

Cooperatives



Cooperatives — people working together for the common good, sharing in profits and losses — got an early start in the Wheaton community. The oldest, the Wheaton Co-operative Creamery Company, was started way back in 1894. While all have not actively survived the changes in the agricultural picture, they have been a strong force in the business community. Some of Wheaton's largest enterprises at this time are cooperatives.

WHEATON COOPERATIVE CREAMERY COMPANY

In February, 1894, a meeting was held to consider the organization of a cooperative creamery. Committees were appointed to canvass the area in order to obtain information on the number of cows available. A sufficient number was found and action was taken to organize. John L. Anderson was chosen president and H. H. Howe, secretary. Another meeting was held at which



Wheaton Co-operative Creamery. Photo taken from a picture postcard which was postmarked in Wheaton in 1916.

the articles of incorporation were adopted and a decision made to proceed with the erection of a building. The organization chose the name Lake Valley Creamery Association.

The creamery opened for business in May, 1895. A man with a team was located to pick up cream from farmers in the area. He was paid twelve cents an inch. The creamery burned in 1895 but was rebuilt and put back in operation. By 1902 the creamery manager decided to start making butter instead of shipping cream.

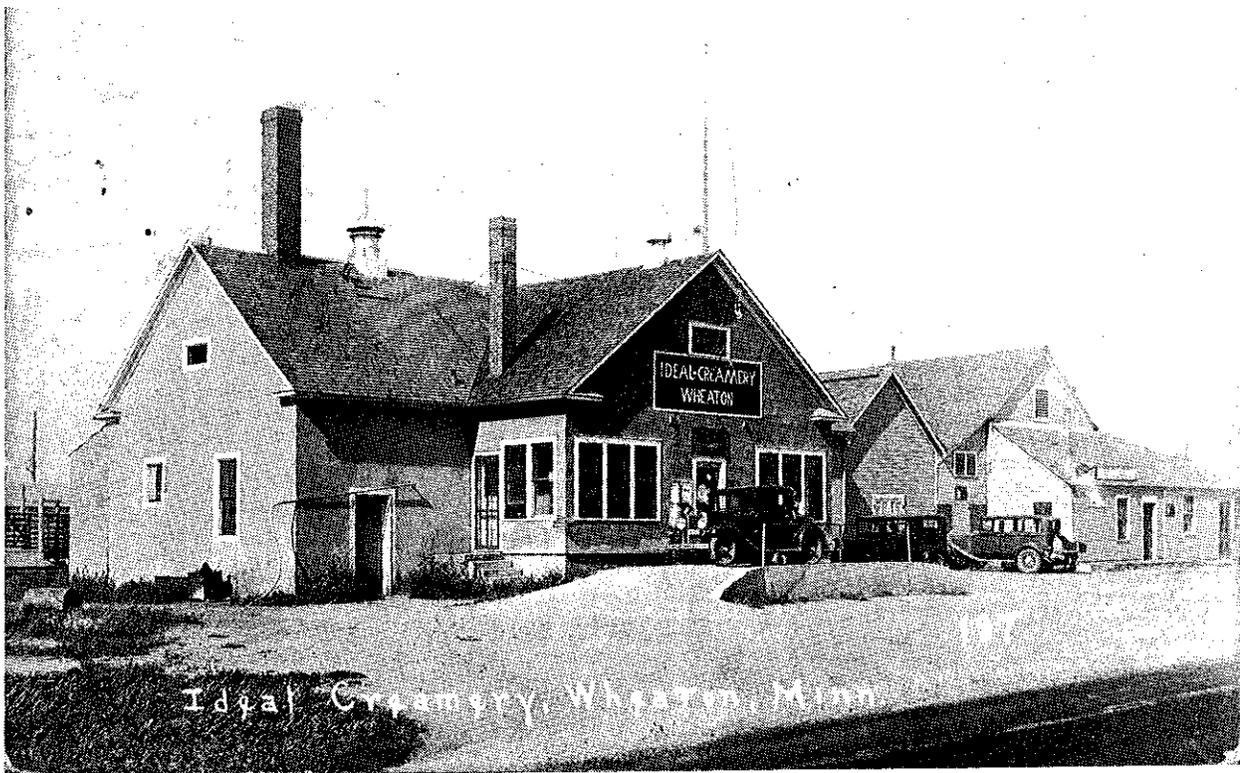
Two years later the creamery was leased to Crescent Creamery of St. Paul, but in 1905 the stockholders decided to turn over the operation to the business community with a first class butter-maker in charge, and the creamery was sold to Falk and Paulsen.

