

It's easy to get along with Harry Davidson—just don't make fun of his mules. According to him, you could do a lot worse than having a mule for a pet. You could have a horse for instance.

Davidson, who lives on a small farm south of Nashville, has one of the best team of mules in the state—maybe the nation, considering the declining mule population. At least, when he took his team to the National Mule and Donkey Jubilee in Indiana recently, they were good enough to win the half-mile chariot race and place fifth overall in the halter or show class from among 1,400 animals.

The mules' home is located 27 miles west of Mt. Vernon, headquarters of Tri-County Electric Cooperative, Inc., which supplies electric power for the farm.

Davidson doesn't exaggerate about his mules' capabilities. In fact, he has a tendency to understate them—which often leads the interviewer to ask one question too many.

"I got a stallion out in the pasture," Davidson said, "but he hasn't got much of a bloodline."

The first mistake. "How far back can his bloodline be traced?"

"Well, he is a great-great grandson of General Ulysses S. Grant's horse, Leopard," Davidson said. "Guess he does go back a ways, doesn't he?"

Or, "Got me a mule across the road, but he can't jump very high and he's pretty slow, too."

Haven't you learned. "How high and how slow?"

"Well, he once cleared a four-foot fence and did a quarter mile in 26 seconds," Davidson said. "Never seen any other mule jump that high. And the speed is up to a quarterhorse's."

When Davidson talks about his mules in a serious vein though—listen. He probably knows as much about them as any self-proclaimed expert. He has been around mules most of his 58 years. Davidson's father spent his life breaking mules he had purchased and Davidson picked up his father's habit early.

"I had my first mule when I was six," Davidson said. "When I was 12, I traded a heifer for a mule and the mule for an old car. Been swapping ever since then."

Davidson now has only four mules. A heart attack in 1971 forced him to sell most of the 13 head he had. Eventually though, the heart attack

also forced him to give up his job as a railroad switchman in St. Louis, so he's back in the mule-raising business again—if on a much smaller scale.

"Before I had the heart problems, I used to do some serious swapping," Davidson said. "Figure I probably traded more than 300 in the years I been around them. Anymore though, it's just a hobby with me."

Davidson only recently has begun entering his mules in competitions. And they have done exceptionally well, even though his mules are considerably smaller than most of the mules and ponies they compete against.

"These are 'mini-mules,' Davidson said. "They are a cross between a donkey and a pony instead of a donkey and a regular-sized horse. The biggest one stands an inch under four-feet high, the smallest is only 45 inches tall."

In another era and area, the mules Davidson breeds would be called cotton mules, bred in the Old South to do work in cotton rows that a large horse could not negotiate.

Which brings us rather obliquely to the horse. In many ways, Davidson feels the mule is maligned when compared to his larger cousin, the horse. According to him, it should be the other way around.

"The mule is superior to the horse, intelligence-wise and most other ways," Davidson said. "For one thing, they are easier to train than a horse. I can train a mule to do things in one year it will take a horse three years to figure out.

"That's why you mostly see trick mules in rodeos instead of trick horses. Same thing with being used as a pack animal. Mules are just more surefooted going up a mountain slope, and they are about half-again as strong as a horse of the same size."

"Mules aren't stupid, but the people that own them can be," Davidson said. One story he uses to illustrate the point is about a mule pulling a load of hay.

"The mule pulled until it couldn't pull anymore, which made the farmer mad. He lit a fire under the mule to get it going. Well, the mule moved alright. It moved until the fire was under the wagon and the hay was blazing.

"Same way with hurting a mule," Davidson added. "Besides showing how dumb some people are, it also proves how intelligent the

(continued on page 16)

HARRY DAVIDSON IS BASICALLY JUST AN . . .





Spoon River Electric News

SPOON RIVER ELECTRIC CO-OPERATIVE, INC.

309-647-2700

CANTON, ILLINOIS

A year of progress and problem solving was highlighted at Spoon River Electric Co-operative's 37th annual members' meeting held recently.

Nearly 750 members and guests heard President Ralph Erb of Ipava predict that the era of cheap electric energy available in unlimited quantities was a thing of the past.

"Now with the inflationary trends of fuel, labor and materials and the effect they are having on the electrical industry, it is becoming a matter of concern as to whether or not there will be an adequate supply of power in the future," Erb added.

However, Spoon River officials are making sure that their members will always have a dependable supply of electrical power.

Erb said a study is being conducted on the possibility of forming a statewide generation and transmission cooperative. This would combine the power supply needs of most of the cooperatives in the state, not only for the purpose of benefiting from the economies of scale, but to assure additional service reliability in the period of energy shortages ahead.

"For the present and for some time into the future," Manager William H. McCamey said, "I'm afraid the continued rising cost of fuels, materials and services will be reflected in the monthly billing."

However, he assured the members that the cooperative will do its best to continue providing dependable electric power at the lowest possible cost.

