

A Chronological History Of Benton Rural Electric Association

It is nearly impossible to document every significant event in the cooperative's 80-year history on two pages. Here are a few milestones from the past 80 years. What happens next, is up to the members.



President F.D. Roosevelt, seated, is pictured as he signs Executive Order No. 7037 establishing the REA. Standing are Representative John E. Rankin and Senator George W. Norris.

May 11, 1935 - Setting the groundwork

President Franklin D. Roosevelt signs Executive Order No. 7037, establishing the Rural Electrification Administration (REA).

April 19, 1937 - Signing the paperwork

The first five members of the Benton REA Board of Trustees sign the Articles of Incorporation, making Benton REA the oldest operating consumer-owned utility serving Benton and Yakima counties. These trustees included: C.V. Trevitt, H.G. Dimmick, Charles E. Morgan, Lawrence Harrison and Sanford G. Ware. These trustees hired John B. Whitehead to be the cooperative's first general manager. Whitehead's wife, Nellie, did much of the secretarial work for the co-op in its first years.

May 7, 1937 - Making plans

The first meeting of the incorporators and members of Benton REA took place at the office of their attorney, B. E. McGregor.

June 1, 1937 - Getting the money

Benton REA is granted a \$45,000 U.S. Department of Agriculture loan through the REA for planning and construction.

May of 1938 - Power is delivered

Electricity is first delivered to 89 members over 43 miles of newly constructed power line with a plant value of \$40,000, allowing farmers to retire their kerosene lamps and step into the modern age. Benton REA purchased its power from Pacific Power and Light Company (PP&L).

September 17, 1938 - First Annual Meeting

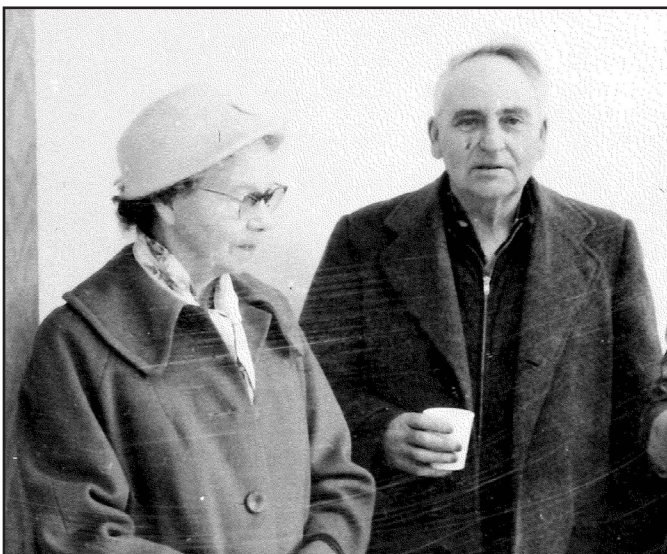
The first Annual Meeting of the Benton REA members is held.

April of 1939 - Growth

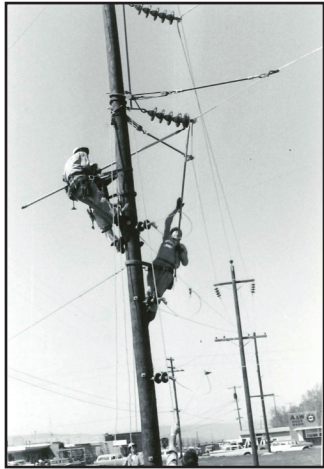
Electricity is delivered to areas of Richland, Mabton and the Emerald community of Sunnyside.

July of 1939 - Expanding funds are needed

Benton REA receives a loan of \$104,000 to build lines and serve more than 300 members in the Emerald, Satus, Alfalfa and Toppenish communities. Construction began in December of 1939. At this time, Benton REA has 13 full time employees.



John B. Whitehead, pictured with his wife, Nellie, was the first general manager appointed to serve Benton REA.



Benton REA linemen repair power lines in May of 1959.

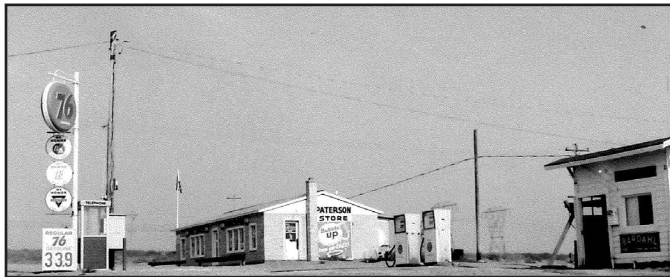
Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) to provide a unified voice for cooperatives and to represent their interests in Washington, D.C. Benton REA was one of the founding members of NRECA.

1946 - Dual duty

PUD District No. 1 Benton PUD condemns Pacific Power and Light's distribution system and Benton REA provides oversight to Benton PUD through 1947, under the management of John B. Whitehead.

1948 - Bonneville Power Administration

Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) begins providing wholesale power to Benton REA.



The new Paterson store is electrified. Date unknown.

1949 - Expansion to the south

Benton REA extends power lines to rural farmers in Horse Heaven Hills, Paterson and Plymouth.

February 15, 1951 - A new district office

Benton REA purchases the first Toppenish district office for \$25,000. The total loan for the purchase was \$30,000 because money was needed for improvements. At this time, Benton REA has 48 full time employees.

December of 1953 - A third office

Benton REA purchased and renovated the first Enterprise (West

Richland) district office for \$9,000.

1962 - Our own space

After years of renting space for its downtown Prosser headquarters, Benton REA builds its own office at 402 7th Street, where it resides today.

1987 - Golden anniversary

Benton REA celebrates 50 years of service to its members.

1997 - A new way to connect

Benton REA branches out as an internet service provider with a new PowerNET division. PowerNET serves members and non-members with dial-up and broadband internet as well as computer repair and networking services.

September 11, 1999 - An office upgrade

With recent growth in West Richland, Benton REA celebrates moving into its much needed, and larger district office located at 6095 W. Van Giesen.



The Toppenish office mural painted in the year 2000 by artist Ken Carter.

2000 - Mural in a day

The Benton REA Toppenish district office, located at 715 E. Toppenish Ave., is painted with a mural depicting rural electrification. Unfortunately, in 2009, the building was condemned and demolished. The only remnants of the mural are left in pictures. Benton REA moved to a new office on G Street in 2008. In 2000, Benton REA has a total of 12,300 accounts, 2,078 miles of line and 56 full time employees.

2006 - Shine as one

Benton REA becomes a member of Touchstone Energy, a nationwide alliance of member-owned electric co-ops.

October 31, 2016 - A sale to Yakama Power

Benton REA members vote to sell 2,107 accounts within the boundaries of the Yakama Nation Indian Reservation to Yakama Power, the Nation's electric utility.

2017 - Our 80th anniversary

Benton REA celebrates 80 years of providing electric service and 20 years of providing PowerNET internet services. Benton REA has 72 full time employees and serves more than 14,000 accounts over 1,721 miles of line from West Richland to the top of White Pass, and from Hanford to the Columbia River.