In 1912 a new cooperative creamery was built. It was named Ideal Creamery Co. Within two years there were 337 patrons. An addition to the creamery was made in 1922. This allowed the installation of larger vats

and machinery to handle the increase in cream receipts. On April 22, 1927, it was certified as a Land O' Lakes plant. Ideal Creamery reported on January 13, 1928, that they were paying 58 cents for No. 1 cream and 55 cents for No. 2, which was the highest price in years. The board voted premiums to poultry producers. The next year a cooling system was installed, and the name was changed to the "Wheaton Co-operative Creamery Company".

By 1937 there was a new pasteurizing plant and a new brick addition which included a meat locker section and a new poultry plant. That year turkeys were worth \$14.00 and thirty people worked all day and part of the night for ten days processing 62,364 pounds of turkey. At the height of the poultry industry in 1946, there were eighty people employed at the creamery.

At the annual meeting in 1938 the creamery reported the manufacture of 376,384 pounds of butter, had 400 patrons, received almost 92,000 dozen eggs, over 120,000 pounds of live poultry, about 107,000



The main portion of the Ideal Creamery was the structure on the left, where area farmers could drive through to drop off and pick up cream cans. In the background on the right is the poultry and egg processing facility.



The Ideal Creamery Co. of Wheaton operated a truck to pick up poultry from area farmers and also purchased eggs at this buying station. Clarence Johanson, manager of the produce department, is pictured in the doorway, along with Rolland Richards. Photo taken in 1925.

pounds of dressed poultry, 18,000 pounds of hides, 25,000 pounds of wool and nearly 500,000 pounds of feed. At the annual meeting in 1948 the reported sales volume was over a million dollars. By July of that year the creamery was shipping two to three truckloads (650 cases) of eggs to Los Angeles each week. The 39th annual meeting in 1951 reported total sales of \$1,407,454.20.

W. H. Wilson was hired as general manager in 1939. Five years later Charles Peterson replaced him, and in 1957 Frank Grindy became manager.

In 1949 a 20 by 135 foot addition was built on the east side of the original building, 50 feet of which was two stories high. It was considered one of the biggest, most modern in the state and acted as a complete dairy, poultry, meat processing and marketing station. Local payrolls exceeded \$70,000. Processing of grade A milk began in 1955.

Wheaton's first strike started April 15, 1958. Two unions, Amalgamated Meat Cutters and General Drivers, struck against the creamery. Pickets were on the streets but the plant continued to operate with non-union labor. The strike was officially over in October.

At the annual meeting in March, 1959, the board was empowered to arrive at a merger with Cass Clay Creamery of Moorhead. Later Cass Clay leased the Wheaton Creamery and continued to operate a market for dairy products.

This cooperative has been completely dissolved for a number of years.

WHEATON-DUMONT COOPERATIVE ELEVATOR

A meeting was held in 1902 to organize a Farmers and Merchants Elevator. In 1905 the Farmers Elevator Company of Wheaton

was organized with \$20.00 stock issuances. The first officers consisted of T. O. Torgerson, president; Joe E. Dodds, secretary; and Fred Seidensticker, treasurer.

The elevator was built, and in 1919 contracts were let for improvements consisting of a new office, motors in the cupola, and an additional motor to provide more power. A new load lift was installed in 1924 to dump wagon and truck boxes. The front end was lifted up by a jack, which was operated by compressed air, to a height of four and a half feet, allowing the grain to be dumped.

In a 1926 reorganization of the corporation the capital stock of \$20,000 was divided into 100 shares. In 1936 the former Hammond Elevator was purchased and remodeled to make room for storage which increased from 30,000 to 50,000 bushels.

Albert Olson, who took over the management of the cooperative in 1932, was succeeded by Alvin Hennen in 1946. Hennen started working for Martin Hanson in his independently owned elevator in 1938. When Mr. Hanson passed away two years later, the elevator was taken over by the Kellogg Commission Company, which in turn sold it to the Farmers Elevator Company of Wheaton in 1942, with Mr. Hennen remaining all those years as manager and continuing to serve the cooperative until 1976, when he retired.

Other managers have included Mervin Watson (1976-1978), Rick Dunbar (1978-1982), Wally Hennen (1982-1983), and Orval Kohls, present manager, who was hired in April, 1983.

From 1950 to 1970, the elevator was constantly building and improving its facil-



The Farmers Elevator board of directors in about 1919. Pictured from left to right are J. A. Norsen, Martin Monson, Louis Bender, Fred Seidensticker, manager Winge, Peter Johanson, employee Martinson, Tom Heggen and Frank Peterson.



