

Excerpt from Interview with Orion Samuelson

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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Samuelson: As I tell people today, there are certain dates in our life that are important—birthdays, wedding anniversaries—but for me, an important day was April 11, 1948. That's the day that the Rural Electric Co-Op came to our farm and hooked us up to electricity. And I'm sure this was duplicated many times over, all over the country, and many times prior to when we got electricity, because they were ready to hook us up just before World War II broke out, and when the war broke out, copper was taken for the war effort, and so there was no wire available, and so we weren't able to get the farm wired for electricity, and the Rural Electric said, you know, "We're not able to do much in the way of adding new farm customers." So it took a while after the war ended before we got back to manufacturing wire and getting the farm wired, the barn and the house.

And so April 11 of 1948, they hooked us up, and it literally changed our life. Literally. My mother threw away these heavy flatirons that she'd use to iron. We got a refrigerator. No longer had to put perishables in the basket at the end of the rope in the cistern. I was able to stand at the foot of the stairs, flick a switch, and there was light in the upstairs bedroom. And we no longer had to milk cows by hand; we got a milking machine. We no longer had to put cans of milk into cold water to keep fresh; we now had a milk cooler that we could do that. And it just changed everything for us. You know, that had to be repeated time and again across America. I think the Rural Electric Co-Ops that brought power to rural America probably brought the biggest cultural change in the history of rural America, because it just so totally changed lives and made work a lot easier and a lot more enjoyable. And I suddenly had a radio that you didn't have to worry about a battery going dead on you and not being able to replace it. And I like music, and until that happened, one of my great Christmas gifts was a small box wind-up phonograph, where I'd play these 78 rpm records; now I had an electric phonograph. It just totally changed everything.

