



How 'Bout Them Punkins?

BY SHIRLEY DUKES

We have just about fallen all the way into fall, and what time of year can be more fun for decorating? The colors have changed from greens to vibrant oranges and golds. We have mowed the yard for the last time and put away the summer table decorations. It's time to start fresh with our fall decorations: Halloween, Thanksgiving or fall in general. There is absolutely no limit to what you can do with pumpkins in the fall.

As Sherri Littlejohn, with Littlejohn Produce, states, "The sky is the limit when it comes to decorating

with pumpkins. All you have to do is give them a setting. And when I say give them a setting, I'm talking about starting out with a bale of hay or just about anything out of the pasture or barn. Once you have a setting, the pumpkins will decorate themselves."

Sherri uses any number of inexpensive, and most of the time free and "priceless" items: old chairs, doors or windows; wooden fence pieces or

old gates or fence posts; old ladders and stumps; and certainly lots of scarecrows. Throw in a few leaves and cornstalks, and maybe some Indian corn and gourds, and you've got yourself a beautiful table centerpiece or yard art that is out of this world.

Sherri had quite a few really good suggestions concerning decorating with pumpkins. She said to remember that the pumpkins will begin to deteriorate as soon as you cut into them, so keep that in mind when planning the timing of your arrangement. Spraying them with bleach water will help deter the decline of the fruit. Covering them with a coat of lacquer or rubbing on a coat of vegetable oil will make them much more appealing to

look at, but this can only be done on indoor arrangements because this process will actually cook the arrangements if they are outdoors or in the sun for any time at all.

Sherri also gave me some very creative ideas on decorating with pump-

kins. She said the most important part is to pick out pumpkins or gourds that have a unique look about them. You can also find pumpkins and



gourds in a variety of colors, such as blue, green or orange. Mini pumpkins can be cut out and have votive candles placed inside, with the cut-off top propped against the side to give your candleholder some character. A larger pumpkin can be done the same way, but place a colorful mum inside instead of the candle. Topiaries using pumpkins and gourds with some Spanish moss nestled between them comprise a very attractive decoration. Mini pumpkins placed in a fish bowl of water with floating candles can make a cute table centerpiece. Any container or basket can be made into an elaborate or a simple arrangement. Just let your imagination run wild.

Sherri leaves us with this piece of decorating wisdom: "If you pick the right pumpkin and gourd, you won't have to do any decorating. They will decorate themselves." And I leave you with this: "Happy decorating, y'all!"



Keeping Winter Warm Calls for Fire Safety

The lower the temperature dips, the higher your chances for a fire in your home.

Nearly one-third of residential fires occur during the winter, the National Fire Protection Association reports. Several culprits mar the holidays with fires: Space heaters and woodstoves are obvious threats, but candles and overloaded outlets are guilty as well.

Prevent holiday fires by decorating carefully and paying a bit of extra attention to fire safety this winter.

Some tips:

- Have the chimney cleaned and inspected each year before winter use. Keep a tight-fitting screen on the fireplace.

- Burn only dry, well-seasoned wood in woodstoves. Do not burn trash inside, as it can start a chimney fire. Clean your fireplace or woodstove safely by putting ashes in a closed



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metal container and disposing of them outdoors.

- Electric space heaters may help you stay cozy when it's cold, but they can be dangerous. Replace your old heaters with newer models that have automatic shut-off protection. Keep

them away from curtains and other flammables; never put clothes or towels on an electric heater to speed drying or warm them up. Most important, teach your children to steer clear of the heaters.

- Don't overload outlets or extension cords for holiday lights.

- Extension cords are designed for temporary use, so pack them away when the season is over. Do not put extension cords under rugs or in walkways. Not only can they trip someone, but the wear on the cord could cause it to fray and become a fire hazard.

- Candles are a classic holiday decoration, but also a potential fire starter. If you use candles as part of a centerpiece, enclose the candle in a glass holder to protect the surrounding decorations. Keep candles off coffee tables, where they easily can be knocked over. Never leave a burning candle unattended.

THE POWER OF ONE

- Several of our states, including California, Idaho, Oregon, Texas and Washington, became states by just ONE vote.
- In 1948, Lyndon B. Johnson, our 36th president, became a U.S. senator by a ONE-vote margin.
- In the 1960 presidential election, ONE additional vote per precinct in Illinois, Missouri, New Jersey and Texas would have denied John F. Kennedy the presidency and put Richard M. Nixon in office eight years earlier.

We encourage you to exercise your right and privilege to vote and participate in the November 7 election.



Happy Thanksgiving from Comanche Electric Cooperative

The offices of Comanche Electric Cooperative will be closed November 23 and 24 in observance of Thanksgiving.