Among the many improvements and additions made by the Farmers Elevator over the years is this modern fertilizer blending plant. The facility was constructed in 1965. Pictured in front of the center truck is the fertilizer plant manager Wally Hennen, and on the right is Don Rittenour.

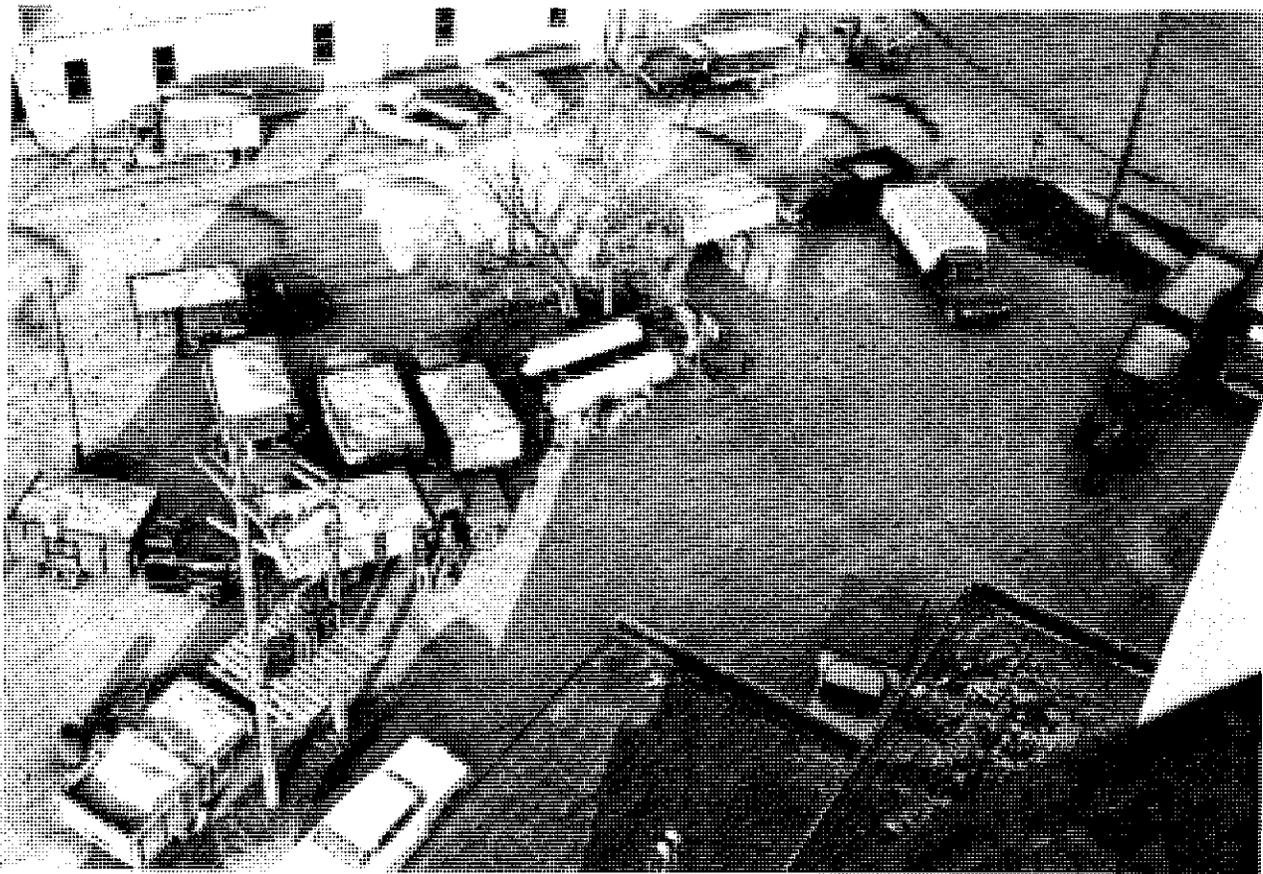
ities with the following construction: 80,000 bushel unit of concrete 130 feet high and 38 by 44 feet at the base, six concrete tanks with a height of 139 feet, new grain dryer using propane gas and having a capacity of drying 750 bushels of grain an hour, construction of a new fertilizer plant, addition to the office, and two government storage bins. In 1970 the Peavey Elevator was purchased. This made the cooperative the only grain-buying agency in Wheaton.

Mini-unit grain trains were put into operation by the Milwaukee Road in 1974. In 1978 the loading space on the Soo Line at Tenney was leased by the elevator for the purpose of shipping out grain when it appeared that service on the Milwaukee line through Wheaton was coming to an end. All grain is now hauled the nineteen

miles to Tenney by semi-truck, where it is loaded on railroad hopper cars on the Soo Line.

