electric Association, Inc., South Dakota Rural Electric Association (SDREA), and National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA). It is unusual for one man to serve as president of the local, state, and national boards simultaneously as Mr. Hauffe had done.

Engineering studies indicated that another substation would improve power quality in Faulk County. The need for the Burkmere Substation and 22 miles of transmission line that would also need to be built brought about another major decision for the FEM Electric Board of Directors. At the annual meeting held June 6, 1979, the membership voted to join East River Electric Power Cooperative. All FEM-owned substations and transmission line were sold to East River which then assumed the role of operating and maintaining the transmission system serving FEM Electric.





Earl Hettick displays some of the modern electric appliances available from Roscoe Hardware during an FEM Electric annual meeting.



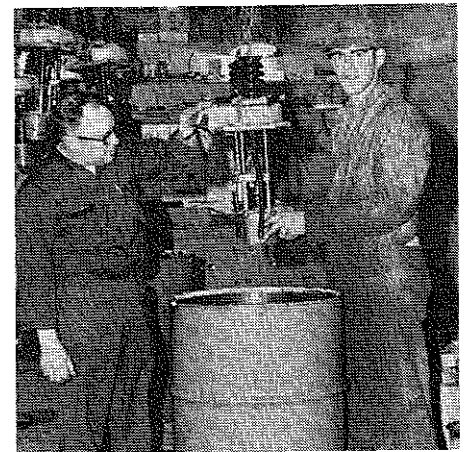
FEM employees Betty Habben, Neva Williams, Grace Engelhardt and Irene Stevenson congratulate door prize winner Donnie Roesch after the 1972 meeting.



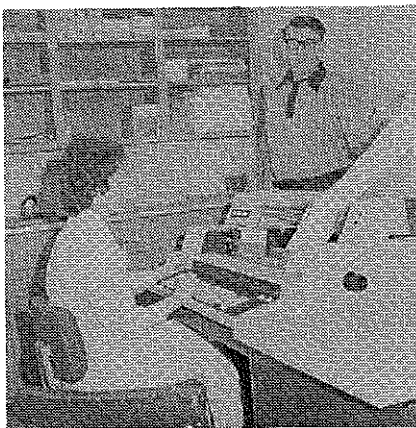
Manager S. G. Fischer is shown congratulating Neva Williams on her retirement in 1974.



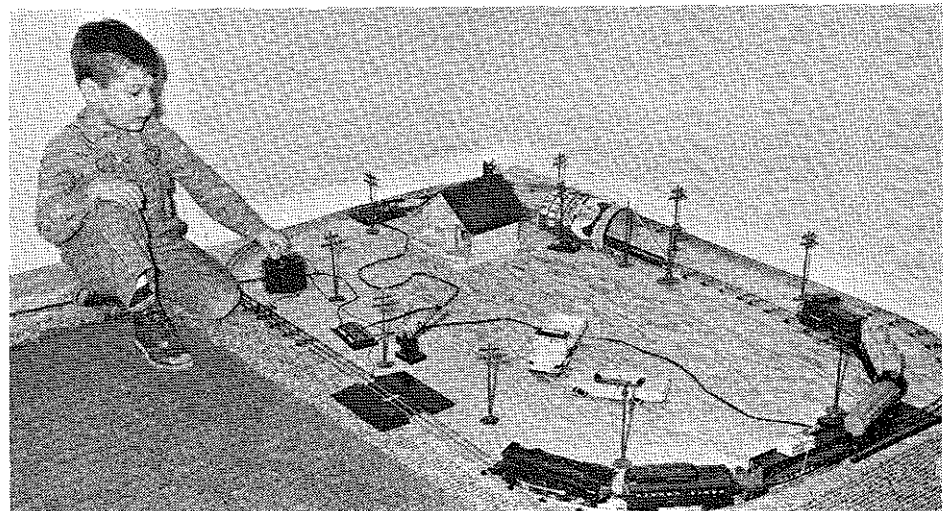
This tractor suffered severe damages when it ran into a power line.



Earl Johnson and Jim Seidel are shown repairing OCRs in the shop.



Bert Voegele and Janet Bruckner are shown here with FEM's first computer system installed in 1974.



Electricity doesn't have to be all business--it can be fun, also. This young man proudly shows off what he can do with his electric train set.