Members, during the business session, elected Floyd E. Wolf, a Liverpool Township grain and livestock farmer, to a three-year term as director. Re-elected to serve with Wolf on the nine-man board were Edwin H. Barrett of Lewistown and Erb.

During lighter moments of the meeting, The Melody Makers and Bill Bailey's Banjos entertained. Ladies of the Homemaker's Extension Association Board served refreshments in the high school cafeteria following the meeting.



Spoon

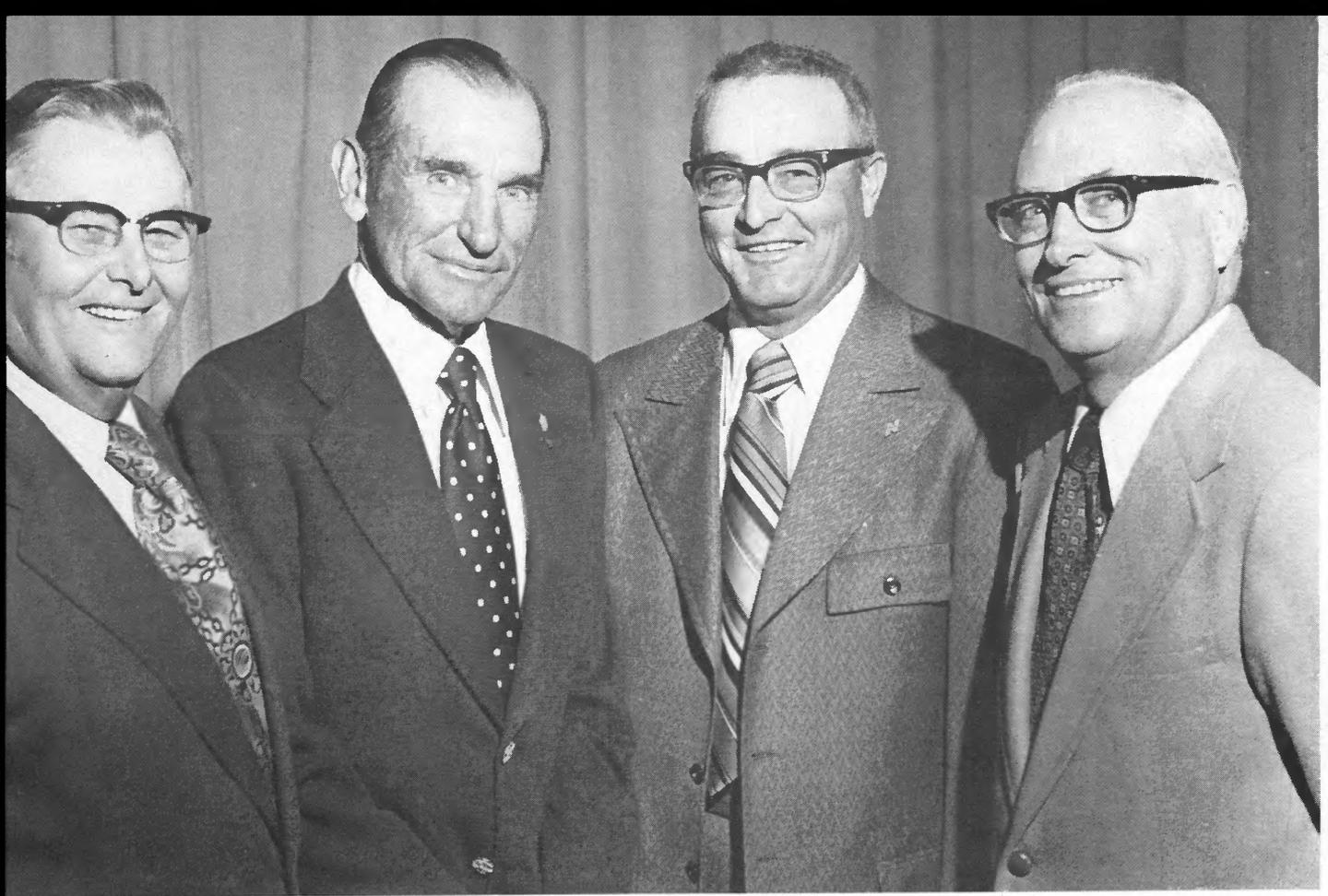


TOP LEFT: Annual meetings are places to share a smile. TOP RIGHT: Re-elected directors Ralph E. Erb (left) and Edwin H. Barrett with new director Floyd E. Wolf and Manager William H. McCamey. FAR RIGHT: Re-elected President Ralph Erb addresses the crowd. RIGHT: Music was provided by the Melody Makers. ABOVE: Directors reports covered Spoon River Electric Co-operative's past and future.