When the Lights Came On

This month begins our new series entitled “When the Lights Came On.” It began as a plea for memories of a momentous occasion in many people’s lives: the day that light magically shone in rural homes across America, thanks to electricity. I had asked for any remembrances of when electricity was delivered to rural Texas, in an effort to preserve a bit of history for those who had never have to do without electricity. The response has been wonderful and I am having the time of my life hearing the stories about electricity changing the lives of so many people. Thank you to all who have shared with their stories. There is still time for more stories, so if you have one to tell, please give me a call at 1-800-915-2533. I will come see you, take down your information, and put your story in a future issue of *Texas Co-op Power*. This month’s story was written by E.R. Walt, and is one chapter of a book he is writing for his children and grandchildren. Mr. Walt is a wonderful storyteller and I applaud him for preserving the history of his family for future generations. —Shirley Dukes

Thank You, Jesus, Mr. Rayburn and the REA!

BY E.R. WALT

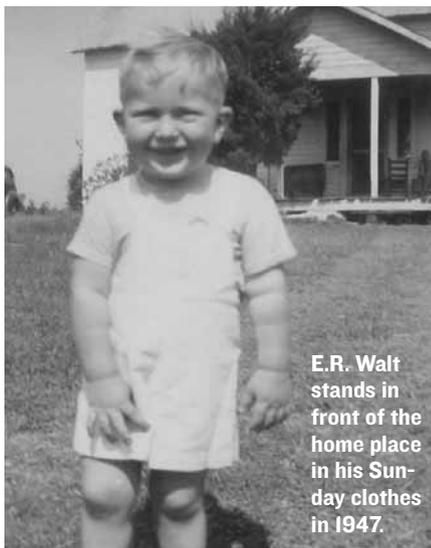
Our little blackland farm was so far off the paved road that electric power came to us late. Although my recollections of that early fall day in ’49 may be colored somewhat by the fact that I was just a barefoot, tow-headed boy not yet 5, I do remember it well. This is how it happened:

I had never heard the word “electricity” and didn’t know what it did or why we would want it, but Mama said Mr. Sam Rayburn and something called the “REA” would be bringing it all the way out from town to our farm. I had never heard of the REA either, but I knew Mr. Sam sure enough. He lived in the big white house on the road to Bonham and worked up in Washington. Folks around our part of the country thought he pretty well hung the moon and if he said electricity was coming, you might as well go buy a lamp.

The first we saw of the REA was

when they started planting a row of the biggest fence posts you ever saw across our cotton patch. They were as tall as the cottonwood tree down on the creek and had some black, funny smelling stuff smeared all over them, but I tried climbing them anyway. Mama was real gentle when she used her sewing needle to take the splinters out of my butt—and then she smacked me in the very same place. Mama was kinda hard to figure sometimes.

About that time my Uncle Albert showed up and announced that he was there to “war” the house. Then he commenced to string big, black wires all over, upstairs and downstairs, running them along the exposed beams and rafters of the high ceilings and through the walls. When he was finished, we had a wire hanging down in the center of each room with a little glass ball at the end of it, and from that dangled a string. Uncle Albert called them “light bulbs.” I didn’t let on, but I didn’t think those little things would hold enough coal oil to last through supper, much less all night. Turns out they did, though, and I never saw anyone have to fill them up. There was a little black plate on the wall in some rooms where he said you could “plug in” a radio or lamp or whatnot. He never explained to me that you shouldn’t try to pry one



E.R. Walt stands in front of the home place in his Sunday clothes in 1947.



Clockwise from left: My father, Raymond Walt (1906-2000), sister Doris Walt Lansford, brother Troyce Walt, my mother Orpha Walt, sister Ruth Ann Walt Carlisle, and brother Earnest Walt with yours truly, Eddie Walt, in the center.

of those plugs out with the blade of your Barlow knife, but I found that out later, all on my own.

Finally, the day came when the big row of poles with the shiny wires on them made it all the way to our place. Uncle Albert pulled a lever on a metal box on the side of the house and we all ran in to see what would happen next. When Mama pulled the little string, that dark old room lit up like the front of the picture show in town. I guess it must have hurt Mama’s eyes some because they were all bright and shiny and she kept blinking. She just looked at that light and said, “Thank you, Jesus!” over and over. Now, I was surprised that Jesus had thrown with Mr. Sam and the REA on this electricity deal. I figured he didn’t have much need for electricity since he had that big round light he always wore on top of his head, like in the pictures on the funeral home fans at church. Of course, he wasn’t wearing it in that picture where he was having supper with his friends. I thought maybe his Mama wouldn’t let him wear it in the house and he would need electric lights there.

After Mama turned on that first light, we kids ran from room to room, standing in kitchen chairs and pulling

the strings on every light in the house. That's when Mama, for the very first time said those words we all got real used to hearing after that. She said, "You kids turn off those lights. Ya'll are wasting electricity!"

