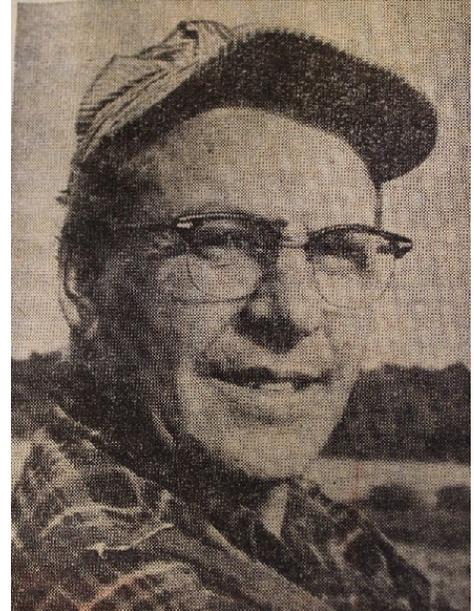


A Cooperative Treasure

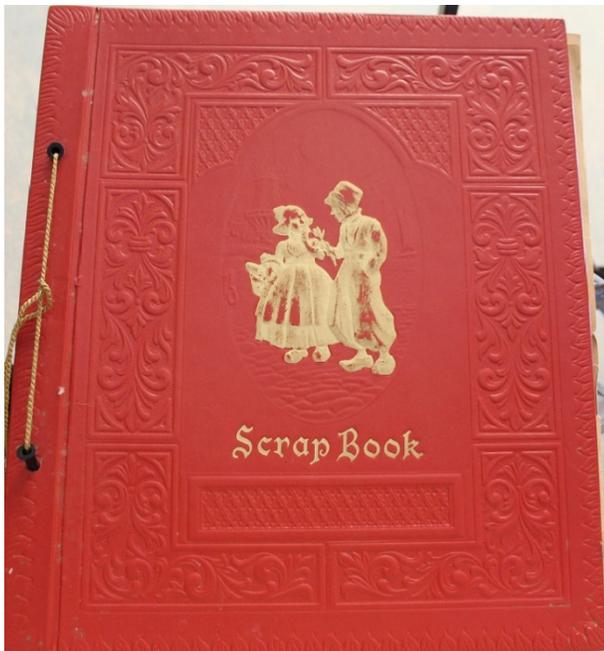
By William L. Caynor Sr., Price Electric CEO

Most recently, Larry Revak, the grandson of Joe Loula, stopped by the office to bequeath a scrapbook created and kept by his grandfather Joe. Joe was a Price Electric board member from 1949 to 1956 and typical of the generation in the Northwoods at the time; being of strong, hearty and courageous Czech descent. This generation of men and women were willing to take a chance on hard work, in a sometimes-unrelenting northern environment, to define their family's destiny. Joe started to work after elementary school when he took a job as a lumberjack, making \$18 a month. In 1929, Joe's perseverance and hard work paid off as he was able to purchase a 200-acre dairy farm in the Town of Worcester. By 1950, he was one of only 31 members utilizing 500 kWh's or more a month on the publicized electric farms. Joe was no ordinary sort, for one of his favorite hobbies was to read, and through this interest, he compiled a 1,000-book library in his home and thus he could choose creative works from his favorite authors of Upton Sinclair and Sinclair Lewis. Joe's community service began as a board member for the Town of Emery. He also served on the Worcester School Board. Although Joe was too young to participate in World War I, he did join the National Guard at the age of 17, in 1918, and was called out during the 1919 Chicago race riots that culminated in more than 500 injuries and 38 deaths.



Joe's scrapbook begins in 1949 when the Cooperative was in its ninth year of infancy and going through tremendous change and growth discomforts. L.E. O'Brien was hired as the manager, and through the voter's

election of 500 members in attendance, five of the nine board members were replaced by new candidates. One of these new board members was Joe Loula, representing Worcester. Joe exclaimed that he was, "a firm believer of the co-op movement because it's a non-profit organization and has improved the standard of living all over the world." At the time, the Cooperative was still struggling with wartime and post-wartime shortages hampering the progress of new line construction to bring electricity to the remote service regions. The development of new powerlines was limited by the scarcity of materials, manpower, and the abundant number of lines requiring construction. Some residents even came out to assist the Cooperative and contracted employees in the construction. Joe was one of these, wherein 1941 he earned 35 cents an hour, trimming trees, digging pole holes, and helping to string the overhead conductors. By the following year, his farm received electricity, but because wartime building



construction materials were limited, Joe had to wait to build his home. By the beginning of August of 1949, 2,217 members were connected to the new lines being extended, and the middle of the following month expected 125 more. The Cooperative was expanding its lines of connection by leaps and bounds. That summer, its primary operational concerns were lengthy outages associated with the July storms and low voltage issues caused by Lake Superior District Power's Ladysmith generators. A generator was out of service, and thus the plant could not generate enough power to supply the load on the Cooperative's system. The Cooperative's substation transformer taps were adjusted as high as possible to accommodate the drop in voltage, but most members still received lower than standard voltages at their homes.

In 1951, the present, but new, Cooperative headquarters was constructed, and new lines were extended into Boyd's Mason Lake Resort, Sailor Creek Flowage, and Wintergreen Lake areas. The following year, L.E. O'Brien was involved in a severe car accident and was replaced by Erwin Nelson, as the new manager.

By 1953, union negotiations resulted in a six-cent pay increase for outside employees who now received from \$1.10 to \$1.68 an hour. Two years later, the Cooperative achieved its first year of positive margins. Over the previous 14 years, the Cooperative amounted \$142,489 in negative margins. Operations were certainly improving as new members interconnected to the new grid and purchased electricity to support the development and maintenance of the distribution system. By 1956, new amendments to the Bylaws illustrated the end of Joe's involvement with the board as a two-term limit was instituted. Although Joe could have stayed for another two-terms because of the timing, he decided not to seek reelection with the statement, "it is best to give someone else a chance to serve so he can become better acquainted with the operations of the Cooperative."

Joe Loula is a superb example of the strength and determination of our early pioneers who blazed the trail in shaping Price Electric Cooperative in its founding, and we are so proud to possess a portion of his memories and this era of our history. Thank you, Larry, for your kind donation. This scrapbook will be placed in the Cooperative's archives, but I couldn't resist sharing it with all of you. This scrapbook is certainly a Cooperative Treasure.