

# F E R R I G U S

## FEATURES

Member Newsletter ♦ Fergus Electric Cooperative, Inc., Lewistown, MT ♦ [www.ferguselectric.coop](http://www.ferguselectric.coop)

## Local man shares rare collection of vintage power hammers

Story and photos by  
Charlie Denison,  
Contributing Writer

“Hey, Charlie, I’ve got a story for you,” Al Lake told me during a Wednesday night street jam in July. “Come see my collection. It’ll amaze you.”

I’ve known Al for years as the owner of Cottonwood Log Cabins. We share a bond as Indiana natives and both love the blues, but there is much we don’t know about each other. I had no idea Al has one of the most phenomenal arrays of vintage power hammers in the nation, perhaps the world.

In October, I stopped by for the grand tour. He was like Willy Wonka in his chocolate factory that morning, giddy as we walked from one hammer to the next.

“This one is really neat,” he said, pointing at a Sears hammer. “It was sold by the Sears, Roebuck and Co. catalog. You’d buy it, bring it to your farm, build it in your barn and put it together.

“Check this one out,” Al continued, turning to a Central Machine Works hammer from around 1915. “This one is more like a teeter totter. See how simple it operates?”

As the hammer went up and down, Al smiled approvingly, impressed all over again, his passion evident in every swing.

“This one’s a Kerrihard,” Al said as we continued the walk. “They hit really hard, and they’re snappy.”

Walking from one antique hammer to the next, I wondered, “What started Al on this journey?”

The idea of seeking out these old hammers came to him after viewing



*Al Lake has an impressive collection of old iron-working machines. Here he stands by a Z & H Friction Press MFG from about 1915. It came from Rhode Island and was used in jewelry manufacturing.*

some episodes of “Forged in Fire” on the History Channel, where world-class bladesmiths recreate historical swords and celebrate a lost art of creating old weaponry. Al thought, “Instead of focusing on swords, why not focus on the lost art of steel work?”

“Blacksmithing and iron-working has been around forever, since they were making swords and other weapons in Roman times,” he said. “It’s always interested me, and it’s been in my family. My grandfather used to be a blacksmith.”

Thus began Al’s search for old power hammers, many of which were used during the early days of the Industrial Revolution.

While showing me how a planer smoothens large pieces of metal, Al started to reflect on what America must have been like back then, and he came to the conclusion there are some similarities after all.

“They had some of the same problems in the old days as we have today,” he said, taking a walk past a 100-pound Bradley power hammer.

Al said he’s always liked working with steel, but once he started the collection, he found a new passion: restoring the old hammers.

“I bring them back to life, and I use them,” he said.

For Al, saving these hammers is saving an essential part of American history.

“These hammers forged about everything: silverware, bowls, hubs on covered wagons, and the list goes on... the bigger and heavier the hammer, the bigger the piece of steel it could work,” he said. “They could even make cannons. Some of these hammers were just massive. A 500-pound hammer, for example, could weigh close to 17,000 pounds.”

Al has a range of hammers from 15 pounds to 500 pounds. This includes a 400-pound Beaudry hammer.

“The Beaudry is like the Mack truck of hammers,” he said. “They are absolute beasts. This one here was designed to work with 4- to 6-inch steel. One Beaudry I have is the last of its kind.”

Every hammer is unique, Al said. They might all go up and down to beat steel, but they do it in their own respective ways.

“It’s interesting how they do different things,” he said, continuing the tour. “This one here is from a Novelty

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# MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Scott Sweeney

## Metering system update

Our line crews and engineers are progressing nicely with the site surveys for our entire system, which includes more than 6,500 meters and more than 3,900 miles of power line throughout a total of 14 counties. We have completed more than 90 percent of the site surveys, with a goal of being finished with site surveys by January 1, 2020.

The meter and communication installation work will be done in five phases. Phase 1 is the test phase, which consists of 143 meters, around the Hilger area, that will be the first new meters to be installed.

Current plans are for integration with NISC, our software billing company, and the new meters to occur in February 2020. After testing of communications is deemed successful, then the installation of communication equipment and meters for Phase 2 will occur. Then we will progress to Phases 3 and 4, and finally the project will wrap up with the completion of Phase 5.

Our estimated timeline is to have the entire meter and communication infrastructure installation completed by December 31, 2021. Of course, whether we hit our target date will depend on weather and power outages, as well as how many new services Fergus Electric Cooperative installs during the next two years.

## Power supply

Our monthly power bill comes from Members 1st Power Cooperative. Members 1st is a small power supply

co-op consisting of three distribution co-ops: Fergus Electric Co-op, Powder River Energy Corporation (PRECorp) and Tongue River Electric Co-op. Members 1st's power supply comes from Basin Electric Power Cooperative (Basin) and Western Area Power Administration (WAPA).

