



# 85 A look back

***In the midst of the Great Depression, word came to Columbus that the Public Works Administration awarded \$7.3 million to Loup Power for construction of a power canal.***

“Happy days are here,” announced the Columbus Daily Telegram on Nov. 15, 1933.

It was indeed a happy day for a group of Columbus businessmen who had worked for months on the plan. They wanted to reverse the effects of the Depression and provide a power source at the same time.

In April of that year, the Nebraska Legislature passed the Enabling Act, which established public power and irrigation districts as political subdivisions of the state.

The Loup River Public Power District was the first to form in the state of Nebraska. Its founders went on to apply for the PWA funds that would be used to build the Loup Power canal and two powerhouses.

But Loup’s story isn’t just about Loup. It is a story about public power throughout the state and nation.

Loup helped create Cornhusker Public

Power District and companies that are now known as Nebraska Public Power District. It also helped Omaha Public Power District get up and running.

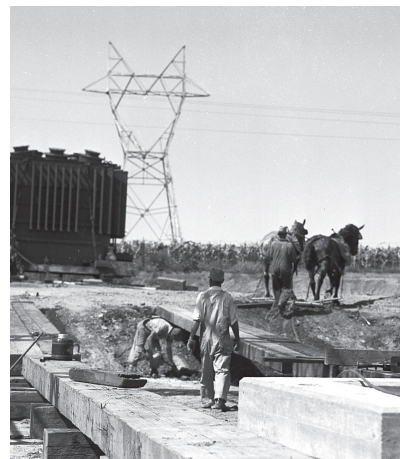
Harold Kramer, Loup’s first general manager, was given leave to work full-time in Washington, D.C., to help start the American Public Power Association.

Max Kiburz, who later served as general manager, headed a legislative study group that eventually became the Nebraska Power Association and he served as its first president.

The District also powered economic development efforts throughout its history. Columbus claims to have the first industrial site in the United States and several Fortune 500 companies are now located on land that once belonged to Loup Power District.

Today, Loup Power District provides retail service to customers in Platte, Colfax, Boone, and Nance Counties and part of Madison County.

It also continues to generate electricity with a canal and powerhouses that have been meticulously maintained for 85 years.





1933

In 1933, the Nebraska Legislature passed a law allowing the formation of public power districts. Loup River Public Power District organized in June that year and became the first public power district in the state.

The project required a **35-MILE STRIP** of land that ranged from 250–500 feet wide. **\$1 MILLION** in land purchases

## LOAN & GRANT

The Public Works Administration (PWA) approved a \$7.3 million loan and grant for the Loup Project on November 15, 1933.

This was a tremendous boost to Columbus and Genoa. The announcement spurred spontaneous celebrations. Businesses closed and residents held torchlight parades.

Before the project could begin, the District needed to acquire property. Some landowners were eager to sell. One farmer sold 26 acres of his 192-acre farm and cut his \$14,000 mortgage in half.

Only 10 percent of land was obtained through condemnation proceedings. In the end, the Loup Project purchased \$1 million in land and saved some family farms from foreclosure.



1936

**May 6, 1936**  
The Rural Electrification Administration approves a \$391,000 loan to the Loup District to build 355 miles of rural lines in Platte County to serve 815 rural customers.

## ECONOMIC IMPACT

The Loup Project employed more than 1,000 people during its construction.

In the depths of the Great Depression, the prospect of steady work drew the attention of job seekers from the surrounding area. The influx of workers brought prosperity to cafés, restaurants, hotels and rooming houses.

All lines of retail trade improved, rentals increased and property values recovered. A leading Columbus real estate office did not know of a single house for rent in the city in July of 1936.

The project also supported other industries. Factory workers helped produce materials used in the project and railroad employees had a part in transporting those materials.



### 1936 PWA MINIMUM WAGE RATES

Concrete Mixer .....	\$1.20	Form Builder .....	\$0.80
Cement Finisher .....	\$1.20	Painter & Steel Men .....	\$0.90
Carpenter .....	\$1.20	Trucker .....	\$0.70
Pile Driver .....	\$1.20	Unskilled Labor .....	\$0.50

**1,782 applicants** in November 1933      **1,352 employed** in October 1936

## THE BEGINNING

Civil Engineer H.E. Babcock was the first to envision using the Loup River for power and irrigation. Two miles of canal and a 600 kW plant were completed in the early 1900s. The plant operated for one year before financial difficulties arising from the outbreak of war in Europe forced its abandonment.

