

# 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.

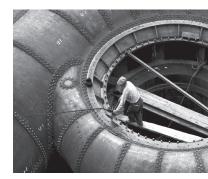
Harold Kramer, Loup's first general manager, was given leave to work full-time in Washington, D.C., to help start the American Public Power Association.

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.







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.

# \* THE COLUMBUS DAILY TELEGRAM

# PWA OFFICIALLY ANNOUNCES \$7 300 000 FUND

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	Rejoicing Today	CONTRACTOR SERVICES AND AND AND				
HERE: GRANT OF	Perhaps It is particularly ap-	FOR DIRECTORS	Directors of the Columbus Chamber of Commerce and May- or Julius S. Niehels this morning	WATER RIGHTS	Canal Edition	OF LONG CAMPAIGN FOR
CANAL DOES IT	propriate that official announce- ment of the public works admin-	POWER DISTRICT	joined in requesting that business houses of the city close between	HEARING, SAYS	Within a week if possible The Telegram plans to home a special power canal section in connection	COLUMBUS-GENOA PLA
DAMAE DOFO II	come today, for this is the flat	I OHER DIGITALOT	the hours of 11:15 a. m. and 2 p.	iiLANINU, UNIO	with a regular edition of the pa-	OOLONDOO OLINOA I LA
Will Provide Work for Aver-	Reamer, district secretary, whose long and values offerir on be-	Enterprise Involves Tremen-	band, the Say Scout Dram and Slegte curps, the Colombia Vol-	Governor Will Call Such a	about different phases of the Co- lembus Genna project which the property of today's pages does not	Grant and Lean Largest of Any Made in 16 Mill
age of Nearly 1,000 Men	haif of the project have been one of the indispensible factors in its	dous Responsibility; Offi-	unteer Fire department, the Ne-	Hearing When Requested	permit. Teday's edition is being	Allotment for 45 Non-Federal Projects in 20 States Today
in Two Year Period	nuccess. For more than a year he has labored day and night in its	oers Issue Statements	er organizations and individuals will juin in a parade sharing that	by Loup Officials	official announcement of the	States Total
MAY GET UNDER WAY	behalf with the persistence, re- neurodateses and thoroughness that are as characteristic of him.	BOARD IS COMPOSED	interval. Plans are being complet-	NO "SCALING DOWN"	lion on the project of a nature	ESTIMATED OVER THOUSAND MEN TO BE
EARLY IN NEW YEAR	Manhan of the band of direc-	OF ELEVEN MEMBERS	to be held this evening, under asspices of the First and Second Ward Democratic clab.	OF PLAN INDICATED	occumentariate with the import- able of the occasion will require several days of propagation.	EMPLOYED OVER PERIOD OF TWO YES
Happy days are here again! Today's manuscoment from	R. Pricks, who is his official ca-	Officers and directors of the Loup.	2.7		Hence the plans for a special section very soon. In the recon-	WASHINGTON, NOV. 15 (UP)-The public wo
Earlington of the public works ad-	wirk and responsibility with Bec- retary Kramer, were first to con- rectidate him today uson the two	highly clated that the project for which they have been labering for	Wagner and Arthur Malles are its attentions.	application of the Columbus-Ge-	gram readers who will wish to	administration today announced it had allocated fur for the construction of the Columbus-Genea power p
90,000 Celumbus power canal grant nd loan-just a week after its	fold cause for rejoicing.	many minite has received approval of the federal public works admin- neration, but their elation is ten-	teday by Prosident Pricks and Socretary Kramer:	rights to enable diversion from the Leve river, "will be taken as	recure extra caples for malling to friends that they place their ord- ers in advance with the subscrip-	ject on the Loup river in Nebraska.  A loan and grant of \$7,300,000 was made for the p
otherization of \$75,000 to extend he city's candiary sewer system— tenso as the propert cause of re-	accept of water the two amalies	pered with a sense of the freezen-	President Frield's Statement "During this day of julification,	quickly as that matter can be reached." Governor Charles W.	tion department, phone 5032.	A loan and grant of \$7,300,000 was made for the p ject.
picing that the people of this com-	projects would need for irrigation	theirs in administration of this huge	which is the ratural release of pressure accumulated in a year of anxious effort, we recover here but	Bryan said today, when informed by the United Press of the grant of federal multip works funds to	state as a whole. My telegrams and	The project calls for the construction of a divers dam 880 feet long to shunt Loup river water into a
Two major projects for Occum- usions approved? Tension indus-		This senie of responsibility was expressed by President C. B. Fricke	feel the tremendous responsibility which the public works adminis-	the district.	messages to Washington officials on this and other projects have been	mile tanal. Two power units and six reservoirs are
	possibilities of adjantment of these coefficing interests, which, for lack of time, cannot be detailed in		tration at Washington has placed on our abundless. It is the task of	"I convect say at present as its whether or not a hearing will be required. As I understand it, the	Gality.	cloded in the canal plans, though some of the reserve are not to be constructed unless future experience sh
that day of rejoining when the	this acticle, but which, at the were!	"the project by the PWA was re-	the eleven members of the board of directors under the guidence of the engineers to see that every dol-	'farth and Middle Loap proposed power and irrigation districts have	"At the time when the public works heard was expected to act upon the Columbus-Genca project.	indicate them to be necessary.  After the water has been used to generate newer
Approval of the project, condi- sent though it is upon provering	early delay and not abandooment nor services curlatered of the Co-	Secretary Moreld Eramer insued a statement expressing appreciation	lar of the generality manay, is wise,	filed objections to grants of water rights to the Columbia Genoa dis- trict in the full amount sales.	last week, I informed them that a survey was being made and would	eastern Nebraska it will be transferred back into
cop river maler rights from the tate, in reward for more than a		of the splendid assistance rendered the district during the formative		Promises No Delay	he available to them in two days. I did not sait delay but they de-	Platte river. The Loup river Public Power district, sponsors of
f persistent men who have been	ing energency periods when the	throughout the state.  Directors of the district are: C.	this territory today. The capendi- ture of milities of foliars over a period of two years means the re-	contemplate irrigation developments	ferred artice until that report was received. The report was in Unit hands restering and the action was	project, plan to liquidate the cost of construction by a ing electric energy wholesale to cities, towns and comp
er of Columbus and Genea busi-	the entered of water filed upon for	H. Pricke, president; Dr. J. E. Meyer, vice president; C. C. Shel-	lief of the agate unemployment	grant their request." the Nebrasia	taken at the earliest possible time,"	tes now owning distribution lines.
	for fitter increase of the water- stronge facilities, were considered		ject means the conservation of the copy natural resource which No.	Eryan said the matter of grant-	The grant of \$7,900,000, authorized teday by the public works board	Application for a loan was filed by the spans of the project led by Rep. Howard, dem. Neb., with
	when the engineering act-up was made. Formal application for the water		bracks possesses water and will result in the eventual reduction of	without dolay. If have made no offert to delay	represents the ful lasts required for development of the project as orig-	Reconstruction Pinance Corporation some months a When the public works administration was set un



