

GEORGIA HISTORY FESTIVAL

POWERING THE

AMERICAN DREAM

NEWSPAPERS IN EDUCATION

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Savannah Morning News
www.savannahnow.com



POWERING THE AMERICAN DREAM

INTRODUCTION

World War II ended in 1945, and America was a very different place than it was when the war started. In 1941, when the United States declared war on Japan and Germany, the country was still struggling with the Great Depression. Many people did not have jobs and were worried about taking care of their families. But, the war changed that. By the beginning of the 1950s, the American economy was booming, and the American people were more prosperous.

As a result of this new wealth and success, Americans were able to afford new technologies. These new machines were made available by the widespread access to electricity. Companies like Savannah Electric and Power Company and Georgia Power Company worked to make electric power available to Georgians across the state. With access to this power source, Americans could add new appliances and tools to their homes, businesses, and farms. Also, electricity helped productivity in industry.



HOME

Electricity was available in homes as early as the late 1800s, but it was not in a lot of homes. By the 1940s, most homes had electrical power. This new source of energy allowed Americans to have many new appliances in their homes, making life easier for many Americans. These new appliances included the television, dishwashers, and electric ranges. These technologies provided entertainment for families across the country and made it easier to complete basic household tasks like washing dishes or cooking dinner.



The Savannah Housing Project. Georgia Historical Society Collection of Photographs, 1870-1960. 1361PH-06-23-5808



[Dwight and Mamie Eisenhower watching a television during the Republican National Convention, Chicago, Illinois] / [TOH]. 1952. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

By 1960, TVs were present in about 90% of homes in America. People no longer had to leave their homes for entertainment. Americans enjoyed staying home and tuning into their favorite programs. Shows such as *Leave It to Beaver*, *Father Knows Best*, and *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* were very popular among middle-class Americans.

Americans could also watch the news on their televisions, making it easier for people to stay informed of what was going on in the country. By the 1960s, Americans could even watch presidential debates at home on their televisions. This changed the way that Americans made political decisions.

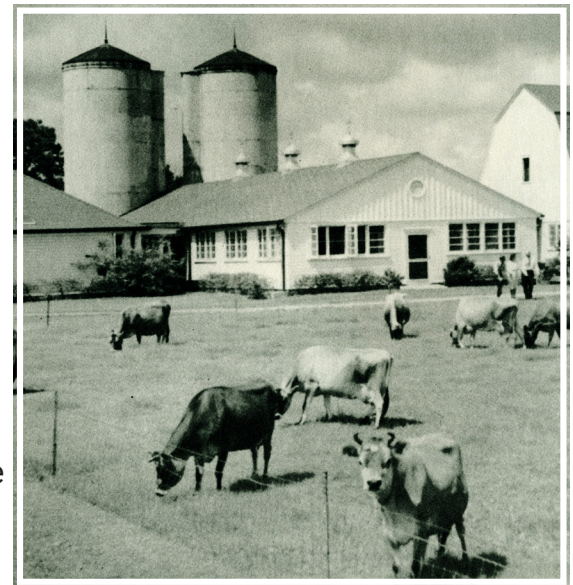
Other technologies were also available in the home beginning in the 1950s. Appliances like electric ranges (stove/oven), washing machines, dryers, and dishwashers were available for people to install in their homes. Advertisers targeted women with these products. Companies even offered them in colors like pink. A family with a washing machine and dryer no longer needed to wash clothes by hand or hang them to dry outside and a woman with a dishwasher could save time by not washing dishes by hand. Range appliances were not new, but in the 1950s, they were powered by electricity instead of gas. This made the appliances more efficient and meant that houses needed only one power source: electricity.

FARM

Before World War II, small family farms depended largely on animal labor to complete many tasks, such as plowing fields. However, in the years after the war, more efficient and affordable products became available that made farming easier and more productive.

The biggest change in farming came from the increased use of tractors. Farmers used to have to use several horses to pull a plow to farm one field, something that took a very long time. With a tractor, a farmer could plow more land in less time, meaning he produced more.

Other innovations were also important to farming in the 1950s. Machines like the combine, a large appliance that helps with harvesting, helped farmers to harvest their crops more quickly. Farmers that used combines did not have to harvest crops by hand and did not have to hire as many workers.



"Agriculture in Georgia," circa 1945. Agricultural and Industrial Development Board. Atlanta, GA, Georgia Historical Society

BUSINESS

New technology also influenced the success of business in the postwar years. New machines, like the electric typewriter, allowed workers to complete their work faster. Also, the popularity of the television created a new way for businesses to reach customers through advertising.

As early as the 1880s, people were using typewriters. These machines provided an alternative to hand writing everything, like letters and business documents. In the 1950s, the electrical typewriter hit the market. This new machine was more efficient and had many more features than other machines. Everything on these machines was automatic and allowed typists to create multiple copies of documents much quicker than ever before.

Most important for business was the television. The popularity of TV opened up a new way for businesses to sell their products. In fact, a lot of broadcasting networks, CBS and ABC, developed programs around advertising. Television commercials became the best way to reach an audience. Jingles, or songs that promote certain products, were popular.