On Sept. 15, 1932, Philip Hockenberger, Sr., and Harold Kramer invited 36 Columbus businessmen to a meeting to revisit the idea of building a power canal near Columbus.

That afternoon, they traveled to Lincoln to file for water rights to the Loup River, Shell Creek, Cedar River and Beaver Creek.



The Great Depression lasted from 1929–1939. By 1933, 15 million Americans were unemployed. Many Nebraskans lost their farms and their homes. Work was hard to find.



HOCKENBERGER



KRAMER

## CONSTRUCTION

Laws governing water rights required construction to begin within a certain time frame or water rights would be lost. Loup did not have the needed construction equipment when its rights were approved in 1934. Several tractor- and horse-led plows began disking soil to protect those rights.



The first shovel of dirt was moved at the Charles Wright farm near Genoa on Aug. 21, 1934.  
The first dragline excavation was Oct. 16, 1934, at the James Donoghue farm seven miles northwest of Columbus.

1934



## THE MONIGHAN CRANE

One of the largest in the world at the time

**365 tons**      **176' boom**      **12 million cubic yards of soil**

Twenty train cars hauled the Monighan Crane from Memphis, Tenn., to Columbus, where it took one month to assemble.

The unique crane walked like a duck and sounded like a freight train. It had a 12-yard bucket and moved dirt at a rate of 1 million cubic yards per month.

The crane fascinated people from around the state and the operators became local celebrities.



“If we placed all of the excavated soil on Dodge Street between the curb lines and piled it nine feet high . . . the pile would extend 95 miles.”

— J.D. Evans  
State Engineering Inspector for the Public Works Administration, on Omaha's WOW radio program in February of 1935



**30 YEARS:** Life expectancy of most of the equipment at the Columbus and Monroe Powerhouses.

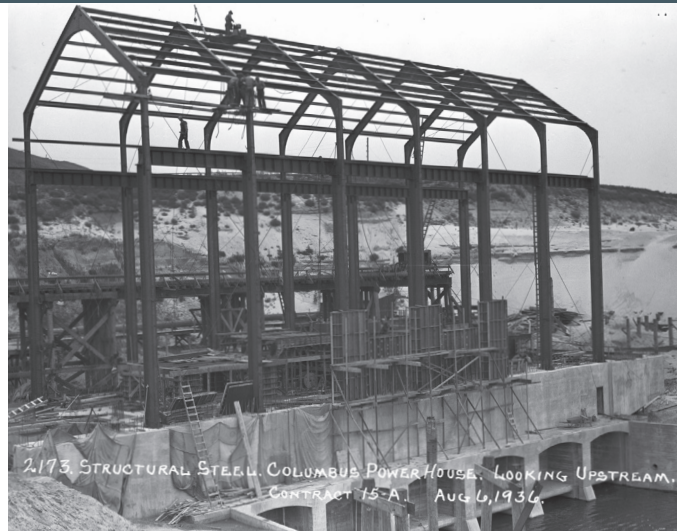
**70 YEARS:** Age of the generating units before a \$17 million refurbishment in 2004.

## THE POWERHOUSES

The hydroelectric powerhouses in Monroe and Columbus really began to take shape in 1936. The work was done without safety equipment. Surprisingly, there were only a few accidents during construction.

The Columbus site became a small community during construction. Some workers lived in tar paper shacks and kitchen houses were established for them.

Special railroad tracks were built to carry materials to the Columbus Powerhouse. Around 2,500 carloads of freight worth \$750,000 crossed those tracks.



Leo Daly, Sr., of Omaha designed the exterior finish of both powerhouses. His total salary was \$1,000.

The Columbus Powerhouse received a Nebraska historical marker in October of 2016.



1938

**OCTOBER 1938**  
official project completion

**56 BRIDGES**  
built to cross the canal

**\$8.9 million**  
total cost to build the two powerhouses and reservoir lake

## COMPLETION & CUSTOMERS

The Omaha World-Herald announced that the Loup Power Plant had four customers in its Aug. 22, 1938, edition. Construction of the project was almost complete. Transmission lines from Omaha to Lincoln, Grand Island to Lincoln, and Hastings to Lincoln were all under construction — funded in part by an additional \$2.3 million loan and grant.

The District switched from its construction period to operation on September 1. The plant's output was approximately 4,000 kW. Electricity was transmitted to the North Loup and Middle Loup Power Districts, Howard, Southern Nebraska, Platte, Cuming and Lancaster rural electrification districts, Western Public Service Company, the Platte Valley District powerhouse at North Platte, and Tricounty's substation at Hastings.

