

My Memories of the Past Regarding Electrifying My Parents Farm

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My memories of the past regarding electrifying my parents farm:

I was born June 1, 1938 on the rural family farm 8 miles NW of Fredonia, ND. I recall some early childhood memories of not having the modern convenience of electricity. I also recall the old barn lanterns 'laterne' and in the house the fancy kersene lamp with a thing inside the glass chimney that was very bright when it was burning. There is a name for that little delicate white thing, but I do not recall its name. In German we called the whole thing the 'gas-licht'.

I do not recall the exact year, but probably about 1944~1945. (My brother told me it was in the fall of 1944, the year of Mother and Dads 25th wedding anniversary) A decision was made by Mother and Dad to do some electrical wiring on the farm site that was used during the fall and winter months being it was one mile closer to the school. My brother tells me that the wiring was done by two people that worked at the Kulm Mill Co.. One was a Rossman and the other a Hildenbrand that did the wiring in the house and barn for the electricity . A 32-Volt electrical system was installed with a generator charging motor and about 16 large square glass batteries consisting of 2 volts each, all in the basement of the house. I do not recall how often this charging motor was run to keep the batteries charged up, but quite often I would think. (My brother said it was very often) The following spring a electric contractor named Ritter from Wishek came to wire the other farm that was used in the summer. This farm had a bigger house and also had a summer kitchen which folks liked. My brother told me that the 32 volt system was never used at this farm, only the Kohler generator system was used. They moved this unit to this farm in the spring after school was out. Then back to the other farm in the fall being it was a mile closer to school. It all had to do with winter snows and blocked roads, so the closer to school the better. It also meant we were 8 miles to town instead of 9 miles in the winter. Sure was nice, just flip the switch and had instant lights in the house and the barn. The IHC cream separator had a motor attached, and that would crank the separator at the proper speed. Mother got an electric motor on the washing machine too. This eliminated the smell of the gas motor used on the 'veshmachine' washing machine even though the exhaust was piped outside the house.. Mother really liked this. Heck, we even had light in the ole out house, this really came in handy during late evening hours.

A few neighbors even had a "Wind Charger" that was used to generate electricity. This we did not have. This 32-Volt electrical system was used for only a few years. I do not know what ever become of the 16 large square glass batteries. The generator was removed from the motor and then a pulley was put on the motor shaft. This motor, about a 10HP Briggs & Stratton was then used on a farm grain auger. As to the square glass batteries, I have seen a few at antique shops and knew that they were used in the 32-Volt systems.

In 1946, the 110-Volt system came along. Now a larger motor (Kohler) with a 110-volt generator was installed in the garage away from the house. That was set up that we did not need batteries in the basement anymore. This motor would start and generate electricity very time a light was turned on. Then in the fall of the year, a refrigerator was bought, this kept the motor running every so often during the cold nights. This was to ensure

that the motor would also start in the morning when lights were needed in the barn and house and to separate the milk in the morning.

Dad was frustrated every now and then when it was very cold during the winter nights and the motor would not start in the morning. So an hour or so went by trying to get this Kohler motor started in the morning. I do not recall, but there must have been some 6~Volt battery that did not have full cranking power to get this motor started. So another fully charged battery needed to be put in place and eventually this motor did get started. Apparently the refrigerator did not need to run very often during the night. So the motor out in the garage would not run enough to keep warm and start in the cold early morning.

In early 1947, dad said he heard that REA was going to be building power lines through our area soon and that he would sign up to have electricity supplied by them. I think it was during late fall of 1947, when that project was completed, and we had dependable electricity after that.

This Kohler generator unit was eventually put on a small two-wheeled trailer, and today we considered it the "Pioneer Portable Generator." I do not recall that it was used very often, but it was available to any of the neighbors that needed electricity at any of the remote farm buildings that were not wired for lighting. This unit has also been used in recent years when power was out from winter related weather. It is not a very powerful unit to run a complete modern farm.

These are my recollection of events as of this date, June 28, 2007.