Each distribution co-op takes delivery of an allocation of federal hydropower that is provided by WAPA. As part of its power supply portfolio, Fergus Electric receives a small allocation, approximately five percent, of federal hydropower from the federal dams. This is very reasonably priced power, and we are fortunate to receive it. The remaining 95 percent of our power supply comes from Basin, our primary power supplier, and it is priced significantly higher.

Power supply costs make up a very large share of Fergus Electric's total expenses. Depending on the month, power supply costs are 65-70 percent of our total expenses. This means that the largest expense at Fergus Electric is an expense which is weather dependent and varies month to month as the weather changes.

Basin will be conducting a survey of Fergus Electric's members, on our behalf, to gain valuable information about our service territory. Basin uses the information in the load-forecast and power-supply planning processes. I encourage you to please take time to participate in the End Use Survey that you should have received in the mail

around Thanksgiving.

Basin has huge load growth projected in the Bakken oil fields around Williston and Watford City, North Dakota. New power supply will have to be secured for this rapidly growing load. The new power may be contracts from other power generators or Basin could construct new power stations, such as natural gas generators, wind turbines or solar power. I will guess that it will be some combination of all the above. Basin also has an older fleet of coal-fired stations that have been very well maintained over their lifetime. Basin is in the analysis stage of a study designed to determine how long to continue to invest in and run these older plants.

Fergus Electric works closely with Basin in many ways. In November, board Director Jason Swanz and Assistant Manager David Dover represented Fergus Electric at Basin's annual meeting in Bismarck, North Dakota. They listened and participated in Basin's annual meeting.

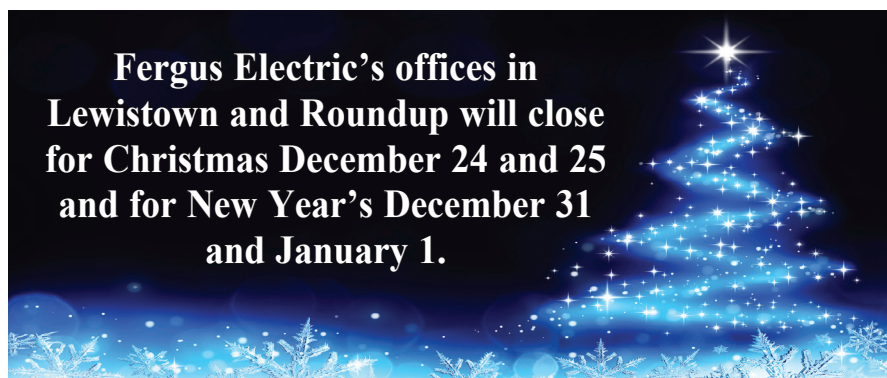
Fergus Electric supports Members 1st, Basin and WAPA. Cost of power is important to our co-op. While we cannot predict the future, we can prepare and plan for it as well as possible. Fortunately, as of now, Basin is projecting stable electric rates going forward for the next several years.

## Christmas time

I want to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a blessed holiday season. As we gather with family and friends to enjoy each other's company during this time of year, let's remember to be thankful for our many blessings and for the reason we celebrate.

## Co-op Month Winners

Forty-one members submitted the "October is Co-op Month" form, and were entered in a drawing for a chance to win an electric credit of \$50. On October 31st, Member Appreciation Day, three members' names were drawn: Janet Hill of Harlowton, Mary Mehrer of Lewistown and Silver Nuggett, LLC of Harlowton each won a \$50 electric credit. Congratulations! Thank you to all who participated; your interest in the co-op is appreciated!



Fergus Electric's offices in Lewistown and Roundup will close for Christmas December 24 and 25 and for New Year's December 31 and January 1.



## Power hammers

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Iron Works show — one of the first mass produced hammer. It could be disassembled and transported.”

Al said he gets his hammers from all over. The Sears hammer, for example, came from New Mexico. Others came from Colorado, Ohio, Illinois, New Jersey and elsewhere.

“There are about half a dozen guys around the country who specialize in old stuff, be it steam engines or old hammers, and I started buying from them. They usually only charge me a little over scrap-iron price,” he said.

Although many of the hammers come from out of state, he has a rock crusher from Lewistown, one of his prize possessions.

“This would crush the stone and turn it into sand. Then the sand was used in the mortar to build the old buildings, many of which are still standing,” Al said. “When I got this rock crusher, it was all rusted, but I’ve fixed it up and made it usable again.”

Al essentially thinks of his collection as a working shop, not a museum. He encourages people to come out and see it for themselves.

“I’d love for more students to check it out,” he said. “Anyone is welcome. I’ve had a few husbands and wives come out here. One husband really wanted to do it and I had to kind of talk her into participating. Then she got into it and said, ‘Al, this is the most fun date we’ve ever had.’”

What keeps Al’s collection growing, however, is his desire to bring life back to a long-gone era.

“Seeing these tools work again is the most rewarding part for me,” he said, “and others seem to be taking notice, which means a lot. People have been calling me from New York and all over, grateful to know there is someone out here doing what I’m doing.”



