

Dempsey Franks embodies true co-op spirit



By Danielle Spina

During my first year at BECi, I've learned a lot about rural electrification, but I wanted to hear a first-hand account of a time well before my own.

In 1935, the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) was established by President Franklin D. Roosevelt's executive order for the purpose of lending money to cooperatives, commercial power companies, and others to build rural power lines. Thus, on March 8, 1939, BECi was chartered under state laws. The purpose of the cooperative was the same as it is today - to provide power to its members at the lowest cost possible consistent with sound financial management of the business.

That's how I ended up in Mr. Franks' living room one July morning, eager to hear about how BECi first energized the countryside. Dempsey Franks, now 95 years old, knows a thing or two about "the good ol' days." He did not enjoy the luxury of electricity until after he fought in World War II and celebrated his 28th birthday.

As most folks did in those days, the Franks family made its living from farming the old home place in Merryville. Most of Mr. Franks' childhood was spent in the fields raising corn and cotton. He remembers when he and his brothers chopped wood for his mother's wood burning stove so she could cook a meal, often using hog lard from a gallon bucket she kept next to the stove. When the Great Depression hit, according to Mr. Franks, a 500-pound bag of cotton would fetch only \$20 to feed and clothe a family; but despite the hard times, the Franks family never went without.

"After the Depression hit, it was hard. People had to scratch by, but we always had something to eat because we lived off the farm," says Mr. Franks.

Mr. Franks joined the Army and went on to serve during WW II. After returning in 1948, Mr. Franks' family finally received electricity. At that time, many families purchased electric appliances before they had power. The Franks family purchased a deep freezer and electric pump that were kept on the back porch until power arrived.

The first thing the family energized was an electric pump for the water well. Mr. Franks spoke of days when they would pull water up from the well, which went dry in the summer, and haul it back and forth to the house. After building a pump shed, they built a shower beside the shed. It would still be a few more years before hot water and indoor plumbing would become standard in the home.

"That was real nice," says Franks

when he recalls the ease and enjoyment the water pump brought to the family.

Many homes built in this time were wired for electricity long before receiving it. Mr. Franks did exactly that when he built the home he and his wife, Alva, shared.

"We were proud to have some lights and electricity is all I can say," says Franks when he remembers flipping the switch in his home for the first time. Mr. and Mrs. Franks were married for 65 years until Mrs. Franks' passing last year.

Things were slower back then and there was always a neighbor to lend a helping hand. (Acct. No. 20269-001)

"Everyone was close," says Franks when he looks back on a time when all the family lived next to one another. "If you got down sick, there was always someone there to take care of you and



sit up with you at night. It ain't like it used to be. People don't have time for that anymore."

Dempsey Franks and those of his generation should be revered as true treasures to the "20-somethings" of my own. They bore witness to things we've only read about in history books. They could teach us something about hard work and sacrifice. They labored in the fields to feed their families, survived the Depression, helped their neighbors and answered their country's call to protect and serve. We are so used to flipping on a switch and having the comfort electricity brings to our lives that we often take it for granted. Let's not forget that not too long ago, electricity and its benefits were a luxury, not a necessity.

Don't get me wrong, I love my hot water and washing machine, but sometimes the constant blaring of the cell phone and the 24-hour news cycle, the side effects of our electric powered world, can get old fast. I could use a few hours with no cell phone, no TV, and no social media and instead spend a day out on the porch visiting with family and friends. Doesn't that sound nice? I don't think I am alone in saying that we all could do with just a little bit more of those "good ol' days."

BECi News



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Merryville Heritage Festival set for March 27-28

The Merryville Museum is a treasure-trove of history and folklore.

The Merryville Historical Society, responsible for maintaining the museum, hosts the annual Merryville Heritage Festival to help raise funds that cover the operating costs of the museum.

The museum holds many relics of Merryville's early days and a vast amount of Louisiana and American history. The oldest items housed in the museum are the bibles from 1833 and 1853 and a musket said to be used in the American Revolution.

Most of the items have been authenticated, including a collection of Indian arrowheads over 9,500 years old, a spinning wheel, a wooden washtub, a rope frame bed, a wagon from the early 1900s and a wedding dress and headpiece from the 1940s. Among the china collection, photos and Merryville High School yearbooks, there is a collection of medical equipment and eyeglasses, a working cash register from the early 1900s, a dugout made of cypress and a series of letters from a Merryville native Confederate soldier during the Civil War. A popular item in the museum is a well bucket used by General Eisenhower during the Louisiana Maneuvers.

The museum is a frequent layover for cyclists traveling across the country. It has become popular because members of the society often cook a hot meal for the cyclists and has a place for them to take a hot shower.

