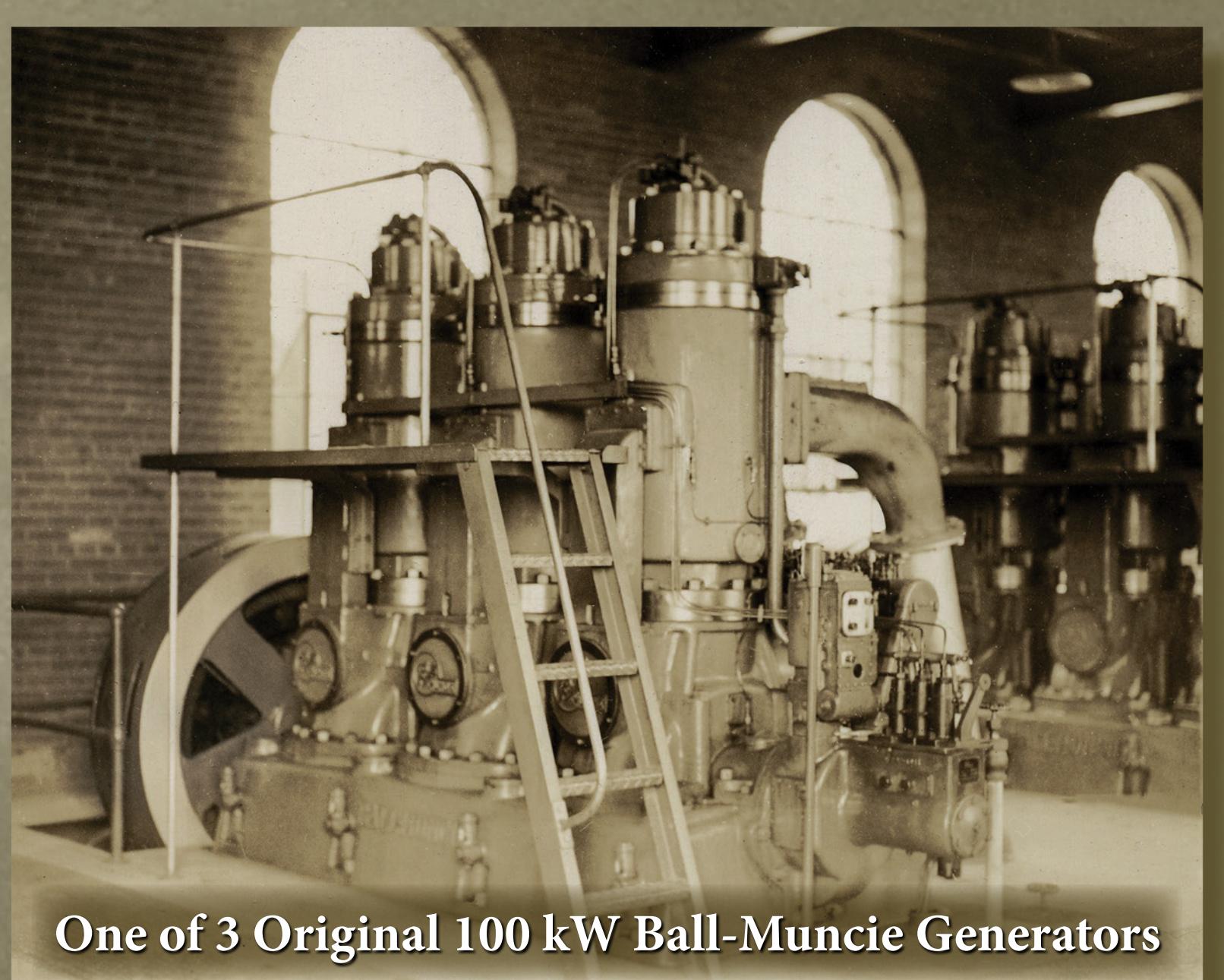
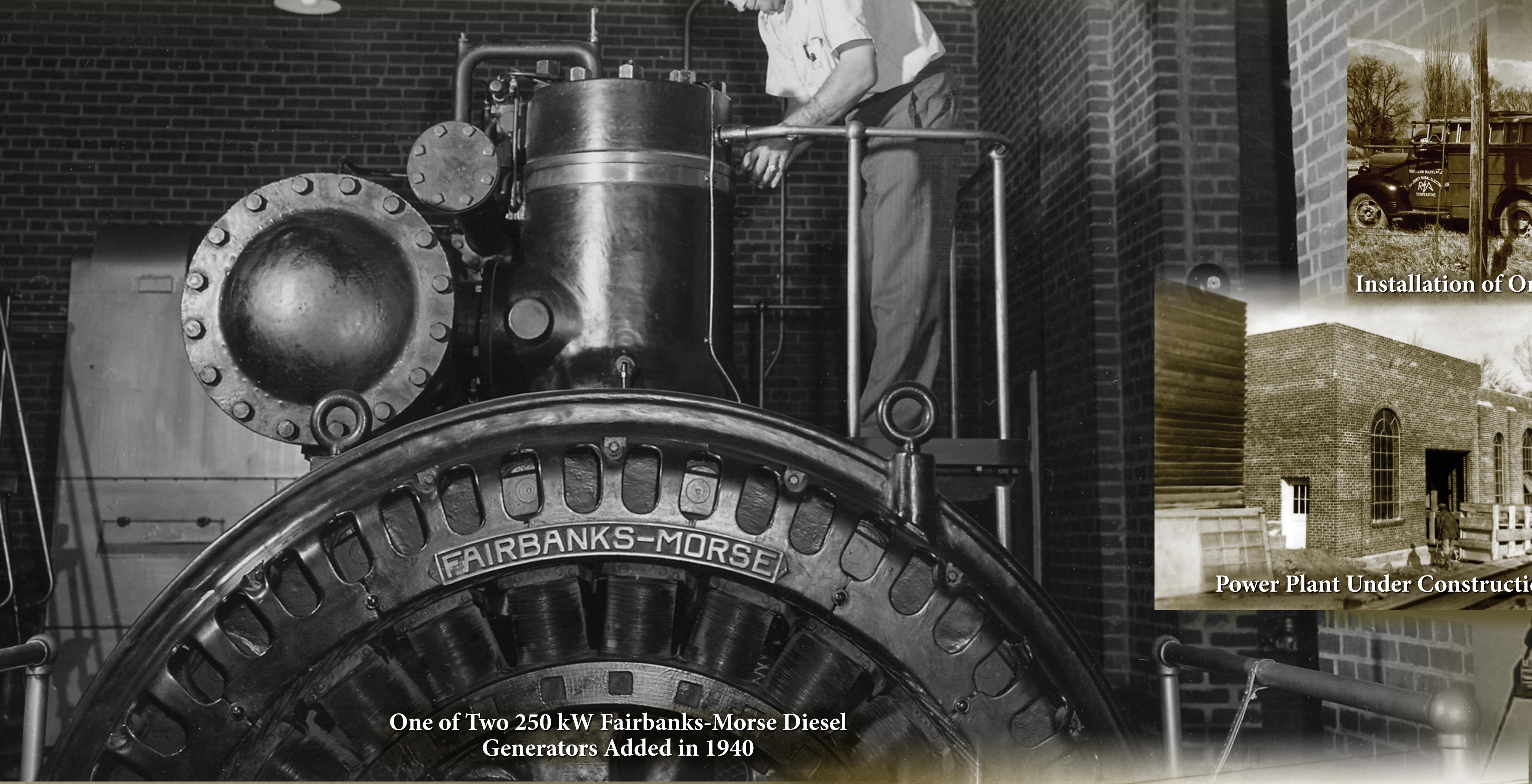
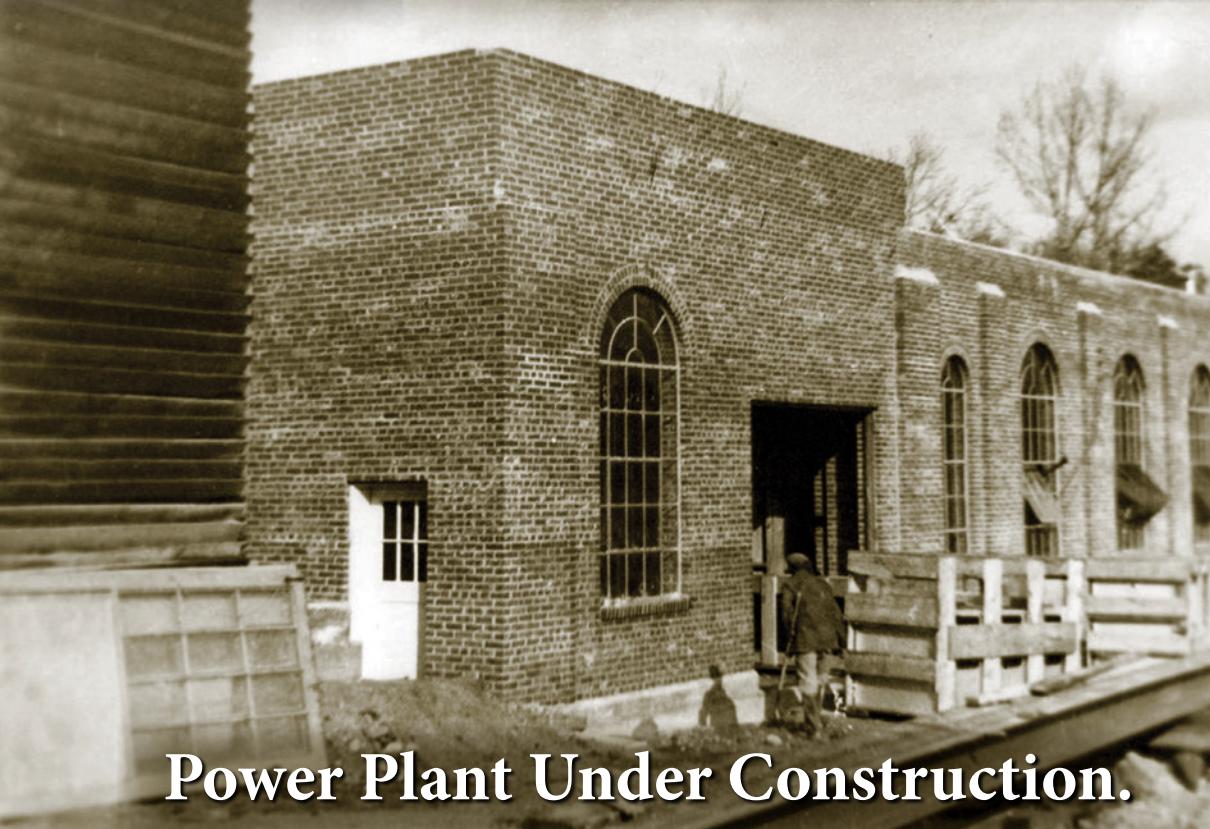
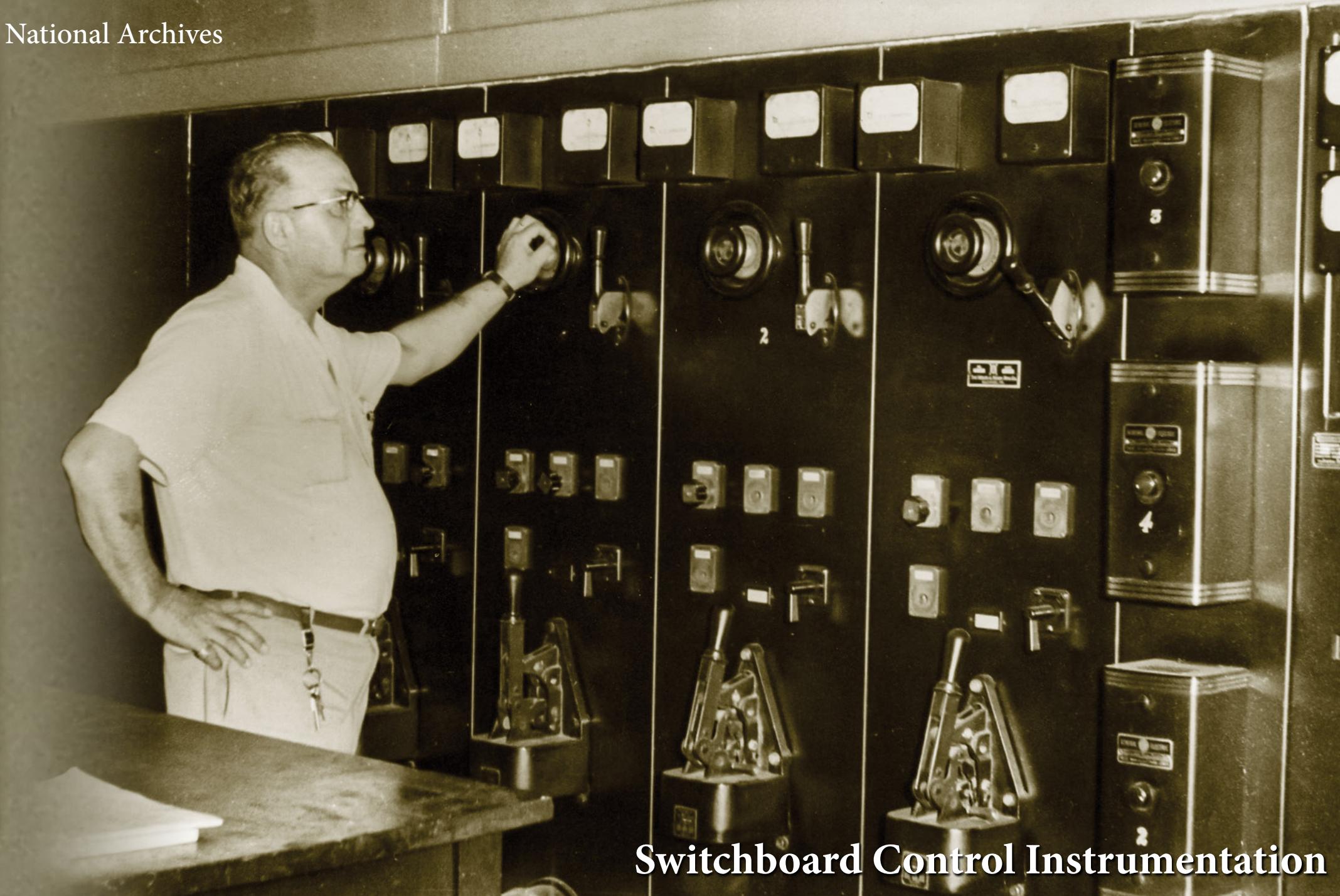


POPES CREEK TURNS ON THE LIGHTS IN SOUTHERN MARYLAND



Photos courtesy of SMECO



By the mid-1930s most cities and towns across the nation were powered by centrally generated electricity while 90% of rural America remained in relative darkness. In Charles County distributed electric service was available only to larger communities such as La Plata, Waldorf, and