Construction started in 1979 on a \$275,000 addition to the elevator to install a new distribution system to replace thirty-year old equipment. Two steel bins with a capacity of 85,000 bushels each were constructed in 1985.

The Farmers Elevator of Wheaton and the Farmers Elevator of Dumont voted to merge in November 1980. On January 1, 1981, the new cooperative was formed and began to operate as a single unit. Rick Dunbar, the Wheaton manager, took over management of the larger unit. Herb Frisch, manager at Dumont, announced his retirement. Total gross sales reported for 1984 were \$17,751,345.95.



During the busy harvest season area farmers with trucks loaded with freshly harvested grain frequently jammed the parking area at the Farmers Elevator, and often were lined up for more than a block, waiting a turn at the scales. The photo above was shot from atop the elevator in the late 1960s.



The Wheaton Co-op Elevator board of directors of 1953. Front row, left to right: Clarence Johanson, Carl Jacobson, Norman Gilyard. Back row from left: Hjalmer Hofstedt, Ed Issendorf, Arnold Marxen, Art Heggen.

WHEATON FARMERS' SHIPPING ASSOCIATION

In 1917 there was need for a more efficient way to transport livestock to market. This need prompted the organization of the Wheaton Farmers' Shipping Association with an initial membership of fifty-eight farmers.

Tom Heggen was the manager in 1920, and the annual report showed that seventy-six railroad cars of livestock had been shipped. The total was 129 carloads in 1922. By March, 1928, the association reported at their annual meeting that 239 carloads of stock had been shipped that year with a gross return of \$400,500.

Sometime during the early 1930's Fred Larson began hauling livestock by truck. In 1937 Lawrence Jacobson bought the business from Larson and continued until 1948 when he sold out to Glenn and Clifford Moore. The association continued to be served by other owners, Squire Reynolds, Howard Weick, and Dale Jacobs, the present owner.

The Wheaton Livestock Shipping Association is still in existence. There is still a board of directors, but because of the lack of livestock in the area and the fact that many farmers have their own methods of transporting their livestock, the association has very little business to conduct.

TARA MUTUAL INSURANCE COMPANY

Early in 1898 a group of about twenty men met in the Collis school house for the purpose of forming a Farmers Mutual Fire Insurance Company. The meeting was called to order by John Wulf. Robert McBrady was chosen to preside as chairman and James Lynch as secretary. It was decided that the town of Tara should be the place of business for the company, and the corporate name of the company was chosen at that meeting. On February 28th another meeting was held at the Sullivan home, twenty-five citizens who collectively owned property amounting to \$50,000 signed the articles of incorporation and adopted the by-laws.

Elected to serve as the company's first

board of directors were John Wulf, president; John Burns, vice president; J. J. Sullivan, secretary; T. F. Ginnaty, treasurer; and directors P. J. Ryan, William Rixe, Thomas Spain, Thomas Ryan, John Reedy, and Michael Ryan.

At first it was the intention of the company to include in its territory only three townships in Big Stone and six in Traverse County. Later the territory was extended by taking in all of Traverse and Big Stone Counties. Gradually townships in Stevens and Wilkin Counties were added.

The secretary was instructed to contact the various township officials in the designated area to find people who were interested in writing fire and lightning insurance for Tara Mutual. This was not easy; however, Mr. Sullivan was a very determined man. He traveled by horse and buggy and was instrumental, according to the minutes book, of securing thirty-four people in the territory willing to write insurance for the company.

In January, 1899, while traveling on business for the company through the towns of Monson, Tintah and Taylor, Mr. Sullivan had the experience of being lost in the big Tintah slough. After wandering about without road or track of any kind on a mid-winter night, he finally saw a light and made his way to a farm house. The cash paid out on this two-day trip was fifteen cents. A short time later he spent two days in western Traverse County. His expenses on this trip were \$1.25, most of which was spent for lodging in the attic of a hotel in Browns Valley.

The company's first loss occurred on April 26, 1899, when lightning caused damage to a chimney, shingles and some siding. The amount paid on Policy 46 owned by Solvan Gustafson of Clinton on this claim was \$10.85.

During the depression of the 1930's and the closing of the banks, the company lost most of its reserves in the Beardsley, Barry and Graceville banks. It was at that time, 1933, that it was necessary to levy a special assessment of the policyholders of the company. This is the only special assessment ever levied by the company, and now with the reinsurance program there is no longer any fear of a recurrence.