One of Al’s favorite tools is this rock crusher used by Lewistown bricklayers in the early 1900s.



Far left: Al stands by a Central Machine Works hammer from Minneapolis, Minnesota, made around 1912. The model is “force” MFG. Left: Al stands by a 250-pound Little Giant. It was used in the Los Angeles shipyards in 1941, and helped make battleships during World War II.

## MECA and Fergus offer scholarships

To qualified students whose parents are cooperative members: If you are a high school senior planning to attend college or are a student continuing an undergraduate education, you could win a \$1,000 scholarship from Fergus Electric Cooperative and have a chance to win a \$500 scholarship from Montana Electric Cooperatives’ Association (MECA).

Scholarship applicants must: 1) Be a member of Fergus Electric Cooperative, 2) Be a graduating high school senior with plans to attend a university or vocational / technical school, or be an undergraduate college student, 3) Submit a completed application to Fergus Electric that includes school transcripts, ACT/SAT scores, a personal statement and one letter of recommendation, and: 4) Submit entries to Fergus Electric postmarked no later than January 24, 2020, to MECA/Fergus Scholarship Committee, Fergus Electric Cooperative, 84423 U.S. Highway 87, Lewistown, MT 59457.

Criteria for scholarship judging includes: 20 percent academic strength (as demonstrated by coursework, GPA and national testing scores); 20 percent activities in school and community, awards and honors; 20 percent employment, volunteerism and community service, and; 40 percent personal statement.

Fergus Electric will select one application to be forwarded to MECA in Great Falls for further judging. A MECA committee will choose the scholarship recipients from the pool of finalists.

Fergus Electric will also award one scholarship from the applications.

For an application or for more information, contact Sue at 406-538-3465. In addition, the application and guidelines are posted on Fergus Electric’s website [www.ferguselectric.coop](http://www.ferguselectric.coop) and on the MECA website at [www.mtco-ops.com](http://www.mtco-ops.com).





# Member Appreciation Day

In appreciation of our membership, the Board of Directors and employees invited all co-op members to come to the office east of Lewistown on Thursday, October 31, to enjoy goodies and conversation with fellow members, the directors and employees. Thirty-three members and seven guests checked out the new truck garage, looked at a display of the

new metering system and watched a high-voltage demonstration presented by Fergus Electric Serviceman Ryan d'Autremont and Journeyman Lineman Jake Grensten. We received positive feedback from the members and are pleased that you took time out of the middle of your afternoon to spend some time with us. Thank you!



From left, clockwise at table, member Jane Timpano, Gail Hruska Sheridan, FEC employee Mark Schwomeyer, Ed Timpano. Back left to right: board Director Terry Frost, FEC employee Brian Godbey, FEC employee Melanie Foran and board Director Bob Evans.



Fergus Electric employee Susie Hinkley greets members Leslie and Marvin Pospisil.

Former FEC employee Mike Stanley (center) visits with former board director Larry Descheemaeker (R) and his wife Molly (L).



Board Director Brad Arntzen shares a laugh with members Nancy and Wilson Stulc.



Fergus Electric employees Ryan d'Autremont and Jake Grensten conduct a high-voltage demonstration.



Co-op members Debbie and Tim Hahn attend Member Appreciation Day.

## Identify Account Number\*

Win a \$32.50 credit

If one of the following account numbers is yours, call Fergus Electric (406-538-3465) and identify yourself and your account number.

Account 384283 • Account 50301  
Account 319066 • Account 396770

Account 317571

You will receive a \$32.50 credit on next month's statement.

Jay Green of Belt and Martha Chapel Boyce of Lewistown were last month's winners!

\*Numbers are drawn monthly.



Your Touchstone Energy® Partner

### FOR OUTAGES

**First:** Check the fuses or breakers in the building in which the electricity is off.

**Second:** Check the breaker below the meter.

**Third:** If electricity is still out, call a neighbor to see if they have electricity.

**Fourth:** Call 406-538-3465 day or night or:

Dale Rikala .....	406-366-3374
Bret Ophus .....	406-366-7523
Guy Johnson .....	406-366-9170
Scott Sweeney .....	406-538-7218
Don Criswell (Roundup) .....	406-366-3465
David Dover .....	406-366-1975
Melanie Foran .....	406-462-5650

### FERGUS ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC.

84423 US Hwy. 87, Lewistown, MT 59457-2058  
Tel: 406-538-3465

Office Hours: 7 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. M-F

Website: [www.ferguselectric.coop](http://www.ferguselectric.coop)

E-mail: [ferguselectric@ferguselectric.coop](mailto:ferguselectric@ferguselectric.coop)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/ferguselectric](http://www.facebook.com/ferguselectric)

Scott Sweeney ..... General Manager

David Dover ..... Assistant Manager

Dale Rikala ..... Operations Supervisor

Sally Horacek ..... Office Manager

Janine Rife Didier ..... Editor

Fergus Electric is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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