Indian Head. Thus, in 1937 Maryland's first electric cooperative, the Southern Maryland Tri-County Cooperative Association, Inc., was created to bring electricity to the rural regions of Charles, St. Mary's, and Prince George's Counties. The cost of building a generating plant and transmission lines, however, would require financing from the Rural Electrification Administration (REA). To obtain the loans the Cooperative had to guarantee at least 3 subscribers per mile of transmission line, each of which would pay a minimum monthly bill of \$3.50 plus a \$5 membership fee. In the midst of the Great Depression this was no trivial sum, but the desire for electricity was strong and enough rural Southerners enrolled. The REA thereupon approved loans to fund construction of the Popes Creek power plant and 175 miles of transmission line to serve up to 600 customers.

Popes Creek was selected as the site of the power plant since it was sparsely populated and fuel to operate the generators could be delivered by train, truck, or boat. Construction was completed in just 5 months and at 10:00 a.m. on July 23, 1938 the lights came on in rural Southern Maryland. On this day, the Washington Post reported, *"Electricity began to flow to parts of Maryland's tobacco country that never had it before, to areas where the ox team is still used, and the candle and the oil lamp are still in vogue."*

After operating for just 15 years the Popes Creek power plant was taken out of service in 1953, but its contribution to propelling Southern Maryland from its pastoral beginnings into the modern age endures.