



WORKING TOGETHER

Concern for Community

As you have driven the roads on the Island this winter, you may have noticed the cooperative crew and the town crew working together to clear brush from the ditches. Our participation in this is often necessary because some of the trees that are being removed are close to the lines. However, you may have also seen us working together in areas where there are no lines. This cooperation between the town and the cooperative benefits us both and therefore all cooperative members. With up to six people working and two chippers, we are able to get a lot done more efficiently and in less time. It is an example of the seventh coopera-

tive principle, Commitment to Community. Following this principle is perhaps a bit easier for us to highlight because our territory is the Town of Washington.

In addition to this activity, your cooperative has upgraded the lights in almost every public building on the Island, making them more efficient and reducing the cost of electricity paid by the taxpayer. We maintain the town's streetlights and hang the banners that welcome visitors to the Island each year. We will continue these activities and more because what benefits the Island, benefits our members.

MY CO-OP



THANKING THOSE WHO HAVE HELPED US

We have had a whole lot of help over the last two years or so and we have always thought that it is important to thank those who have helped us. We had the opportunity during WECA's (Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association) Education and Lobby Days to thank Governor Tony Evers for including us in his budget. We had earlier thanked Representative Joel Kitchens and Senator André Jacque for their support and action on the legislative side, which ensured we stayed in that budget. All three were recognized as Champions of Cooperatives at this meeting as well.



L-R: Robert Cornell, Gov. Tony Evers, Orion Mann, Joel Gunnlaugsson, Hoyt Purinton, and Lee Engstrom.



L-R: Adam Tobias, Rep. Joel Kitchens, Robert Cornell, and Lea Patek.



BL-R: Bill Cosh, Hannah Gibbs, Robert Cornell, Sen André Jacque, Nik Rettinger, and Evan Hafenbreadl.

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

The cooperative and the community lost a friend on January 7 of this year. Butch Jess passed away surrounded by family after suffering a stroke. Butch played a key role in both the cooperative and the community and will be greatly missed.

He worked for the cooperative as a lineman from 1969 to 1984 and as an expert diesel mechanic helped many times getting the old engines started when power was lost from the mainland in the early years of the submarine cable. Any time there was a notable outage or significant work occurring at the cooperative, you could always count on Butch to stop in to offer encouragement, tell an amusing story from years and storms past, or just to get the scoop on what was happening.

Butch had a long history of service to the Island including serving as the school board president for six-plus years as well as on the library board. He volunteered for the Washington Island Fire Department for 15 years, was an original board member for Friends of Plum and Pilot Island, was the commander of the Coast Guard Auxiliary for several years, and volunteered with the Washington Island Archives. He was a



Len Jorgenson, Henry Nelson, Ray Krause, and Orville "Butch" Jess in the early '70s.

member of the Jaycees and a lifetime member of the Sportsmen's Club. He enjoyed being a member of the ROMEIO (Really Old Men Eating Out) Island group.

We wish Karen, Denise, and all his family the best as we share our sympathy and mourn the loss of a Washington Island Electric Cooperative icon. Orville "Butch" Jess was 77.

HOW ELECTRICITY CAME TO WASHINGTON ISLAND

By Ray Krause, as printed in the *Washington Island Forum*, 1974

Installment 3

We then got organized. I was appointed coordinator and Herman Leasum the project attorney. He has since stuck by us through thick and thin. I started to get paid.

Herman and I did most of the work obtaining other members and right-of-way easements. I wish there was more time and space to list the various reasons why they didn't want lines on or over their property. Some of them were: "It will spoil my land"; "It may kill my animals"; "When this project fails, which I know it will, the government will take away my land"; etc.

The first meeting of the incorporators was held at Tom Nelsen's Hall August 24, 1940. They were: George O. Mann, Anna Gunnlaugsson, Robert Gunnerson, Andrew Cornell, George Hanson, Wm. C. Cornell, Art Hanson, Chas. O. Hanson, Conrad A. Anderson, Ted Gudmundsen and Martha Stelter.

The first Board of Directors were: President – George O. Mann; Vice President – Marvin Andersen; Sec./Treasurer – Conrad A. Anderson; Wm. Engelson, Robert Gunnerson, George Hanson, Andrew Cornell, Art Hanson, Chas. O. Hansen, Ted Gudmundsen and Clifford Vogel.

We rented the present office at \$10.00 per month. We employed "Wisconsin Development Authority" as our engineers and set rates.

Our first building plan was a small building with two 50 Kilowatt machines with space for a third machine should it ever be necessary. Now we have 2120 Kilowatts of power and will soon be thinking about more.

We had nothing to start with. I bought an old desk from Dr.