## 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.





# 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.



**KRAMER** 

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.







# THE MONIGHAN CRANE

One of the largest in the world at the time

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

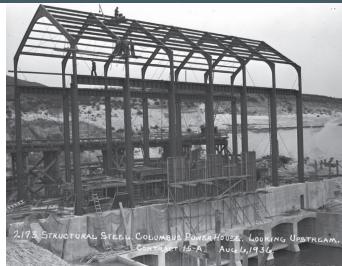
# THE POWERHOUSES

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.

## **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 metallicize 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.







#### \$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

# All Hydros' Eggs Now Go in 1 Basket OWARA WORLD HERALD Complete Refinancing, Start Operation as a Unified System

By Associated Press. 6 1940 Nebraska's three big hydroelectric districts consolidated their operations Thursday into a single system expected ultimately to pro-

# **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.

Loup Helps Omaha Public Power Move Supplies Funds Under Contract With Non-Profit Corporation

> ation of Loup River Pu district with member ple's Power Commission and other Omahans in bringing about publ of the electric utility vas an important factor

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.



#### 100,000+

visitors to Loup's recreational facilities in the summer of 1968

Loup cited for outstanding achievements in

1974

Loup moves to new general office building at

2404 15th Street in Columbus

#### 1971

17 communities sign 25-year distribution lease agreements with Loup

#### 1978

outdoor recreation by Nebraska Game & Parks

# 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.

# **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



