

18, 1946, they received their first loan contract for \$206,995 to finance construction of transmission and distribution lines, approved the following November.

It was time to set up an office and officially open for business. At the April 1, 1946, board meeting, Luther Riddle was selected as their first choice among the five candidates for manager.

Luther Riddle was born and raised on Jones Creek near the Riddle Bridge named for his grandfather, Eliza Riddle. For a while, he taught at area schools and then attended college at the School of Mines in Rolla and Washington University in St. Louis majoring in business and public administration. While in St. Louis, he joined the naval reserves and in 1940 was called to active duty in the U.S. Navy. He worked in aviation, radio, a new-fangled invention called radar, and as an electrician during his five years of service. In 1945 Luther returned home from the navy and headed to Kansas City to find work at the Federal Aviation Administration when A. W. Davis, one of the original directors of the co-op, suggested he apply for the manager's job at Gascosage.

The board's choice for manager received REA approval and Luther was instructed to assume his duties as manager on June 17, 1946, at a salary of \$200 per month. He was also to purchase necessary office furniture, fixtures, supplies, and equipment; to rent an office; and purchase a truck. He selected an office in a building owned by Edwin "Birdie" Russell in Dixon, purchased a 1 1/2-ton truck, and with his customary frugality, scrounged the rest. "There weren't any desks available so I went down to the bank and Ray Stevens gave me a desk," Luther recalled years later. "Then I went down to Gilbert's Furniture Store and bought two chairs. I gave \$2.00 a piece for them." Myrtle Creech was hired as the first office employee and Robert E. Smith as lineman. The board agreed to pay Luther 5¢ per mile for traveling to and from meetings.



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They were starting a new business from the ground up and a lot of decisions had to be made, particularly where customer service was involved. The board decided the cooperative would furnish the meter, meter socket, and all wiring on the service pole including a service breaker and a service pole was installed. If a meter was to be placed on the house, the cooperative would furnish the meter and meter socket only. They also decided to have a cooperative employee do the house wiring inspection at the time of meter installation at no cost to the member. On March 19, 1947, the co-op extended the boundary further to include Phelps County.

The first lines delivering power purchased from Sho-Me Power Corporation were built in 1947. By that fall, about twenty-five people on approximately twenty miles of line near Iberia received electricity for the first time and were Gascosage's first consumers. The first family to "turn on the lights" lived on Highway 17 and Luther Riddle recalled their stunned reaction. "I told them they could turn on the electric," he said, "but the family was eating dinner at the time and they were afraid to turn on the power. So I flipped the switch and a light came on over the table. The wife's first reaction was 'It's so bright, turn it down.'"

Though the board originally intended to begin annual meetings in 1946, the first was held on September 25, 1947, in the co-op's office. Manager Riddle proudly reported, "Today we are opening nearly thirteen miles of line and are serving 270 customers in Miller and Pulaski Counties. Your Cooperative has under construction twenty-eight miles of rural line to serve seventy-seven customers and final plans for the construction of a total of 200 miles of rural line. In addition, your Cooperative has received approval for the construction of 200 more miles making a total of 400 miles to serve rural farms.

The co-op moved to a new location in 1947, in a building east of Veasman Hardware. (In 1953, the co-op's office moved a couple doors down to Dixon's American Legion Building.) Three office positions were added: Mary June Hamilton was bookkeeper, Deloris Humphrey Eads was billing clerk, and Norma Veasman was hired as secretary. In August of that year, Luther explained in a newspaper article, "Material orders have been placed approximately one year ago for the construction of 200 miles of line." Slow delivery of materials was causing consternation among those folks who were now more eager than ever to enjoy the benefits of electricity. Invoking the REA's "area coverage program" based on the belief that every farmer and rural homeowner was entitled to highline electric service, Luther assured them they would receive electricity as soon as humanly possible.

(NOTE: In 1956 Gascosage moved into their new headquarters on Ellen Street at the southern edge of Dixon. In 2019 the Cooperative completed a major renovation and expansion to the facility. According to the Gascosage website in 2019, Gascosage is owned by the consumer-members and currently serves more than 10,000 homes, farms, businesses and industries in the counties of Camden, Maries, Miller, Phelps and Pulaski, with more than 1,500 miles of electric power lines.)

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Great Minds discuss ideas. Average
Minds discuss events. Small Minds
discuss people.
— Eleanor Roosevelt