The District continued to build infrastructure, but first it needed waivers from farm-owned mutual telephone companies because the power lines could cause interference to the grounded phone systems. The Rural Electrification Administration would not loan funds to metalize the phone lines to eliminate the interference.



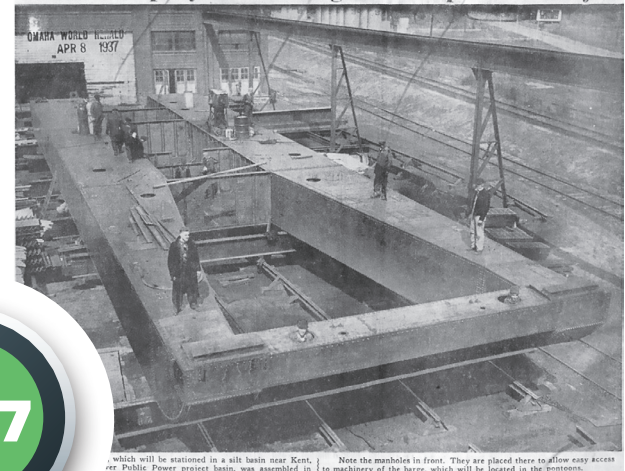
## GENERATION BEGINS

The Monroe Powerhouse began generating electricity on March 5, 1937.

The District had to finish the project and test the system, so the first commercial sales were not until the following spring.



### Omaha Company Builds Barge for Loup River Project



## THE PAWNEE DREDGE

The District needed a unique dredge to clean its two-mile settling basin at the Genoa Headworks. Omaha Steel Works designed and built the Pawnee dredge, which was then dismantled for shipment and reassembled at the Headworks.

The barge was 110 feet long and 30 feet wide. It was designed to draw in 172,000 tons of mixture daily. That original dredge was used until 2012, when a new dredge, the Pawnee II, was commissioned.

**\$186,000** to build    **140 TONS** per minute    **75 YEARS** in use

## PUBLIC POWER EXPANSION

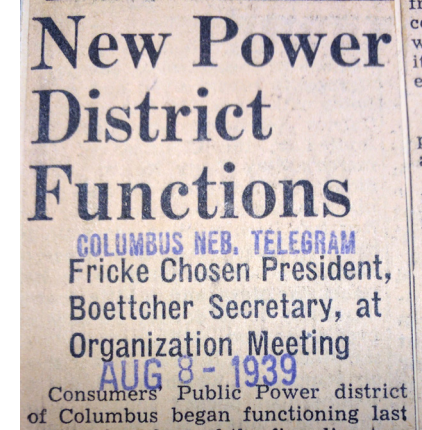
Loup Power District initially distributed the power it generated to private and public power companies. By 1939, there were two other hydropower districts in the state — Platte Valley Public Power and Irrigation District and Central Nebraska (Tri-County) Public Power and Irrigation District.

The districts were all generating power but needed to expand their markets. They had been contemplating the purchase of private power companies for some time for that purpose. Loup had debt obligations to the Public Works Administration, posing a funding problem.

On Aug. 5, the same men who organized the Loup project helped create Consumers Public Power District to facilitate the purchase of those facilities. Loup River Public Power District's President C.B. Fricke was named president of the debt-free Consumers.

In October, Consumers assumed operation of the Columbus division of the Northwestern Public Service Company through a lease-purchase agreement. It purchased the company in July 1940 with \$1.2 million in bonds. It was the first acquisition of a private utility by a public power district through bond issue.

The hydro facilities continued to sell power to private companies. But that would soon change. By the end of 1943, Consumers Public Power District acquired all generation and distribution facilities across the state except for Nebraska Power Company in Omaha. The cost was more than \$40 million paid for by revenue bonds. This change to public power caused much controversy throughout the state with some comparing it to socialism and communism.



FRICKE

1937

1939



# 1940

**\$9,268,000 PWA BONDS + \$761,520 DEFAULTED INTEREST**  
refinanced by Loup Power District in 1940

*The American Public Power Association formed in 1940 to represent the common interest of community-owned utilities. Harold Kramer, Loup's General Manager, served as the first secretary-manager for about six months. Today, the Association serves not-for-profit, public utilities that power 2,000 towns and cities nationwide.*

## A PUBLIC POWER SYSTEM

In 1940, the three hydro districts that formed Consumers — Loup, Platte Valley and Tri-County — signed an agreement to pool their generation and revenue. This would provide stability, prevent competition and allow them to finance growth. The agreement created the Nebraska Public Power System (NPPS), a wholesale marketing and transmission agency. Its three-member board consisted of the three district managers.

