

1945 January 29-February 4

Shivering in the Dark for Victory

In last week's "On the Homefront" feature, we wrote about the electricity brownout instituted nationwide on February 1, 1945 to save coal. There was also a directive asking that interior temperatures be no higher than 68 degrees.

Coal was used to heat homes too; furnaces that burned wood could also burn coal.¹

Advertisements in this week's *La Crosse Tribune* showed two different takes on the brownout by local businesses.

If you Save
ONE TON OF COAL
this Winter—

IT WILL BE ENOUGH TO PRODUCE THE
 STEEL REQUIRED TO MAKE:

1	2000-pound aerial bomb, or
20	1000-pound aerial bombs, or
9	3-inch trench mortars, or
9	20mm aircraft cannon, or
16	5-inch shells, or
21	4-inch shells, or
833	hand grenades

. . . . That is why it is sometimes hard for us to deliver the quantity and exact size of coal when you want it. We are doing all we can to meet your demands, but you can see why coal is vital to winning this war. Use enough for comfort and health, but do not waste it.

Tell us your total requirements, as far in advance as possible. Let us deliver when we can. Accept partial deliveries.

With cooperation of all concerned, everyone should have enough—and the war will move on toward Victory.

CARGILL'S
 SINCE 1891.
PHONE 10

(*La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 January 31, page 8)

Cargill's, which was one of several companies in the city that delivered coal to homes, expressed saving coal in tangible terms of how it would help the war effort.²

Cargill's was established in 1891 by W. W. Cargill as a means to distribute wood and coal. These were the primary fuels for home heating in La Crosse until the 1950's when oil furnaces began to be more common in homes.³ Cargill's later became Cargill Heating and Air Conditioning. The company continued to serve the community until it went out of business in 2013.⁴

BROWNOUT TONIGHT

Now that interior and exterior advertising signs must be turned off, why not make an additional saving by installing neon lighting? It reduces power consumption, provides efficient lighting and is more economical than fluorescent or bulbs in operation.

Let Us Give You An Estimate

NEON SUPPLY CO.

314 SOUTH THIRD STREET PHONE 692

(La Crosse Tribune, 1945 February 1, page 13)

Neon Supply Company, however, saw it as an opportunity to grow its business.

Cyril Hedrick started selling neon lights and supplies in 1935. Two years later, he formed a business partnership with Robert Lett to create Neon Supply Co. Its first location was 312 S. 3rd Street in La Crosse. They moved the business to 321 S. 3rd Street about six years later.⁵

Arnold Evanson and Dan Meroll bought Neon Supply Co. in May 1952. About two years later, they moved the business to 906 S. 3rd Street.⁶

The business operated under that name at least through January 1969.⁷

Neon Supply Co. later became Nesco Sign Co. Evanson, a U.S. Army veteran of World War II, was president of the company until he retired in 1985.⁸

In the mid-1980's the company became Nesco-Briteway Signs at 2126 South Avenue.⁹

Coupled with a Wisconsin winter, the reduction in available coal for electricity and heating made the early part of 1945 a cold and dark time for La Crosse and the surrounding area.

Jeff Rand
Adult Services Librarian
La Crosse Public Library

Sources & Notes:

¹ Over 100,000 homes still use coal for heating today, mostly in Pennsylvania. Jeff Brady, "For The Few Who Heat Homes With Coal, It's Still King," *National Public Radio*, March 3, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/03/03/699325560/for-the-few-who-heat-homes-with-coal-its-still-king>.

² One of the other businesses delivering coal was Manson Coal Co. at 119 Vine Street. *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, February 25, 1945, page 7. Another coal supplier was Badger Lumber and Coal Co. *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, March 3, 1945, page 7. The classified advertisements had a section for "Fuel, Coal, Oil, Wood."

³ "Cargill Heating and Air Conditioning Co., Inc." *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, July 4, 1976, no page. Advertisement in the Independence Day edition of the newspaper.

⁴ Jane Galstad, conversation with the author, January 29, 2020. Galstad, secretary-treasurer of the company, said it went out of business between 2012 and 2015. Cargill Heating and Air Conditioning is listed in the 2012 CenturyLink telephone book for La Crosse and Onalaska, but not in the 2013 edition.

⁵ "Neon Supply Firm Has Amazing Success Story," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, October 31, 1954, page 12.

⁶ *La Crosse Tribune*, October 31, 1954.

⁷ List of businesses, *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, January 26, 1969, page 39. This is the last date it appears when searching in the *La Crosse Tribune*. The last *La Crosse City Directory* listing is in 1966; it is not in the 1969 edition.

⁸ Arnold C. Evanson obituary, *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, April 24, 2010, page B-3.

⁹ Walter J. Earhart, "Neon," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, June 15, 1984, page 22.