



*Street Scene in Wilson, Arkansas, about 1940 (Jack Pryor)*  
*What do you notice about the houses along this street?*  
*What about the landscape around the houses?*  
*What can you tell about the boy in the photograph?*

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## Electricity Comes to the Country

Although the construction of Remmel Dam in 1924 brought hydro-electric power to the state, few Arkansans benefited from electricity during the 1920s and 1930s. Arkansas was not alone. When President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) in 1935 as one of his New Deal programs, less than four percent of all southern farms had electricity. That didn't mean people didn't want electricity, or that those producing it didn't want the folks on farms to have it. The problem was not its production but how to get the electrical power to the people. In 1937 workers put up the first electrical cooperative utility pole in Arkansas at Jacksonville. By 1940 more than 100,000 people in the state finally had electricity.

Even in 1941, on the eve of World War II, only thirty percent of the people in the United States had electricity. Although the REA worked to bring electricity to farmers, the end of WWII was what actually caused electrical construction to boom. However, it took most of the next decade (the 1950s) for all Southern farms to get wired. Now people could have running water, indoor toilets, and better lighting. They could also have refrigerators and electric-powered radios. In time they would even get that new-fangled invention called the television.

The majority of people in Arkansas were still farmers; a little more than twenty-five percent were tenant farmers who didn't own the land they farmed. By today's prices the cost of renting a house on an Arkansas farm was not much, between \$4 and \$17 a month, but when you consider that a lot of people didn't make much more than that every month, the prices seem much higher.

Arkansas did see some of its businesses and industries grow. The military facility at Camp Robinson expanded, and roads were graded and even paved throughout the state. Aluminum production, created in part by all the bauxite being mined in the state, increased as did natural gas production in the state.