Well I tell you, for a kid trying real hard to be a big boy and not afraid of the dark, those lights were something. That little glass ball lit up a whole room without those wavering, scary shadows in the corners like you got with coal oil lamps. My brothers and sisters could see to do their homework, too, but I think Mama liked them best of all. She liked to sew and quilt at night and it was hard to do those little bitty stitches by lamp light. Sometimes she would stick a finger and let out a few cuss words a little kid probably shouldn't hear. Of course, they weren't nothing I hadn't heard before when Grandpa would read the paper and start cussing the Republicans and the Yankees. Best I could tell, they were pretty much the same thing and were responsible for everything from the drought and Depression to the boll weevils and the poor price of cotton. After we got electricity, Mama didn't cuss quite so much while she was sewing, but it didn't seem to make much difference to Grandpa.

Good as the lights were, a few days later things got even better. My sister Ruth Ann and I were alone at the house while everyone else was in the field. Back then Ruthie was four years older than me, but I think we're even now. Anyway, a big truck pulled up in front of the house and some men from the hardware store in town brought in a big, shiny, International Harvester refrigerator. At least they called it a "refrigerator." From day one we called it an "ice-box" and some of us still do. They plugged it in and one of them showed us how to fill up a shiny tray with a dipper of water and then he put a jiggly little thing with a handle on top down in it. Then he put the whole thing the top of the refrigerator and said in an hour or two we could take it out, pull on the handle, and we would have "ice cubes." We had never heard the word "ice cube" before either, but

eventually, much to our surprise, that water did become ice. It probably would have happened much sooner if Ruthie and I hadn't pulled a kitchen chair up and stirred the water with our grubby little fingers every minute or so to see if anything was happening.

I tell you, we were two proud kids to be able to show Mama and Daddy how to make ice when they came in from the field. Mama looked suspiciously at a grey tinged ice cube with black specks suspended in it, then shrugged, threw it into a pint mason jar with a half dozen more and filled it up with sweet tea. You see, for us back then, iced tea was a luxury and a sometimes thing. We got it maybe when the preacher came over for Sunday dinner, or when the relatives who fled to California to escape the Dust Bowl came back to visit and brought a bag from the ice house in town. Even then, a little kid would get only a tiny sliver that soon melted. The ice the ice man delivered every few days went into the ice box to keep food from spoiling, and was too scarce and expensive to waste on something as frivolous as iced tea.

Eventually, many more wondrous things were to come to us powered by electricity. The radio would introduce us to Baby Snooks, The Great Gildersleeve, and Fibber McGee and Molly. A few years later a TV with a tiny tube in an enormous cabinet would add the terms "test pattern," "snow" and "vertical hold" to our vocabulary. But that night, as we ate supper, each of us had a big mason jar of sweet tea by the plate, filled to the top with the new-fangled ice cubes. I held mine in both hands as it sweated in the humid night air and left pools of water on the oil-cloth-covered dining table that glistened in the bright light from the bare bulb hanging from the ceiling. Then Mama smiled at me and dropped another ice cube in my glass. At that moment, I just couldn't imagine how life could possibly get any better than it was right then. When I went to bed that night and said my prayers, I made sure to thank Jesus for the electricity and then I asked Him if he wouldn't mind passing our thanks along to Mr.

SAM RAYBURN

Samuel Taliaferro Rayburn grew up on a 40-acre blackland farm in Fannin County, Texas, and went on to spend 48 years in the U.S.



Sam Rayburn

House of Representatives, with 17 of those as Speaker of the House. During his tenure, he was largely responsible for the creation of the Rural Electrification Administration in 1935, when only about 5 percent of Texas farms had electricity. He also dedicated a large portion of a major highway appropriation in 1944 to the construction of farm-to-market roads. Many farmers believed that "Mr. Sam" had personally been responsible for lifting them and their families out of both the dark and the mud.

At a 1955 REA meeting in Biloxi, Mississippi, he had this to say about rural electrification: "Some of you do not understand what it means to live away out somewheres on the side of the road where it is so lonesome, where you sit on the fence and just wish someone would come by, anybody to break the loneliness with no conveniences. The mothers and sisters will build up a big fire in the fireplace in July and August and scorch their arms and their faces putting smoothing irons down there. They rub their knuckles off on the washboard. You trim lamp wicks and you have to carry a lamp from one room to another, and have the chimney burst in your face. Now, most of those places have the comforts and conveniences of electrification and they are enjoying it. It has lifted them up more than anything in the world."

In November of 1961, I was in the field, picking the last of the year's cotton crop when I paused to watch helicopters pass overhead as they ferried four current, former and future United States presidents to the funeral in Bonham to honor "Mr. Sam" Rayburn.

Courtesy of "He Brightened Our Lives" by Sherri Deatherage Green, Texas Electric Cooperatives publication, July 2001.