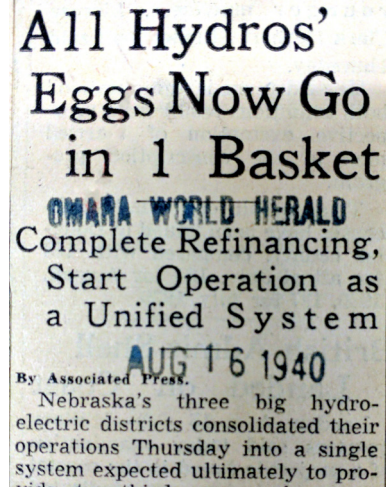
The three unified districts also refinanced nearly \$38 million in debt. The new bonds reduced both the interest and bond payments to give the districts an opportunity to pay off obligations while building revenues.

Consumers leased its generating facilities to NPPS which began coordinating power generation and transmission. Rural public power districts continued to form across the state and purchased power from NPPS.

Central withdrew from NPPS in 1949 to focus on irrigation.



*Nebraska's three big hydroelectric districts consolidated their operations today into a single, \$60-million system . . . The action culminated nearly five years of struggle, often bitter, for some sort of unit operation.*  
— Associated Press, Aug. 1, 1940



# 1967

**100,000+**  
visitors to Loup's recreational facilities in the summer of 1968

**1971**  
17 communities sign 25-year distribution lease agreements with Loup

## A RETAIL SERVICE AREA & NPPD

In 1967, Loup and Consumers Public Power Districts signed a realignment agreement. Under the cross-management deal, Loup began managing Consumers' retail customers in Nance, Boone, Platte and Colfax counties and withdrew from statewide generation and transmission.

In exchange, Consumers replaced Loup as a partner in the Nebraska Public Power System and began managing Loup's properties outside the four-county service area.

The following year, Platte Valley Public Power and Irrigation District and Consumers agreed to a merger that placed all of Platte Valley and Consumers properties and almost all the properties of NPPS under one board of directors.

The merger followed years of negotiations and unified all the electric generation and transmission facilities in the state except that served by Omaha Public Power District. In 1970, the merged agencies became known as Nebraska Public Power District.



*Nebraska Public Power District authorized \$150 million in revenue bonds in 1970. Part of those proceeds were used to retire outstanding bonds of Loup Power District due to the trading of facilities. Loup had a bond burning ceremony December 23 to celebrate its debt-free status.*

## CORNHUSKER & OPPD

On January 4, 1943, the newly organized Cornhusker Rural Public Power District purchased Loup's rural properties — including electrical lines and equipment — in Platte and Colfax counties. The following day, it purchased property from the Boone-Nance Rural Public Power District. The cost was \$1 and the assumption of the district's debt.

The following year, a group of Omaha citizens formed the Omaha Electric Committee, Inc., a non-profit corporation to obtain public ownership of Nebraska Power Company.



In December 1944, Loup Power District created an Eastern Division and issued revenue bonds to finance a \$15.6 million loan to the committee for its purchase of Nebraska Power.

In December of 1946, the committee formed Omaha Public Power District, issued \$42 million in revenue bonds and repaid Loup Power District.

By 1949, Nebraska became the first and only state where public power replaced all private utilities.

## LAKE NORTH

Loup began work on Lake North in 1962. The extension to the Lake Babcock reservoir had its grand opening on August 5, 1963, with more than 5,000 people in attendance. The following Sunday drew visitors from 33 counties and 13 states. Loup employees counted 1,122 cars coming into the lake grounds between 12:30 p.m. and 5 p.m.



# 1963

## FLOODING

On August 12, 1966, the Loup River began to rise. Forty men began sandbagging, but they could not hold it back. The raging Loup broke through the diversion dam and headgates. It washed out roadways and bridges. Thirty-five of the men were rescued by helicopter while the other five continued to work.

The district's dredge, the Pawnee, was in dry-dock undergoing repairs. The flood lifted it and washed it downstream until it hit a tractor. The crew had to build a dike around the dredge, fill it with water and float it back to the dry dock.

The flood peak at Genoa was 129,000 cubic feet per second. The previous peak record was 90,000 cubic feet per second in 1947.

Despite the damage, Loup continued to generate electricity and met peak loads. The diversion dam was back in operation in less than two weeks.



**more than \$500,000**  
in damage to Loup properties

# 1943

# 1966