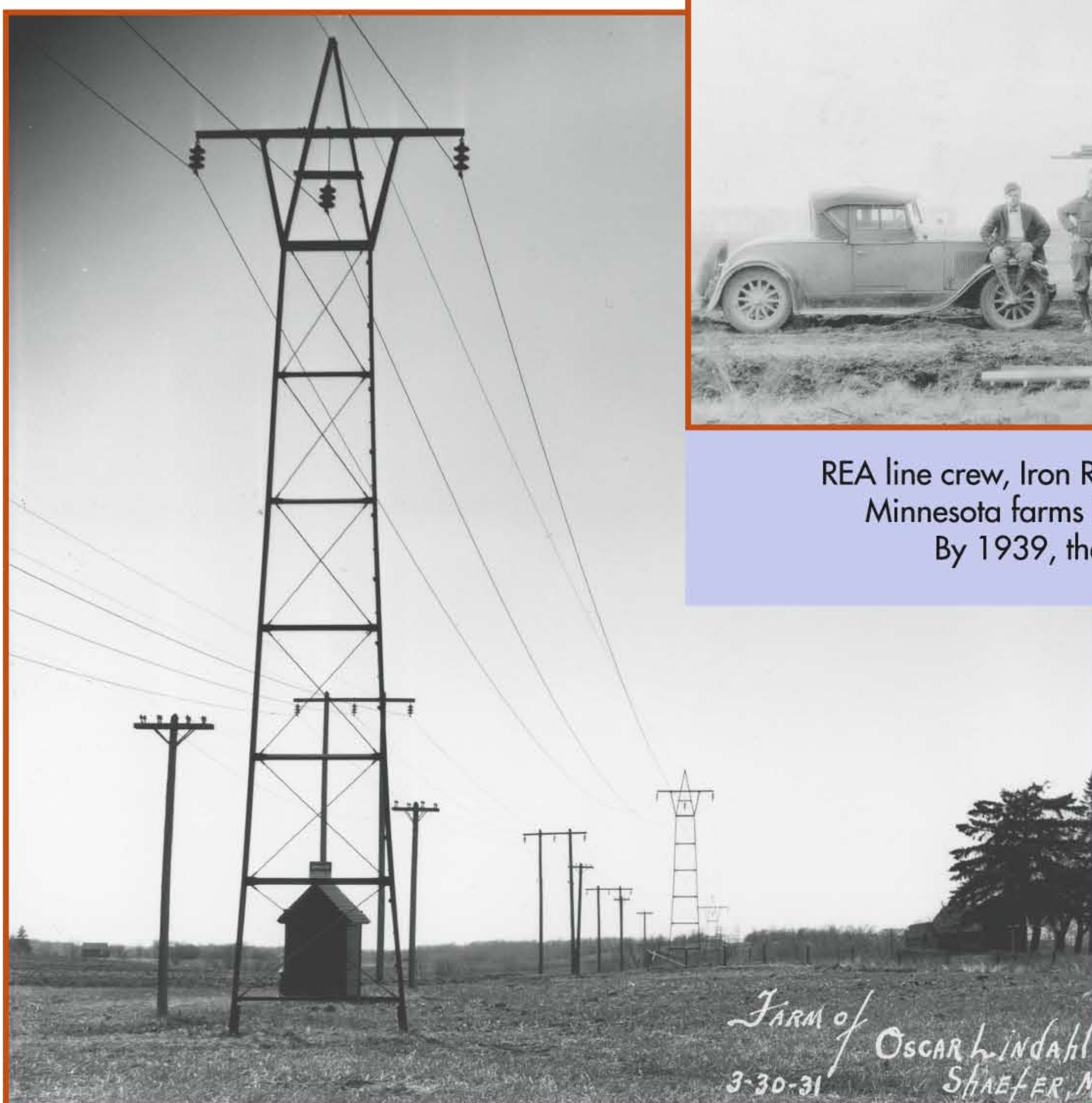


“Electricity is no longer a luxury.”

President Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1932

Electric companies were initially reluctant to string power lines to farms because there weren't enough customers to make a profit.

Although the U.S. government established the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) in 1935 to help farmers get access to the electric conveniences city dwellers had, electricity on farms was not common for another few decades. Today, 75 years later, Internet providers face similar challenges.



