



SandHill Marketing photo. Advertisements and artwork from *The Richland Observer* archive.

## **Spangler/Metz Blacksmith Shop – Highway 56 – Gillingham (Marshall Township).**



S.H. 'Herb' Spangler. Shirley (Spangler) Steiner photo.

The blacksmith's profession of working wrought iron is over 3,000 years old. Originally, he was a maker of tools, hardware, nails and other useful and decorative iron implements including horseshoes. The blacksmith was important to 19th and early 20<sup>th</sup> century life, especially in rural America, and was often called upon to repair damaged equipment, forging new pieces whenever necessary. In the early 19th century, manufactured cast iron objects began replacing those handcrafted of wrought iron, and the trade diminished. The blacksmith then assumed the farrier's duties in addition to his own. His work became mainly concerned with the shoeing of horses, carriage work and repair of implements. In the closing years of the 19th century, repair of the new fragile horseless carriages became an additional duty, and the blacksmith shop was, in reality, the original service station.

The equipment of the late 19th century blacksmith included the forge with its fire for heating metal, the bellows for forcing air through the coals and creating the desired heat, a barrel of water for quenching red hot iron, and the anvil on which the metal was pounded, shaped, and formed.

The Richland County village of Gillingham still has its blacksmith shop, although most people wouldn't recognize it as such. The first blacksmith shop in Gillingham was located at the intersection of Highway 56 and the town road leading to the Methodist church and was operated by Monroe Hendricks. Monroe Hendricks' son, Merwin, built the building described in our narrative sometime in the early 1920s and his father operated it until he died in 1926. Merwin continued the business in the new building until 1938 when it was sold to S.H. 'Herb' Spangler.



**The Spangler Blacksmith shop on the move to its present location in Gillingham. The shop was jacked up on rollers and pulled along Highway 56 by Guy Friday's Trucking Service and placed on a stone foundation where it could be connected to the REA lines. Mary Ann Metz photo.**

Gaining access to electricity was the reason Spangler moved the building. Merwin Hendricks had built the new building on leased land and the owner refused to grant an easement to the newly formed Richland Cooperative Electric Association to install a power line to Spangler's shop. Spangler continued his business at the new location doing general blacksmith work such as shoeing horses, rebuilding wagons, making wagon hubs and sharpening plow shares and sickles. Ownership passed through a number of people including Phillip McNamer in 1945 who purchased the building from Spangler and added pumping gas and welding to the business. Interestingly enough, Mrs. Kenneth Pauls operated the Gillingham Post Office out of McNamer's shop for six months in 1948 until it moved to the Pauls store next door. Don Moran ran a general blacksmithing business there from 1949 until 1957. Leslie McBain, Moran's father-in-law obtained the building in 1957.

McBain was well-known widely as a carpenter and cabinet maker for his high quality work. He worked steadily at his craft long after most people retire repairing and refinishing furniture as well as teaching woodworking to 4-H members.





**Most of the blacksmithing tools still remain in the shop including the forge and anvil. This includes the shafts and pulleys that operated much of the McBain Cabinet Shop. SandHill Marketing photo.**

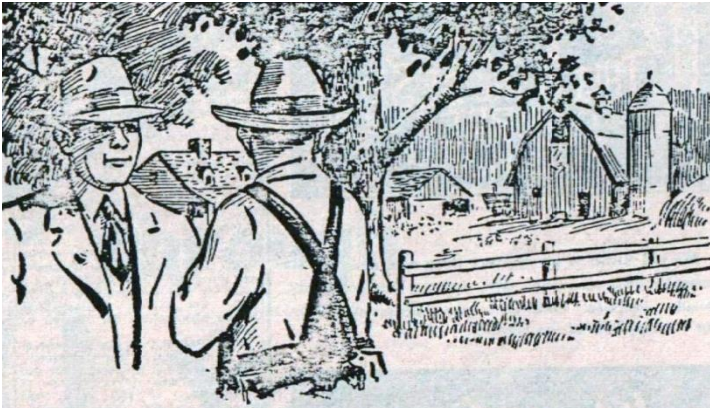
McBain was also known as a talented vocalist and musician; playing in the Richland Center, Viola and Bloom City bands for 50 years and singing in various area quartets as soloist at funerals. In the fall of 1975 McBain sold the shop to Mr. and Mrs. Walter Metz. Mary Ann Metz is the current owner of the building and supplied much of the information contained in the narrative.