Weatherman, Robert L. Heriot, 1908-1986 Collection, Georgia Historical Society

INDUSTRY



Steel Products Co. 1947. Foltz Photography Studio (Savannah, Ga.), photographs, 1899-1960, Georgia Historical Society

During the Industrial Revolution of the 1800s, coal and steam were the most popular power sources. Machines such as engines and tools were powered by steam or coal. This allowed for great technological advancement throughout the century. However, by the 1950s, a new energy source was powering America—electricity.

Electricity allowed for more productivity in industry. Equipment like electric power tools made work more efficient so fewer workers were needed. This meant that many Americans in the 1950s went from producing goods to providing services, like electricians, plumbers, or salesmen.

The rise of electric power led to a whole new profession, the electrician. Electricians were very important in the postwar years. As more and more Americans were moving out of the cities and into the suburbs, more and more housing developments were constructed. All of these new homes had electricity and used electrical appliances. If something went wrong with their power, they could call an electrician.



TIMELINE OF ELECTRICITY



1752

Benjamin Franklin's famous kite experiment.



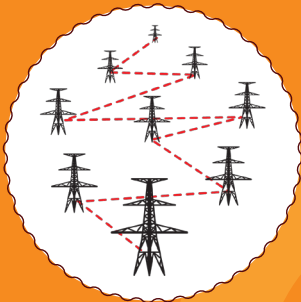
1821

Michael Faraday, a British scientist, invented an electric motor.



1879

Thomas Edison invented the first incandescent light bulb.



1936

The Rural Electrification Act provided federal loans to extend electric service to rural areas.



1926

John Logie Baird pioneered the television, though it would not be very popular in America until the 1950s.



1911

Carrier, an American company, invented electric air conditioning. This product became very popular in the postwar years.



1956

Walter Hess Bodle invented the first freestanding electric can opener.



1974

The first personal computer, a mail order build-it-yourself kit, was sold.



2004

LED televisions give better picture and save energy

DID YOU KNOW?

By 1942, almost 50% of American farms had electricity, compared with only 11% in 1932. By 1950, almost all farms had electricity.

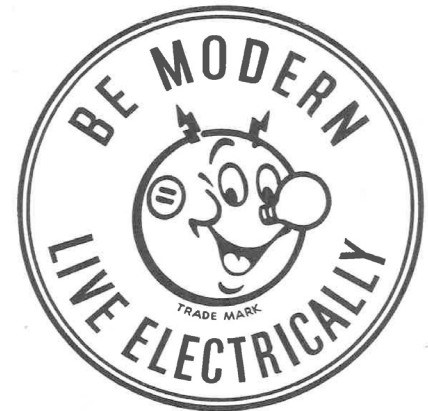


In 1954, the first color TV was introduced.

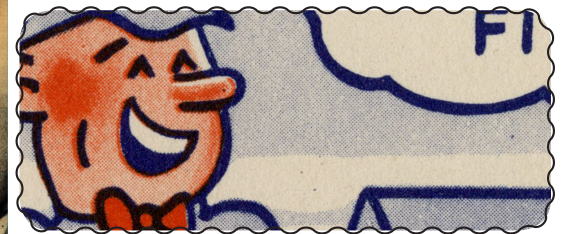
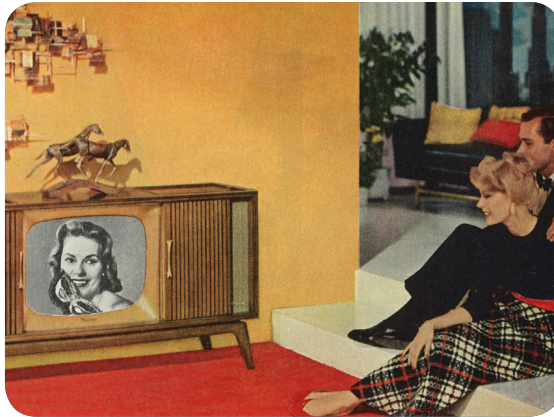
The first electric vacuum cleaner was available in 1908.

In 1951, *I Love Lucy* premiered.

In 1957, *Leave It to Beaver* premiered.



In 1950, only 9% of Americans owned a television. By 1960, 90% of Americans had a TV in their homes.



In 1950, companies spent \$5.7 billion on advertising. In 1960, they spent \$11.9 billion.

In the 1950s, the American population increased by 30 million.



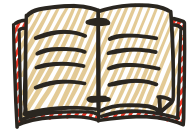
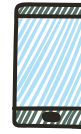
our favorite snack...

FLORIDA
Orange Juice



ACTIVITIES

Circle the pictures below that use electricity:



Today, we use electricity for everything, but it was not always like that. Draw a picture of what doing your homework would be like without electricity.
Hint: How would you see?





Learn more about

POWERING THE AMERICAN DREAM

Visit the Georgia Historical Society's website georgiahistory.com for our new online exhibit "From Waffle Fries to Global Skies: How Georgia Business Created the Modern World." Click on the LEARN page to find Explore Georgia History. From there you can access all the online exhibits.

OTHER WEB RESOURCES

"Society in the 1950s" by Shmoop.com

"Postwar America" from the University of Groningen's Outlines of American History: www.let.rug.nl/usa

"Farming in the 50s and 60s" by Wessels Living History Farm in York, Nebraska: www.livinghistoryfarm.org

Growing A Nation: The Story of American Agriculture: www.agclassroom.org

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