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**SANTEE ELECTRIC  
 COOPERATIVE NEWS**

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A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

## From Humble Beginnings



**I HAVE SUCH** a fondness for this electric cooperative that I have found myself lately wanting to dig into its history. Nothing tells you more about an organization than learning about how it began. I've had an opportunity to read through some of the early

documentation, and I wanted to share a bit with you from the first couple of years of Santee Electric Cooperative Inc.'s (SEC) existence.

SEC began on Dec. 14, 1939. Back then, we didn't even have an office, so the first several meetings were held in the office of the cooperative's attorney. Since electric cooperatives were completely new, they were referred to as "Projects," and our first attorney, Philip C. Stoll, was called the project's counsel. That board meeting was presided over by SEC's first chairman, Mr. W. L. Harrington, and they had quite a lot on the agenda for that meeting.

The Articles of Incorporation of the cooperative were approved by the trustees. They elected board officers and adopted the first bylaws of the cooperative, a corporate seal, and SEC's official application form and membership certificate. In order to help oversee such a large construction project, the cooperative needed to hire an engineering firm, and J. B. McCrary Engineering was chosen for this task. The first cooperative employees were right-of-way and easement solicitors, and one of these initial solicitors was Mr. Basil Ward, who would later serve as manager of the cooperative for 30 years.

In later meetings, the board set about the task of finding an employee to manage the cooperative. In those days, however, this person's title was project superintendent. After an in-depth search,

the board chose Walter Blackwell on Feb. 7, 1940. Of course, you will notice from these dates that the United States had World War II to deal with during this time, and Mr. Blackwell—who was a reserve officer in the U.S. Army—was ordered to report to active duty on May 26, 1941. After requesting applications, the board chose Mr. J.W. Wallace to serve as project superintendent in Mr. Blackwell's absence.

SEC's first office was a rental property on South Academy Street in Kingstree, which was rented for \$15 a month! SEC hired its first lineman—Mr. J.P. Days—on May 1, 1940. Our first annual meeting of the membership was Dec. 2, 1940.

Typical salaries averaged \$100 a month, and most employees had to drive their own cars for cooperative business—to be reimbursed at 5 cents per mile! Our first loan with the federal government was for \$1.5 million. That's what it took to build the first electric system SEC operated. Today, that would not even build one substation.

One thing has not changed, though. The membership fee back in 1939 was \$5, just like it is today. Back then, \$5 was a considerable investment, and all those membership fees helped pay for the first electric grid. Today, the \$5 membership fee serves more as a reminder of the link between cooperative and member-owner, a reminder of where we came from and what is still most important to us.

**ROBERT G. ARDIS III**

President and Chief Executive Officer