




RITA BLANCA ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

During the settlement of the Northwest Panhandle, people who ventured from the small towns to live in rural areas found themselves in the dark, literally. They no longer had the convenience of electricity, but were dependent on lanterns or wind-powered generators. The private power company that serviced the towns of the Northwestern Panhandle felt it was unable to extend its lines into the sparsely settled rural areas. Something had to be done to get the people of the area out of the darkness.

Extension agents of Dallam, Sherman, Moore and Hartley counties held meetings with area farmers and ranchers to discuss the possibility of Rural Electrification Administration (REA) assistance. If taken advantage of, the assistance would secure money to be used for an electric co-op specifically for the rural residents.

The REA's response to this was that an electric co-op was not feasible in the area at this time. People in Washington, DC said there were not enough residents and houses for it to be worthwhile. However, the residents continued to hold meetings. Leaders of the four counties and Northeastern New Mexico sent representatives to Washington, DC to plead with the REA for approval of the co-op. Asa Willis, a longtime leader in Texas politics, along with others, contributed money to help pay expenses. The formative group continued to fight for their cause.

An agreement was reached with Southwestern Public Service that they would sell Texline's electric distribution facilities to the co-op, if one was formed. Armed with this agreement, Willis made another trip to Washington, DC and received tentative approval from the REA for the formation of a co-op.

New-Tex Electric Co-op was the original name of the organization, taking the first parts of both states' names that made up the expected service area. On July 12, 1945, a group of provisional directors met in Dalhart with representatives from the REA to discuss the issue. At the meeting, it was announced that the New Mexico portion would actually be serviced by the electric co-op at Springer, N.M. The directors Asa Willis, Sam Wohlford, R.C. Buckles, R.C. Johnson, F.S. Makeig, James Morton, Jr., Clyde Lathem, Fred M Finch, and Cark Kuper were left to deal with the withdrawal of New Mexico.

A name change for the organization was in order. Suggested names included Top of Texas, West Plains, Palo Duro, Four-County and Rita Blanca. The directors decided, and Rita Blanca Electric Co-op was born. However, incorporation and application approval were still to come.

On September 4th, the Articles of Incorporation were approved by the Texas Secretary of State. Eleven days later, the board approved the constitution and bylaws. The first nine members of the cooperative were the incorporating directors and they were duly accepted for membership on the same date. Willis earlier had been named president. Other officers included Buckles as vice president and Finch as secretary-treasurer.

The co-op's office was temporarily set up at the corner of 3rd and Denrock in Dalhart. A committee was appointed to find a more permanent location. With help from the Dalhart Chamber of Commerce, they found a building at the corner of 6th and South Highway 87. It was declared suitable and the co-op leased it for five years. This building was later purchased by Rita Blanca, remodeled and a vault was installed. It was home of the co-op until 1962. The headquarters was located in this office building on north Highway 87 for 53 years. Seeing the need for a larger facility, construction was completed on a 14,000 square state-of-the-art building in August, 2015. Located directly south of the old building, this new facility houses 33 employees.

The first loan application of \$250,000, was submitted to the REA in March, 1946. It was needed to build power lines that would serve 262 customers. At this time, more than 500 members had applied for service.

Early in 1947, with approval from the REA, an agreement was established with Southwestern Public Service for Rita Blanca Electric Co-op for Rita Blanca Electric Co-op to purchase the electric services of Texline. At that time, 148 electric meters were receiving service in Texline. Later the Texline water system was purchased also. Another acquisition was made in June 1947 when an electric line to the West Air Base at Dalhart was bought from Southwestern Public Service. This made Rita Blanca electricity available to the Rehm community.

During the establishment of the co-op, George C. Shearer had served as coordinator until a permanent manager could be hired. In April 1947, the co-op employed Ralph B. Wadley, who worked as manager for seven months. Secretary Finch then served as manager until Glynn W. Scott assumed the position. Scott passed away in 1953 and was replaced with R.L. Elliott, Jr. He retired in 1977 and was succeeded by Bob Elliott, who retired in 1998. Aubrey L. Neff, former manager of engineering for Rita Blanca, retired as President/CEO at the end of 2007. Brent Wheeler, who worked for Rita Blanca in the 1980's, is the current President/CEO.

In the history of the co-op, there have only been six chairmen of the board: Asa R. Willis, R.C. Buckles, Luther Browder, Bobby G. Green, Wallace N. Bridwell and current Chairman, Carl Finch.

The first annual meeting that included all members was held at the XIT Ranger's Club in Dalhart on February 3, 1949. At this meeting, members requested that telephone service also be available to the rural areas. This resulted in the formation of the XIT Rural Telephone co-op, which shared Rita Blanca's facilities and employees until 1972, and management until 1973.

By the late 1950s, Rita Blanca had grown to approximately 1,200 members. The co-op continued to grow, and in the 1980's there was a boom in the area land use. A loan from the Rural Utilities Service (formerly the REA) of over \$2 million was project to last for two years of construction, but because of rapid growth, it was used in only one year.

Improvements are constantly being made to keep pace with the increasing demand for electric power. An example of this is Rita Blanca's joining of Golden Spread Electric Cooperative, Inc (GSEC). GSEC consists of Rita Blanca Electric and 15 other co-ops. Rita Blanca customers get the quality of local service with the support of a large, power entity. This should ensure customers of great, personal service and competitive rates.

We want to thank all of our customers for making this possible. Being a co-op, all customers are active member/owners who have voting powers and receive dividends from the organization's margins. We are proud of all that we have accomplished together through this cooperative.