Mr. Sullivan was secretary from the beginning of the company until 1938, when he retired and L. D. Zimbrick was elected secretary. At that time the office was moved to Wheaton. It occupied two rooms in the Mae Cory house at 1002 First Avenue North. The first board meeting in Wheaton was held at the Palmer House. Later the office was moved to the Odenborg building at 20 Eleventh Street North.

When the office was moved to Wheaton, the company held policies in the amount of approximately \$950,000. In 1986 Tara Mutual

Insurance Company insurance risks exceeded \$120,000,000. The company is now in a position to write several types of policies including the basic fire, windstorm and liability, as well as homeowner's insurance for both town and rural homes, serving the area of Traverse, Big Stone, Grant, Wilkin, Stevens, Otter Tail and part of Clay County.

Officers and directors in 1986 were Sam Deal, president; Donald Wilson, vice president; Harry R. Rixe, treasurer; Leo Terhaar, secretary; directors were Cleo Dyer, Helen Sutkus, Lawrence Deal, and Cecil Morris.



Traverse Co-op Oil Association when it was located in downtown Wheaton adjacent to where the railroad depot was located. Pictured from left are Henry Nachtigal, Marlin Hoglund, Myron Maudal and Fred Larson.

TRAVERSE COOPERATIVE OIL ASSOCIATION

The organizational meeting of the Traverse Cooperative Oil Association was held on March 22, 1929. The meeting was called to order by E. G. Court of the Minnesota Cooperative Oil Company of Minneapolis.

Eighteen interested members were present.

Seven temporary directors were elected to organize the association. Herman Budke made the motion that the name of the association be the Traverse Co-operative Oil Association. J. A. Raguse made the motion to have the par value of each share

set at \$25.00 and that no stockholder could purchase more than ten shares. The articles of incorporation were signed that same day. With 176 shares sold up to this time, the first meeting of the stockholders was held July 25, 1929. The first board of directors consisted of Frank Peyton, president; Dave Neuman, vice president; Raymond Steidl, secretary-treasurer; Alfred Winter, Otto Keller, August Byman, and F. H. Raguse.

The Consumers Home Oil Company of Lidgerwood, North Dakota, owned a filling station located just east of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway Depot. This station was rented for \$35.00 a month and was the first building occupied by the co-operative. In July, 1934, their products were moved to Wheaton Auto. In June, 1941, they moved back to the original building which had been remodeled and expanded.

Robert Neuman was hired as truck driver and was paid by commission which was set at one cent a gallon for gasoline delivered in the city limits, two cents for deliveries in the country, ten cents a gallon on oils, and ten percent on greases. John Erickson was hired to run the station for \$50.00 a month. The secretary of the board was to receive \$25.00 a month for bookkeeping duties. After six months in business, a profit of \$675.00 had been made. On May 13, 1930, the auditor's report showed a profit of \$3,861.90.

Jimmy Richardson was later hired to replace Erickson as manager, and in December, 1933, Fred Larson was hired as manager for the service station and bulk plant. Later managers were Dorrance Larson, Oscar T. Nelson (temporary), Paul Nelson, Sidney Olson, Urban Thoennes (temporary), and Gust Roehlke. Kenneth Nelson was temporary manager from May, 1954, until he was officially hired as manager on August 16, 1954. He remains in that capacity to this day.

The land for the present site of the co-operative at the intersection of highways 75 and 27 was purchased in 1953, and construction started the same year. An additional 1148 square feet was added in 1979, and in 1986 the offices were remodeled to allow for a more efficient location for the computer area.

The business has steadily increased

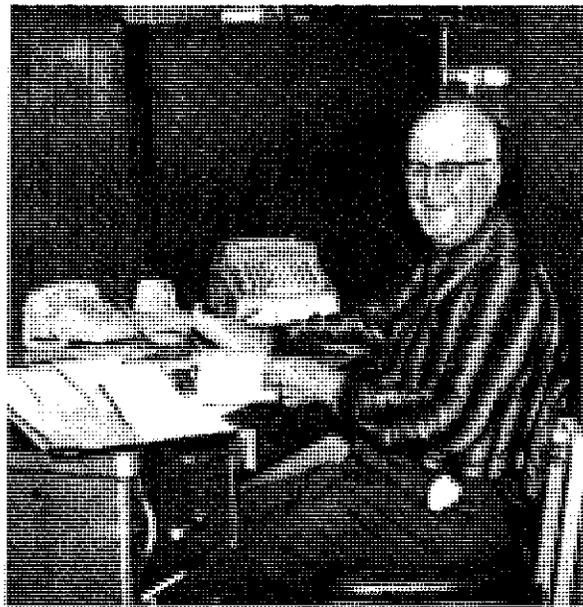
over the years. In June, 1972, the co-operative announced plans for a new LP gas and anhydrous plant which was built along highway 75 north. In 1974 the co-operative redeemed for cash all the outstanding stock for their first twenty-one years of business from 1929 through 1950.