Transmission lines, 1931



REA line crew, Iron Range, 1930s. Less than 13% of Minnesota farms had electricity in the 1930s. By 1939, the number grew to 30%



Unloading hay, 1915

Farming BEFORE electricity:



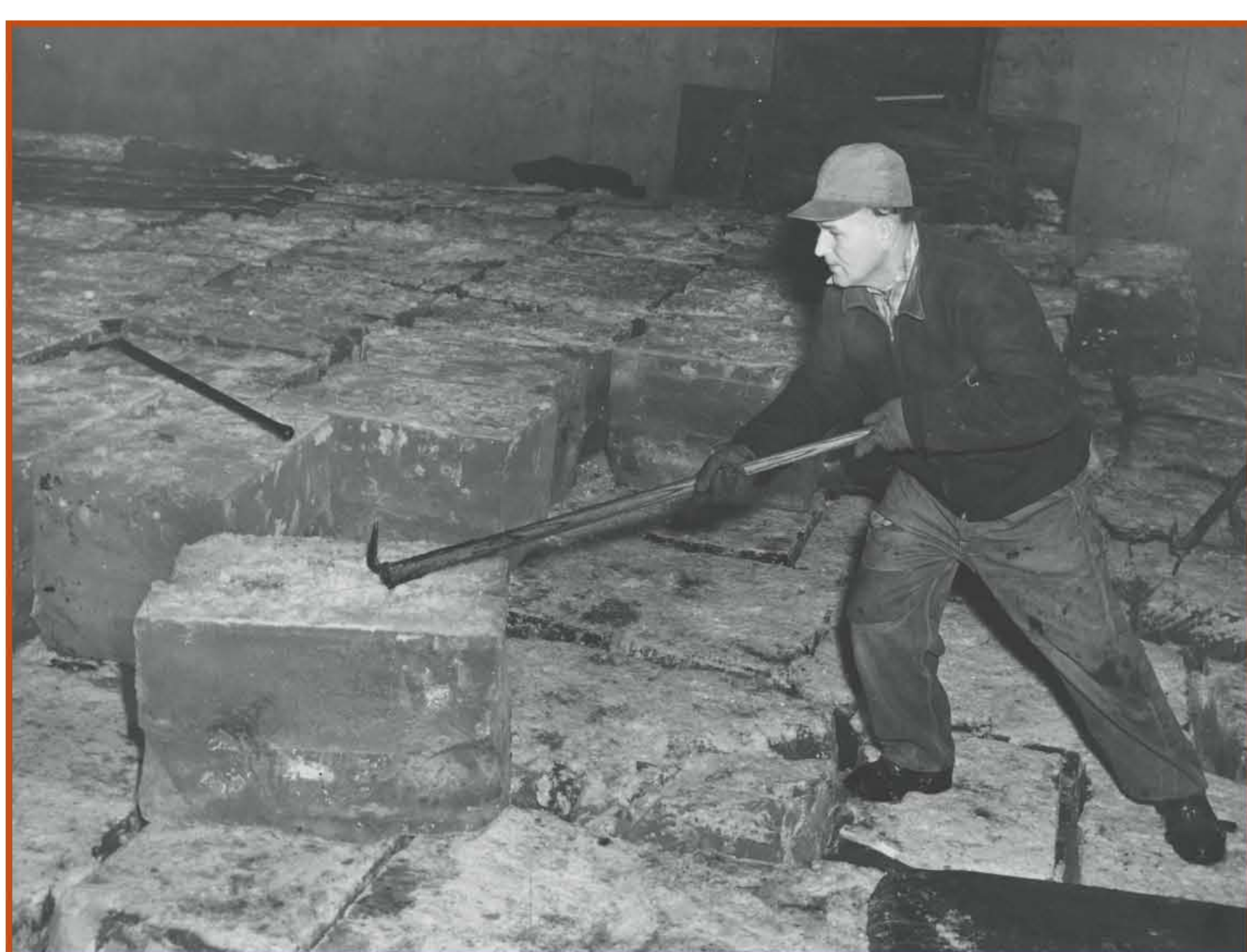
Cutting ice on the Mississippi River, 1925

It was a typical farm home from the area. No insulation. In fact, the ceiling in the dining room was dirt and straw insulated. The laundry stove (cast iron, wood/coal-burning) was our heat. If we stood close enough, we would get warm. Otherwise it was cold. No heat upstairs, except a vent in the floor, and if you slept close enough to the wall you had an icicle between you and the wall in the morning . . . I helped deliver the poles for the REA lines in 1949, so I suppose we got electricity in 1950.

Glenn Orville Belseh,
operated a 160-acre farm outside of Milan, MN

“There were no lights in the barn or hog house or chicken house. We always made sure we had all the feeding of livestock done before dark. The hay for the cows was up in the barn so it had to be thrown down before dark. You didn't dare take a lantern in the hay mow because it would set the hay on fire.”

Elmer Bartels,
farmed near Hardwick, MN, 1950



Moving ice in icehouse, 1943

I remember the year Charles was a baby—I had to get up during the night with a kerosene lamp and light a fire to warm the milk for him. The only refrigeration that we had was ice, which was a lot of work putting up in the winter, and dragging into the house to fill an icebox in the summer, and keeping a pan under the box to catch the water when the ice melted.

Lydia Thomas, remembering life on a Minnesota farm, 1938–1966