

MINISTERING IN AN EVER-CHANGING WORLD

There were numerous of technological inventions and advancements at the turn of the century. Some inventions and innovations did not have an immediate impact upon society until toward the end of the 1910's, such as the airplane. Electricity was another invention that did not have an immediate influence on rural America. In fact, much of the rural areas of the United States did not have electricity until Congress passed the Rural Electrification Act in 1936, which provided federal funding for an electrical infrastructure to make electricity available to even the most remote areas.¹

Mechanized vehicles, on the other hand, had an immense impact on society and on everyday life. The invention of the automobile forever altered the landscape and nearly every aspect of life. The internal combustion engine was invented in the 1890's and offered great potential for gas-powered vehicles. However, in the first few years of the new century, only the very wealthy and elite could afford to purchase an automobile. For example, before 1910, a Model T automobile cost around \$950. Adjusting for inflation, this would equal \$19,497.39 in the year 2005². One must also consider the wages being earned at the turn of the century. For example, in 1905 the average non-farmer employee made an annual salary of \$550. By 1925, the average non-farmer employee was making \$1,420 annually.³

During the 1910's, with the price of automobiles dropping and the average salary of the worker increasing, the automobile started becoming a standard in every home. By the middle of the 1910's, Henry Ford had perfected his assembly line method of production to a point that it was much cheaper. and at the same time quicker. to produce an automobile. In 1915, the one millionth Model T rolled off the assembly line. That same year, one could purchase a Model T for just \$345.⁴

The advent of the automobile as a common part of a family meant that a person could now travel four to five times the distance that they had with a horse and buggy. For the Church in Kansas, it allowed for easier travel both by the faithful and by the clergy. For example, Father Adrian Stallbaumer, a Benedictine monk in Atchison, Kansas, was the missionary pastor of both St. James Parish in Fanning and St. Charles Parish in Troy. Each were approximately 45 miles from Atchison, and Fr. Stallbaumer usually traveled by rail to minister to these communities. A steam engine locomotive could travel 25 to 30 miles an hour, which meant Fr. Stallbaumer could go from Atchison to Troy and Fanning in about 2 hours. Stallbaumer was only able to offer services for each community every other Sunday alternating from one community to the other. By the late 1910's, automobiles were becoming much more affordable. Fr. Stallbaumer suggested that Troy and Fanning together raise the money to purchase an automobile for his use. The communities discussed this and decided that this was a good idea. They went together to purchase a Ford Coup at the cost of \$641.00 and agreed to share the cost of oil and fuel that Fr. Stallbaumer would use.⁵ With the purchase of the automobile, it now took him only an hour to reach the communities. He was able to have services every Sunday for each church.

1 Hirsh, Richard F. *Powering American Farms: The Overlooked Origins of Rural Electrification*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999, p. 24.

2 S. Morgan Friedman, "The Inflation Calculator," 11 Dec. 2000, <<http://www.westegg.com/inflation/>> (15 Jan. 2006)

3 Lebergott, Stanley. "Wages and Working." *The Fortune Encyclopedia of Economics*, edited by David R. Henderson, Warner Books, 1993, pp. 503-504.

4 Peggy Whitley, "American Cultural History: – The Twentieth Century 1910-1919," Kingwood College Library, May 2005, p. 54.

5 "St. James in Fanning, KS," Volume | - Alma to Fanning , (Kansas City, KS: Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas Archives, 1926), 2.