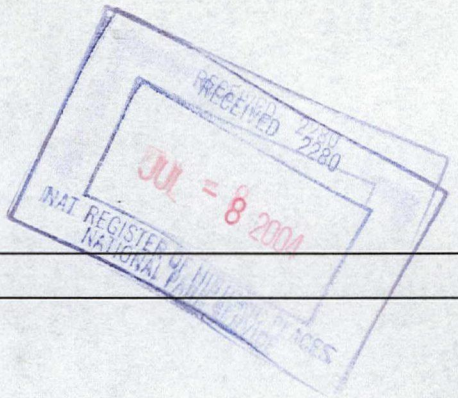
(Oct. 1990)
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM



1. NAME OF PROPERTY

HISTORIC NAME: Comal Power Plant
OTHER NAME/SITE NUMBER: N/A

2. LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER: NW Corner Landa Road and Landa Park Drive **NOT FOR PUBLICATION:** N/A
CITY OR TOWN: New Braunfels **VICINITY:** N/A
STATE: Texas **CODE:** TX **COUNTY:** Comal **CODE:** 091 **ZIP CODE:** 78131

1. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this (x nomination) (__ request for determination of eligibility) meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property (x meets) (_ does not meet) the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant (_ nationally) (_ statewide) (x locally). (__ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

_____ 6-25-04
Signature of certifying official Date

State Historic Preservation Officer, Texas Historical Commission
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ___meets ___does not meet the National Register criteria. (__ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

_____ _____
Signature of commenting or other official Date

_____
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is: Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

√ entered in the National Register
___ See continuation sheet.
____ determined eligible for the National Register _____ _____
___ See continuation sheet
____ determined not eligible for the National Register _____ _____
____ removed from the National Register _____ _____
____ other (explain): _____ _____ _____

for Edson Beall 8/20/04

5. CLASSIFICATION

OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY: Private

CATEGORY OF PROPERTY: District

NUMBER OF RESOURCES WITHIN PROPERTY:	CONTRIBUTING	NONCONTRIBUTING
	4	1 BUILDINGS
	0	0 SITES
	2	0 STRUCTURES
	3	0 OBJECTS
	9	1 TOTAL

NUMBER OF CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES PREVIOUSLY LISTED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER: 0

NAME OF RELATED MULTIPLE PROPERTY LISTING:

6. FUNCTION OR USE

HISTORIC FUNCTIONS: INDUSTRY/energy facility

CURRENT FUNCTIONS: WORK IN PROGRESS (decommissioned facility undergoing rehabilitation)

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: Late 19th and 20th Century Revivals: Classical Revival

MATERIALS:		
	FOUNDATION	CONCRETE
	WALLS	BRICK, CONCRETE, METAL/steel
	ROOF	ASPHALT, CONCRETE, METAL/steel
	OTHER	METAL, GLASS

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION (see continuation sheets 7-1 through 7-41).

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

The Comal Power Plant is a former industrial power generating facility located in New Braunfels, Comal County, Texas (see page 7-14 for location map). First developed by United Gas Improvement Contracting Company (UGI) in the mid 1920s, surviving elements of the original plant site include the Main Building, the Comal Canal, the Gas Metering House, two pump houses, and a variety of scenic landscape elements (trees, lawns, drives, entry pylons, and a suspension-type footbridge). The design of the Main Building and its surrounding landscape reflect classical urban design concepts emanating from the City Beautiful movement of the late nineteenth to early twentieth century period. The site continues to serve today as a locally significant architectural and engineering landmark on the western flank of Landa Park, the city's primary recreational area.

The original 32-acre power plant site is bounded by Landa Park on the north, Landa Park Drive on the east, Landa Street on the south, and Fredericksburg Road on the west (see page 7-15 for current Comal Power Plant Site Plan). Having undergone extensive changes over the years, particularly across the western portion of the plant site, many original elements, including the original switching yard and distribution lines, have been lost. Thus, the nominated portion of the complex includes surviving original elements located in the eastern portion of the plant site (see Page 7-15) that retain their spatial and functional relationship. As a highly visible landmark, the plant also retains its relationships to other locally prominent landmarks in the surrounding area, including Comal Canal, Comal Springs, Landa Park, and the former Landa Industries complex.