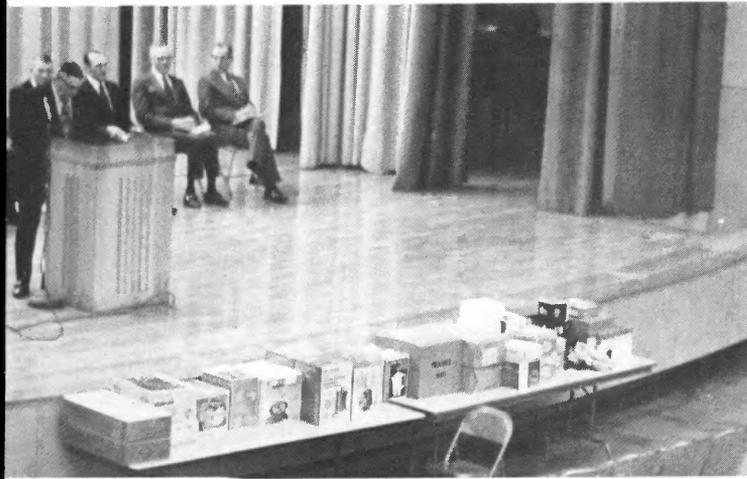
Merry Christmas



FROM THE BOARD,
MANAGER
AND EMPLOYEES OF
SPOON RIVER ELECTRIC
CO-OPERATIVE, INC.



River Prepares for the Future



Is it true that Santa Claus lives on Bannon Hill near Grayville rather than the North Pole?

Not really, but one of his helpers who has portrayed the jolly old gent for the past 49 years does live there. And from time to time he receives mail addressed: Santa Claus, Route 1, Bannon Hill, Grayville, Illinois.

Santa's helper is Willard Bannon. And with almost a half century of ho-ho-hoing, one might say he has quite a bit of experience under his wide, black belt.

Bannon, a director of Wayne-White Counties Electric Cooperative, started as Santa's Grayville area representative in 1925. He enjoyed it so much he hasn't been able to resist donning that fancy red suit since.

Bannon's interest in portraying Santa came after seeing an uninteresting portrayal by another of Santa's helpers.

"What bothered me," Bannon said, "was the person, not wanting to give away his identity, wouldn't speak. A Santa without a voice isn't worth a hoot—I felt I could do a better job so I gave it a try.

"I soon realized it wasn't an easy job to be an interesting Santa. I remember waiting to make one of my first appearances and I noticed an elderly couple walking out. Asking where they were going, they

replied 'Santa Claus is not for old folks.'

"Since then I've tried to make my program interesting to young and old alike. I've found out the red suit alone fascinates children, but the older people tend to listen to what you say."

Bannon works out a special program for every appearance. His repertoire includes stories, joke gifts and various types of letters to Santa.

"As far as Santa's concerned," Bannon said, "everyone's a child—men are boys and ladies are little girls. Just referring to an elderly lady as a little girl creates a jovial atmosphere.

"Whatever I do, I just try to keep the program interesting," Bannon said.

And interesting his programs must be, for he has played the role many times in an area from Fairfield to as far as Evansville, Indiana.

He counted 10 churches and eight schools he has played many times. Sometimes he plays as many as three different engagements in one night.

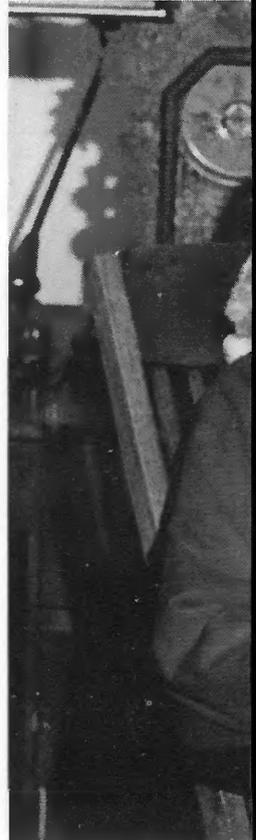
"Santa, like a mailman, has to go rain, ice or snow," Bannon said. His wife does the driving when he is in costume and she keeps track of his engagements. She also makes, repairs and maintains his fancy red suit. He has worn out several over the years.

Bannon proudly says he has never missed a year in nearby Fortney. His endless list of other engagements include the Edwards County Fair, Grayville Christmas festivities, service organization parties and many private parties. Bannon has been Santa to five generations of one area family.

He is also proud of the times he has been able to bring Christmas to less fortunate families because of the generosity of many people in the Grayville area.

The years have provided many memorable experiences, some humorous. He recalled one school program where he was supposed to appear, and when dressing found the pants to his costume had been left at home. "Luckily, it was a short drive and I had enough time," Bannon said.

"Children can be mischievous at times," he said recalling an incident after another school program. "Three 12-year-old boys decided they would disrobe Santa and were waiting for



Grayville Area Resident

Nearly 50 Years of Ho