Crane for \$5.00, I got an old office chair from my father-in-law, Wm. Jess, and an old typewriter from him also. The typewriter table was an old slot machine stand. Clarence Anderson made us some tables, and each director brought a chair if he wanted to sit down. Herman's chair is still there.

In the meantime I was taking some correspondence courses in electricity. I also went to Oconto Falls, the nearest REA project, for two weeks to learn how they did things.

In the fall of 1941 we were all set to start staking out the

lines when the attack on Pearl Harbor took place. We received word from REA at once to suspend all operations and to send representatives to Wisconsin Rapids to get instructions

from REA officials. The Board of Directors sent Herman Leasum, Wm. Engelson and myself to meet with them. We were told what we should do, "stop all activities at once," which we did.

The Board of Directors voted me \$25 per month to keep things in shape until the war was over. Most believed it would be a very short war. After getting paid the \$25 a few months, I stopped it as I didn't feel I was earning it.

Conrad Anderson went to Milwaukee to work and I took

his place teaching school for a few more years.

On the last day of school, May 25, 1945, an engineer, Carl C. Crane, and Construction Manager Edward Killoren came to Washington Island. We had a meeting with them that night, and I was again put on the payroll, from one job to another, never losing an hour. We hired Carl C. Crane as our engineer and Killoren Electric C. to build our lines. The Board also sent Herman and myself to St. Louis to meet with the heads of different REA departments. REA was in St. Louis during the war.



Betty (Jessen) Shellswick and her mother, Clara Jessen.



Early cooperative annual meeting at the old Community Center (Gislason's Store). How many members can you name?



Meet Your Director

Orion Mann

Orion Mann was first elected to the Washington Island Electric Cooperative board in 1994 and has been serving as president since John Herschberger retired from the board in 2004. Orion has a long family history on the Island and the board. His grandfather, George Mann, started Mann's Store in 1903 and, in addition to serving on the first Board of Incorporators, was the first president of the cooperative's board of directors. His father, Jerome Mann, also served on the cooperative board from 1981 to 1983.



After high school, Orion left the Island for a while and worked in the uranium mines in Wyoming. He then returned home to work in the family business, Mann's Store, and now manages the store with his brother Jerry.

Orion is a former Boy Scout leader and is currently one of the organizing members of the unofficial Island Snowmobile Club.

When you see Orion, Thank him for his service to the cooperative and the Island community.

BILLING/ACCOUNTING SYSTEM UPGRADES

You may recall from the 2018 annual meeting that the cooperative's accounting system was going to be upgraded after serving us well for 15 years. Our intent was to tie the upgraded system to the automated meter reading capability of the meters we installed in 2015. We got a little distracted and this obviously got put on a back burner.

We are now happy to say that this is moving forward once again and we expect to have the system upgraded in April and shortly thereafter will be integrating our Landis and Gyr meter system with it. In addition, as part of this upgrade, the cooperative will be implementing online bill pay, emailed bills and will, as part of this system, be able to accept credit card payments. This all should roll out to the member by mid-year. You will still be able pay with cash or check and those members who wish to receive a bill by mail will still be able to do that as well. This means that, once implemented, you will no longer need to read your own meter and use the payment books that are almost as old as the cooperative! It also means, however, that timely payment of the bills will become imperative as the automated billing will also add late charges should the bills not be paid on time.

As we get further into the project, updates will be posted on our website and will also be communicated. This is a fairly large undertaking, but it will streamline our systems, save the cooperative time as well as reduce overall billing costs, and should be significantly more convenient for you, the member.

TRIMMED TREES = better, safer service

When you see us trimming trees near power lines, know that we are doing so because:

- Stormy weather can cause nearby limbs to break off and land on power lines.
- Power lines can give off a spark or arc that may land on a nearby branch and ignite.
- Unobstructed power lines make it easier and safer for lineworkers to maintain equipment or restore power.



SAFETY CORNER

You might be tempted to trim some of your trees yourself. HOWEVER, if there are power lines nearby, call the cooperative and have the trees trimmed safely by the line crew.

FIBER OPTIC CABLE PROJECT

While we do not have a whole lot new to report here, we can update you that the grant application made by NSight went through the comment period at the Public Service Commission with no negative comments. It, along with many other applications, is now being evaluated by the PSC for merit and we hope to soon hear a positive answer. Many of you have already heard that Frontier will be filing Chapter 11 Bankruptcy in March. While this means they are reorganizing their debt, it is one added incentive to complete this project. As we have said before, keep your fingers crossed! By the time this article is printed, we hope to have news.

Robert Cornell, Manager

1157 Main Road, Washington Island, WI 54246

920-847-2541

info@wiecoop.com

Hours: Monday–Friday, 9 a.m.–5 p.m.