The Spangler/Metz Blacksmith Shop has a unique connection to one of the most important developments in the history of Wisconsin and Richland County; the electrification of its rural areas in the late 1930s.

As the financial squeeze of the Depression affected the entire nation, a growing urban and suburban population demanded more efficient food production from the nation's farmers - an efficiency that many believed could be gained through rural electrification. Many members of Congress and farm leaders believed that farmers needed electrical service under conditions and prices that would allow for its full and productive use and waiting for commercial electric companies to provide services was a too expensive and inefficient solution. So, in 1935, President Franklin Roosevelt established the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) to help farmers meet the growing need for power. Although, like many New Deal programs, the REA began as a program of unemployment relief, it soon became primarily a lending and investment agency. The government began to encourage and to grant preference to non-profit, cooperative organizations of farmers to develop their electrical transmission infrastructure.

The task of organizing rural electric cooperatives was generally left to local leaders; they organized meetings, collected fees, enrolled consumers, and worked with the REA on program details. The REA provided farmers with low-interest





## **REA - Making Rural Life More Comfortable, More Productive**

loans to help them build their own lines and provide their own electricity. On May 7, 1937, Wisconsin's first cooperative, Richland Electric Cooperative, went into service. The James Hanold farm near Boaz was the first home in the state to receive electricity from a REA-financed project. Wisconsin co-op leaders created the nation's first statewide association for rural electric cooperatives, printed the first publication for members, and founded an insurance company that provided coverage to most rural electrical cooperatives in the country. Within fifteen years, 90% of American farms had electricity. Electric cooperatives remain vital parts of the communities they serve.

As county agricultural agent, A.V. Miller spearheaded the campaign of Richland County farmers to organize the electric cooperative which, with the help of REA loans, brought electricity and a modern standard of living to Richland County's rural population. Miller was the

cooperative's first president, and served in that position until 1943.

As coordinator of Rural Electrification, Orland S. Loomis, a Progressive from Mauston in Juneau County, directed the support of the federal REA program. His efforts to encourage and help farmers set up co-ops to make use of the REA loan funds earned him the title of "Wisconsin's father of Rural Electrification." Loomis died in 1942, after his election as Governor, but before he could take office.

While rural electrification efforts began primarily to assist farmers, electric power also contributed to the growth of the tourist industry in northern Wisconsin. Resort owners realized that electricity would make the area more attractive to tourists, so the Bayfield cooperative established a special summer rate for these resorts. With affordable electricity, the tourist industry boomed in both the summer and winter.

*An Important Event in the History of Richland County - Be Sure You Attend This*

# **ELECTRICAL FAIR**

**AND**

# **CELEBRATION!**

*On the Beginning of the Rural Electrification Program in*

# **RICHLAND CENTER**



## Kittenball Game and Boxing Bouts

Boxing Bouts at 8:00 P. M., on Friday Night.

Make Entries With B. C. Davis, Richland Center

Lincoln Life Girls of Madison vs. Davis Hardware Girls at 8:00 P. M. Sunday.  
Ford V-8's vs. Bloomington CCC at 9:15 P. M. Sunday.

## Free Coffee Served on Sunday

You are urged to bring your picnic lunch Sunday, and spend the entire day at Krouskop Park. The Chamber of Commerce will furnish you with free coffee, and you will be treated royally all day. There will be lots to see, and the big exhibit tent will be open at all hours. Come—spend all day Sunday at Krouskop Park.

# SEE ACTUAL SETTING OF FIRST POLE

## Band Music By Two Bands

The famous Richland Center High School Band and the popular Yuba Band will be on hand to furnish music. These two fine musical organizations have arranged special music for this event and you'll not find a dull minute. Everyone in the county should make immediate plans to attend, for the committees have arranged an outstanding program.