Merryville was the birthplace to a few local heroes and the burial place of an infamous legend. Football prodigy Chris "Red" Cagle played football at Merryville High School and broke many records during his college football career. Cagle died on Dec. 26, 1942, in New York under mysterious circumstances after he was found unconscious at the bottom of a subway staircase. (Acct. No. 118704-002)

There is no outlaw in Beauregard Parish that remains more legendary than that of Leather Britches. The story of Leather Britches consists partly in folklore and partly in the research of W.T. Block, but is fascinating none the less. Charles "Leather Britches" Smith lived in Robertson County, Texas, until he was found guilty of murdering his wife. Sentenced to hang, Leather Britches escaped to Beauregard Parish.

Known for his marksmanship, drinking and bad temper, Leather Britches was hired by the owners of the local timber company to intimidate employees who were part of the Grabow Timber Strike. The members of the town took matters into their own hands when they shot and killed Leather Britches. City leaders had Leather



Shown above, clockwise from top: The Merryville Museum has become a popular layover spot for cyclists traveling across the country; the original headstone of Charles "Leather Britches" Smith; a copy of Time Magazine featuring local hero Chris "Red" Cagle is on display at the museum; pictured is the original cabin before it was moved to its current location.

Britches' body put on ice and displayed for all to see. Leather Britches was buried in Merryville, outside the city cemetery, where he was said to be buried face down because "he was headed straight for hell."

A visit to the Merryville Museum is not complete without visiting the Burks Log Cabin, a registered historical home, built in 1883. Descendants of the Burks family donated the cabin and has helped share the history of family who lived in the home. Unfortunately, the elements are threatening to take away this historical treasure and the roof is in dire need of repair. The historical society is unable to make the needed repairs to the cabin and

maintain the building without the help of the community.

The annual Merryville Heritage Festival, held this year on March 27-28, is a major fundraiser for the museum and the historical society encourages everyone to attend. The society is also planning to use the funds to make updates in cataloging and authenticating information within the museum and hopes to hire a full time staff soon, but none of this can be done without your help. Visit the Merryville Heritage Festival during the last weekend in March. To make a contribution year-round or find out more, visit www.merryvilleheritagefestival.com or call 337-825-0101.

Official Notice of Beauregard Electric's 2015 Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting of Members of Beauregard Electric Cooperative, Inc. (BECi), will be held on Saturday, March 28, 2015, at 10 a.m. at the BECi office in DeRidder, Louisiana.

Election of directors will be conducted by mail in accordance with the bylaws, which provide for rules to be established by a credentials and election committee of BECi members. Conduct of business at the meeting will be set forth in the bylaws.

Annual Meeting Agenda

- Reading of the notice of the annual meeting and proof of due publication of mailing



thereof, or the waiver or waivers of notice of the meeting, as the case may be.

- Reading of unapproved minutes of previous meetings of the members and taking of necessary action thereon.
- Presentation and consideration of reports

of board officers, directors and committees.

- Report of the elections committee on the balloting for the election of directors.
- Unfinished business.
- New business.
- Adjournment.

DOOR PRIZES—A Special Drawing for three door prizes will be held at this year's BECi annual meeting. Those at least 18 years of age in attendance and registering will be eligible.

- TWO (2) FLAT SCREEN TELEVISIONS
- APPLE IPAD (Acct. No. 123510-001)

From the Manager



By Kevin Turner
General Manager

Member participation is key to BECi's success

I believe that one of the most important values of cooperative membership is member participation. Unlike investor owned utilities (IOUs), BECi follows the basic principle of one member, one vote.

Member participation is critically important to the survival of the co-op. BECi, like most co-ops, measures its membership in thousands, whereas IOUs measure in millions. If you are not actively involved with the co-op, we all suffer. As the electric utility industry evolves, having interested members who are willing to take an active role is critically important.

The month of March is a special time of year for us and our members. March is the time for BECi's Annual Meeting. The annual meeting serves as a way for you to get to know the people who run the co-op and get updated on business matters and important issues in the util-

ity industry. I encourage all of our members to join us at our annual meeting on March 28 at our office in DeRidder. (Acct. No. 16552-001)

"Democratic member control" means you, the member, vote for a director who represents you on a board, which governs the cooperative. This year an election will be held in Districts 4 and 7.

If you live in one of these districts, I encourage you to vote. Voting is simple and convenient. BECi mails you a ballot and a return envelope – postage included. Ballots must be received by March 20. We pride ourselves on conducting an unbiased and fair election for our members each year.

Co-ops believe in the power of human connection. Here at BECi we believe that every member should have a voice, so don't miss the opportunity to help us continue in this proud tradition.

Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month



Summer is right around the corner! Have you changed your home's air filter? Filters get loaded with more and more particles as they do their job. This actually has the effect of making them more efficient, but it also increases resistance and reduces airflow. Remember to check filters once a month.

Source: EnergySavers.gov

You could win \$50!!

Beauregard Electric is offering its members an opportunity to win the Co-op's Lucky Account Number Contest by publishing four account numbers somewhere on pages 6-7 of Louisiana Country.

Look for your account number hidden somewhere on these pages.

To win, you must locate your account number (listed on your electric bill) on these pages and then contact the Co-op. To claim your prize, call 800-367-0275 or 463-6221 by April 15.

Your Cooperative Connection

LOUISIANA COUNTRY

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