The main purpose of the original organizers of Traverse Co-operative Oil Association was to serve its patrons and the community. This they continue to do.

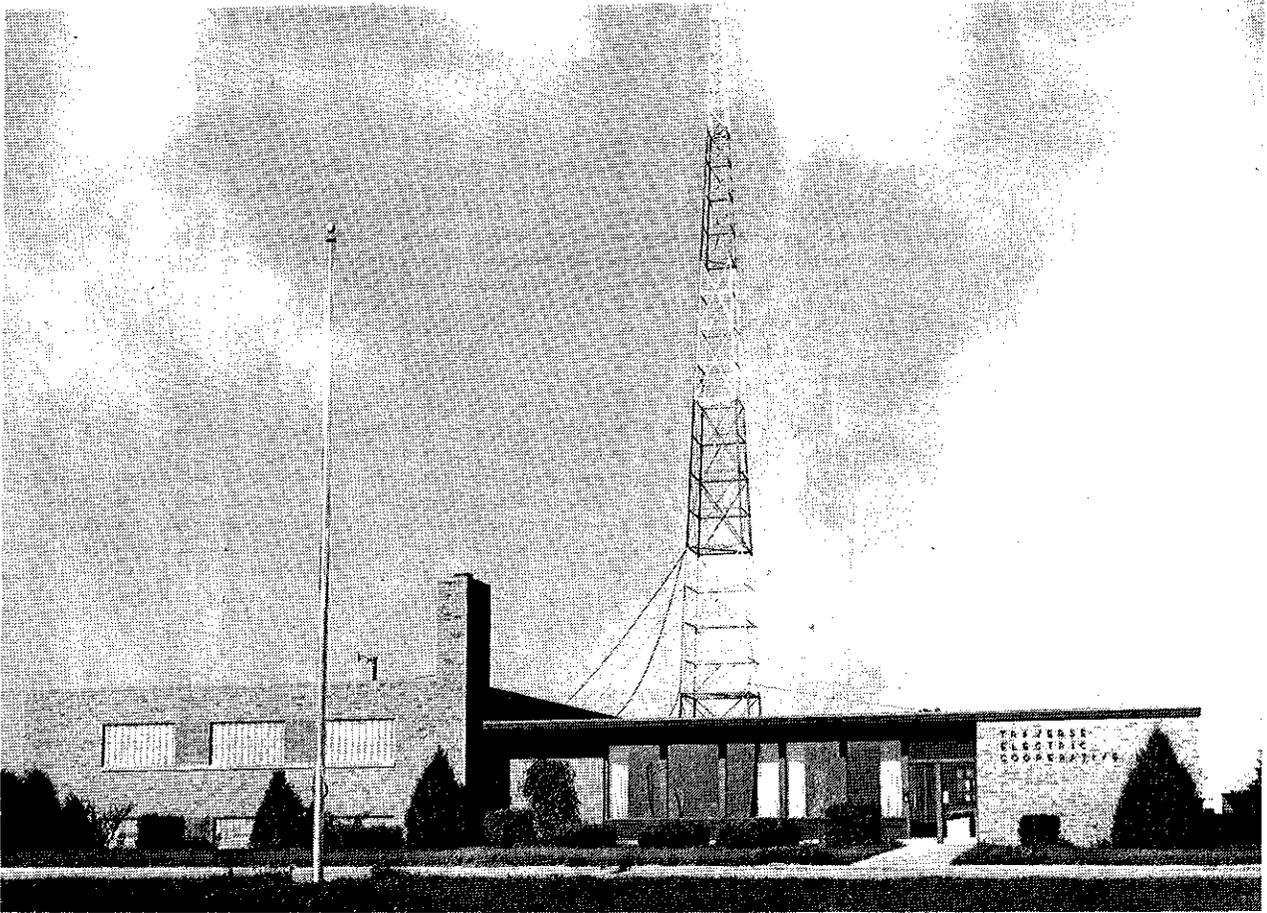
COOPERATIVE STORE, INC.

A new grocery store, the Cooperative Store, Inc., opened July 5, 1939, with Art Berg, field man for Midland Wholesalers, the temporary manager and Lester Roske the temporary clerk. It was a branch of the Midland Cooperative Wholesalers of Minneapolis and was to serve the public for almost twenty years.

