

# MCCOY LIGHT – “How McCoy Created Light”

By Mal Anderson

Today, the use of electricity and, more specifically, electrical appliances, are just part of everyday life. 100 years ago, right after the turning of the century into the 1900s, found the widespread use of something so common today, that was not so easily accepted and found then.

Big cities and towns of all sizes were electrified by their own electric plants serving only local areas. Widespread use of electricity was being favored and electric powered appliances were being invented, accepted and used. Life altering changes were underway from the hand washing of clothes, sweeping dusty floors, use of an ice box to save perishables and a turn away from those smelly and dim oil lamps.

As electricity gained favor, many, many households and businesses in rural America were excluded from getting that service. This was due to the high cost of installing transmission lines to serve just a few customers. In the early 1920s, power companies forecasted a cost of between \$1800 and \$2000 per mile to run transmission lines. This was a huge expense during that time. Their investment would take decades to see a profit so they just would not offer service to rural America. By 1932, it was estimated that only 10% of rural areas had electricity and for those who had it, about 1/2 had to buy and operate their own home generator plants.



What does this have to do with McCoy Lamps? Well, as you will learn, electrification of America helped many businesses prosper, Nelson McCoy Pottery included. McCoy realized that the trend to move from oil lamps to electrified ones opened a door for making a new product that they previously did not. McCoy made no oil lamp bases but some other potteries did. However, in the middle and late 1920s, McCoy was delving into this new endeavor slowly with a few stoneware lamps. The V-2 Lamp of 1926 is a prime example of this along with some others.

When the 1930s arrived, America was suffering from the Depression started by the collapse of the Stock Market in 1929. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, newly elected in 1932, began his “New Deal Administration” work to return America’s workers to jobs. He campaigned hard to be President by promising to create jobs and also to electrify all of America beyond the confines of towns and cities. In 1935, he did just that by establishing, thru Executive Order, the “Rural Electrification Administration”. Their charge was to assist local electric utilities with loans so they could extend their transmission lines and connect rural households to this new asset. With electricity becoming widely available for everyone, service was broadly accepted.

R.E.A Linemen Crews ran new transmission lines and their Electrician Crews wired homes and rural businesses outside of towns and cities. In homes, a ceiling mounted light fixture was installed in mostly every room and was controlled by a light switch near a door. At most, one outlet or receptacle was also installed per room in that home. Plug connected appliances were

expensive and uncommon back then. Some people were afraid of electricity so the R.E.A. sent out teams to curb the fears people had.

Having one receptacle per room was a luxury to most. Usually the outlet was used for a table lamp, hopefully McCoy, however you could always plug-in your new vacuum when the lamp was not needed during the day.

So, getting electricity to everyone somewhat helped but definitely moved America out of the “Dark Ages”. This move was capitalized on by the Nelson McCoy Pottery and many others. McCoy ramped up production of table lamp bases in the 1930s with notable lamps like the ones with leaves and berries and others known from that era.

While this is a little history of how the Nelson McCoy Pottery Company got into the making of lamp bases, a future article will discuss how they were marketed.

**In the meantime, keep those McCoy Lamps lighted as a reminder of how their business grew and helped light up America.**