## First Pole Set Sunday at 2:30

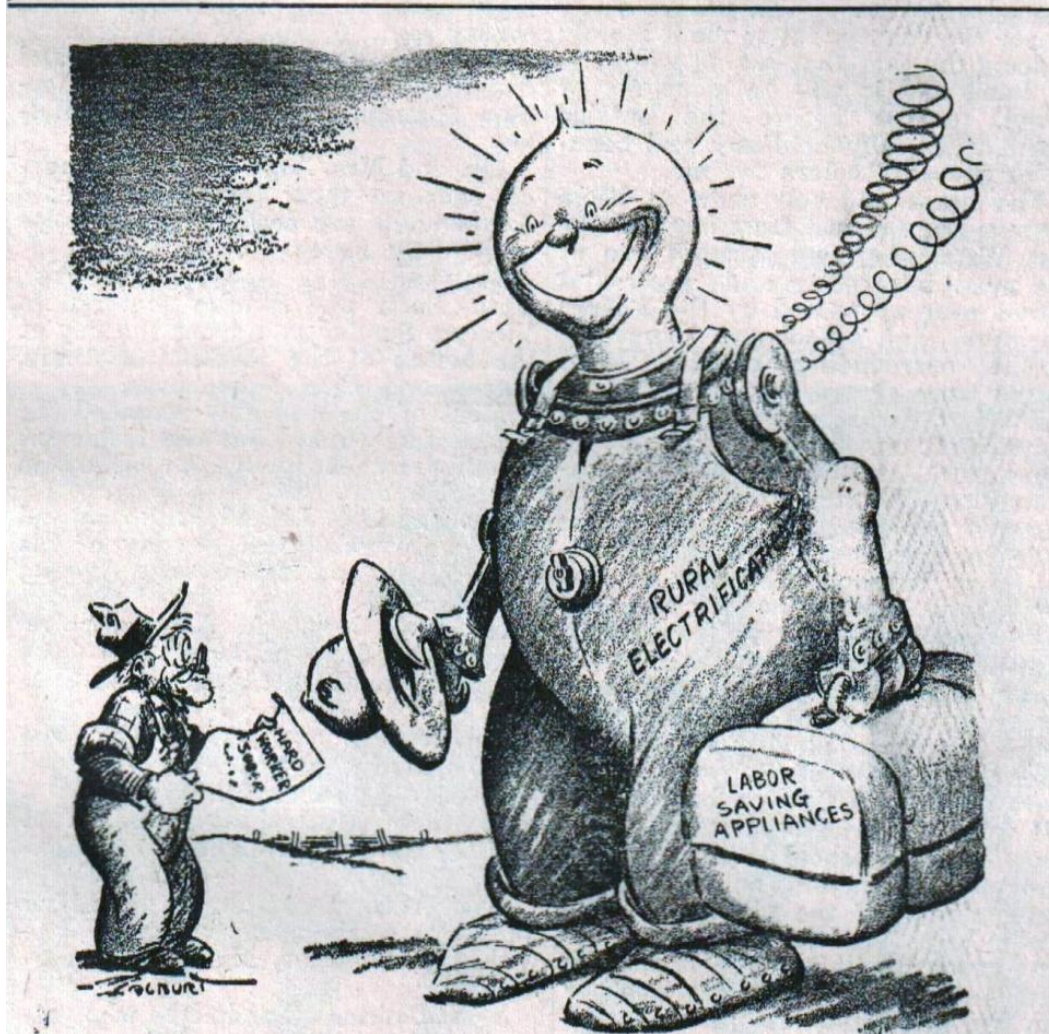
The first pole will be set at 2:30 Sunday afternoon, and there will be appropriate ceremonies at this all-important occasion. The pole, which will be one in the line that extends northward from Richland Center to Yuba, will be set in Krouskop Park, and officials of the Industrial Electric Corporation of New Orleans will be present to start the big job.

## Many Prominent Officials Present

The beginning of the rural electrification project in Richland county is creating interest all over Wisconsin, and also in Washington. For the actual start of the work, there will be present many prominent officials from the state and national REA offices, and you will want to hear their remarks. News reel companies will be on hand to take pictures of the affair too, so come and join in the celebration.

# See the Big Displays of Electrical Merchandise!!

## The Farmer's New Hired Hand







“ Eight firms were represented in the bidding when the proposals for the construction of the rural electrification project in the county were opened in the circuit court room. The actual construction of the rural electrification in the county was a huge task. The total of 239 miles of line to be constructed included 45 miles of three phase circuits, and 194 miles of single phase circuits. It would take 6,904 poles to hang the wires on that carried the “juice” to the farmers, and the volume of freight handled by the local railroad station would be greatly increased,” *The Richland Democrat* July 27, 1936.