Lester Roske was the first manager. Other managers were Reuben Solberg, who remained in that position for thirteen years starting in 1943, Clifford Richards, Carl Lupkes, Clifford Johnson, and Ervine Brown. At a meeting of the stockholders on March 20, 1959, the decision was made to liquidate the business, and the store closed shortly thereafter. The business had been housed in the present liquor store lounge area.



Reuben Solberg, manager of the Cooperative Store in Wheaton from 1943 to 1956.



Wheaton was selected as the home base for Traverse Electric Cooperative, a cooperative formed under the Rural Electrification Act to provide electricity to farms and other rural facilities in an area covering part of western Minnesota and northeastern South Dakota. The cooperative was officially formed in 1940. The headquarters building above was constructed in 1953.

TRAVERSE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC.

The R.E.A. came into being in 1935 by executive order of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. One year later, in May, 1936, the Congress of the United States passed the Rural Electrification Act, making it possible for farmers to organize cooperatives to borrow low-interest funds to build electric facilities to serve themselves.

The first REA meeting in Traverse County was called by Melvin Hole, county agent, and was held in the Arthur Community Hall, eight miles north of Beardsley, on January 26, 1939. Lloyd Zimbrick introduced Albert Knutson, manager of the Lake

Region Electric Cooperative of Fergus Falls. Mr. Knutson explained how they had proceeded to obtain funds for their lines. About forty farmers from Arthur, Windsor, and Folsom townships attended this meeting. Mr. Hole had prepared membership applications for electric service, but because of skepticism on the part of the people there were only twelve applications signed.

After several more meetings the interest shown seemed to justify setting up an organizational committee. In May, 1939, the committee was formed and consisted of one representative from each township in the county. The following officers were elected:

Jacob Bauer, president; John Johnson, vice president; Fred Lichtsinn, treasurer; and Melvin Hole, temporary secretary. Other members were J. J. O'Donnell, Harry Magnuson, R. E. Murphy, L. D. Zimbrick, Walter Putnam, Simon Lundquist, Ed Osterman, Mark Mulvanny, H. G. Marshall, Albert Deal, Fred Krenz, and Sam Cawelti.

By July 11, 1939, 289 members had been signed up with 211 having paid \$5.00 membership dues. A group from the extreme northeast corner of Roberts County, South Dakota, asked to be included in this area, and it was unanimously agreed that an effort would be made to include two or three townships in Roberts County. Members of the South Dakota delegation included Peter F. Anderson, Wilhelm Nelson, John L. Anderson, John Eggers, Walter Trende and Sam Simpson. By 1941 there were additional signups in Big Stone, Wilkin, and Roberts Counties.

At a meeting held in February, 1940, with the local organizational committee and Ralph Rice, the Federal REA Coordinator, steps were taken to incorporate. In April membership had increased to 420. M. H. McDonald prepared a set of maps for the proposed system and Earl E. Huber, attorney, prepared papers for incorporation. The next month the incorporators met and the name Traverse Electric Cooperative, Inc., was chosen.

The first board meeting was officially held July 9, 1940. Simon Lundquist was elected president; John Johnson, vice president; Lloyd Zimbrick, secretary; and Fred Lichtsinn, treasurer. During the following months membership tabulations and maps of proposed lines were submitted to the REA, and \$192,000 was allocated to build 234.5 miles of line to serve 450 members.

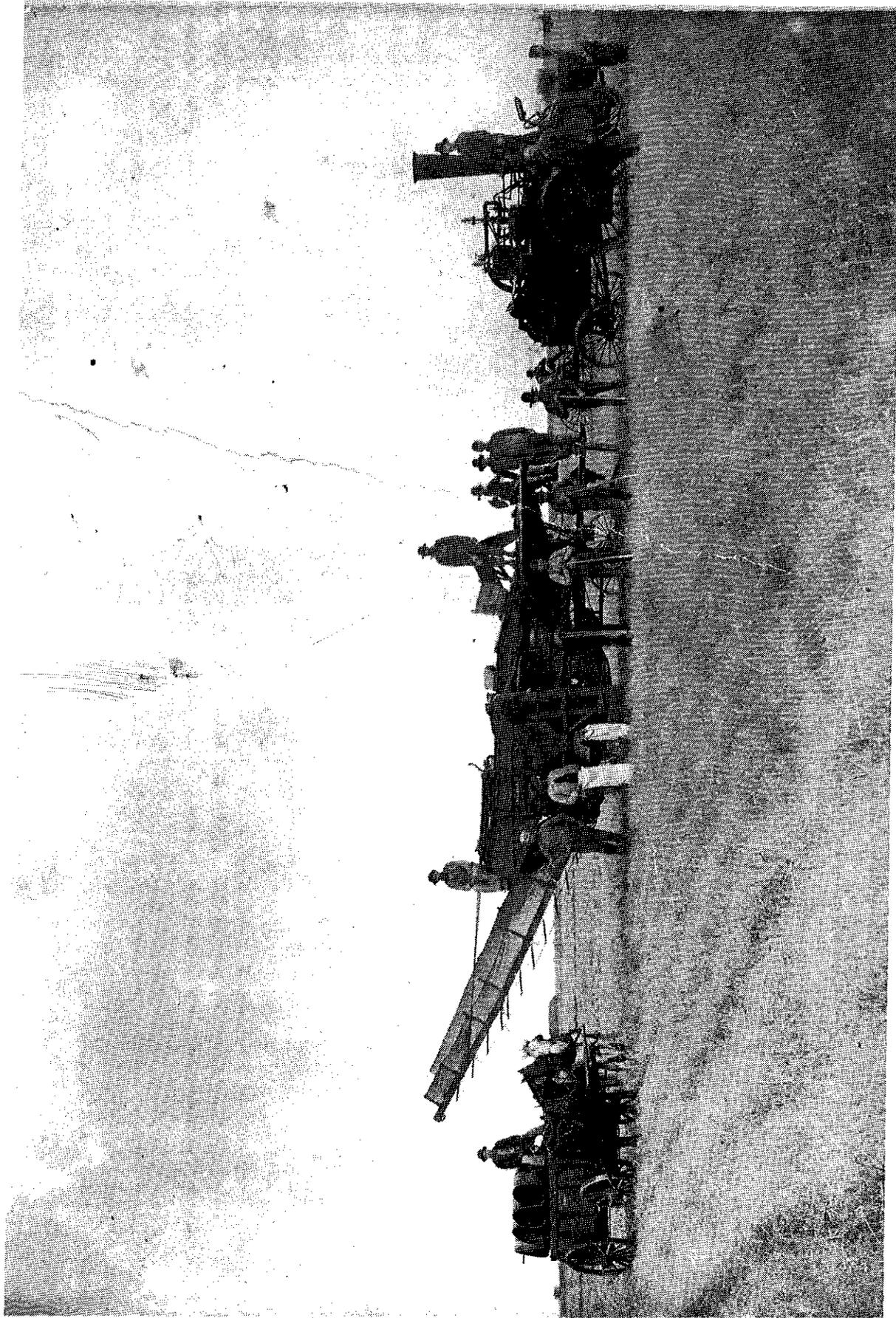
On April 9, 1941, the first pole was set on the Erickson farm south of Wheaton, and on November 25 the first 114 miles of line were energized. There were 150 farms energized in this first phase. Approximately forty miles of poles remained without conductors when World War II erupted, causing copper and strategic materials to be frozen. In 1943 a proposal was made for a program whereby the War Production

Board would release materials for lines to members who would contribute food to the war effort through the use of electricity. By June of that year twelve-member extensions had been completed. In 1944 more members qualified and more lines were added.

The cooperative had its first office upstairs in the county building west of the railroad tracks. On March 24, 1941, Traverse Electric hired Miss Martha Siltman as bookkeeper with a salary of \$75.00 per month. Lloyd D. Zimbrick was hired as temporary manager at \$125.00 per month. Their second office was located on the ground floor of the Robert Neuman building west of the railroad tracks. After being there from 1942 until 1946, the office was moved to the Tara Mutual Building just off Broadway. After thirteen years of steady growth and progress, the cooperative built one of the most modern headquarters in this area. The new \$80,000 building along highway 27 west was occupied in May, 1953. An addition was built and the interior remodeled in 1971.

The Traverse Electric Cooperative has the distinction of having organized the first Junior Board of Directors in this area. The group has received national recognition. The Junior Board was appointed by the Senior Board in October, 1952, and consisted of Rodney Sand, Ed Hasbargen, William Lehrke, Dale Skundberg, Dennis Heifner, Roger Pearson, Roy Hormann, Robert Ringger, and Robert Keller.

At the 36th annual REA meeting, Lloyd Zimbrick announced that he was retiring from the management position at the end of 1976. He was a key figure in organizing the cooperative and had been its only manager up to that point. Vincent Bartholome was named the new manager, and he continued in that capacity until March, 1986, when Donald O'Leary was named manager of the cooperative.



The David Neumann threshing machine in Redpath Township in the early 1900s.