Geographical Information

The Comal Power Plant site is located in Comal County, Texas, 0.5 miles northwest of the New Braunfels Square, and approximately 35 miles northeast of downtown San Antonio. In this vicinity the Guadalupe River cuts through the Balcones Escarpment and joins the Comal River within the town of New Braunfels. The Balcones Escarpment is an ancient geologic surface feature of the underlying Balcones Fault, along which several of Texas' largest natural springs occur. The original channel of the Comal River begins at Comal Springs and then flows through Landa Park. However, most of the springs' flow has been diverted along the man-made Comal Canal, which passes through the eastern edge of the Comal Power Plant site. Historically, this canal has provided the hydraulic energy needed for several early milling operations in the area as well as prior two electrical power generating plants (Landa Power Plant (1891) and Comal Power Plant (1926) located along its route (see Page 7-16 for a 1933 blueprint of the area).

The Comal Springs have an average flow of approximately 9,000 liters per second and a temperature ranging from 73.58 degrees to 75.02 degrees Fahrenheit. They are supplied by spring water out of the underground Edwards Aquifer. According to the Texas Water Development Board, Comal Springs is the largest natural spring formation in Texas and the American Southwest. From June 13 to November 3, 1956, the springs ceased flowing altogether, due to drought conditions. The maximum-recorded instantaneous flow was 15,100 liters per second on October 16, 1973, (Brune 1981:130; Texas Water Development Board 1975).

The Comal Power Plant site is located on soil classified as Oakalla clay loam. This is a deep, nearly level soil that occurs in narrow bands along stream terraces and flood plains. The soil exhibits moderate permeability but is well-drained and moderately alkaline and calcareous. Although characterized by frequent flooding and not considered suitable for urban-industrial uses, suitable protection against flooding and erosion have made the Comal Springs vicinity useable

for both recreation and water-powered industry. The average change in elevation from the Upper Comal River to the Lower Comal River is a drop of approximately 21 feet (UGI not dated:4).

The Comal Power Plant

The Comal Power Plant Historic District is a 13.66-acre complex that occupies the eastern portion of the original 32-acre tract. When constructed the Comal Power Plant had multiple structures, buildings, and landscaping elements. Structures included an electrical substation, railroad tracks, roads, discharge tunnel, and fuel oil tanks. Buildings included the power plant, carpentry workshops, blacksmith shop, pump houses, and warehouses. Landscaping elements included the Comal Canal, rows of pecan trees along Landa Drive and the canal, a suspension footbridge across the canal, a circular driveway, and a pair of pylons at the main entrance. In 1938 the natural gas metering house was constructed near the entrance to accommodate the new fuel system. Several additional structures were added to the complex to facilitate the conservation and recirculation of water for cooling the turbines during a severe drought in the 1950s, including a sheetpile dam built across the Comal canal and a large redwood cooling tank below the dam. In addition, a concrete apron stretching from the plant north to the dam along the west edge of the canal held L-shaped sprayers (see page 7-16 for a 1933 blueprint of the site).

At present, the primary surviving historic features of the district include the Comal Canal, power plant building, three small buildings, and a variety of landscape elements, including the footbridge over the canal, rows of mature pecan trees, a circular driveway, and concrete pylons flanking the entry gates. Since the plant's peak of development in the mid-twentieth century, a large number of ancillary support structures and facilities have been removed, particularly since the plant was decommissioned in the 1970s. The most notable change is that broad expanses of lawn now cover the property where once existed a wide variety of workshops, warehouses, railway tracks, and roads. A new power transmission yard surrounded by metal security fence now replaces the original switching yard, transmission lines, and A-frame support towers. At present the majority of the site consists of broad expanses of manicured grass.

Main Building

The Main Building is a large power generating plant located near the southeast corner of the original 32-acre Comal Power Plant tract. The plant building includes several below grade levels, as well as an irregular 2 to 7 story structure above-grade. The structural system is reinforced concrete with structural steel roof trusses spanning some of the larger internal spaces. Distinctive exterior architectural elements include massive banks of industrial awning and casement windows, contrasting colors of red brick and white-painted concrete, and Classical Revival detailing on the south and west facades. Surmounting the flat concrete roof are two large exhaust stacks that once vented heat from the boilers inside the plant. Although all of the original power generating equipment was removed shortly after the plant was closed in the 1970s, the architectural design, materials, and construction characteristics of the building have undergone relatively little change since it served as a vital electrical power generating facility during the Depression Era and World War II.

Functionally, the Main Building is divided into three sequential operations areas: the coal pulverizing house along the west side, the boiler house in the middle, and the turbine house along the east side (see page 7-18 for a cross section of the operating areas and floor levels). However, there are also administrative office areas and elevator towers located across the south front of the building. Overall the building measures approximately 250 feet by 150 feet at grade-level.

The main portion of the coal pulverizing house extends approximately 75 feet above a ground floor elevation of 633'-9" above mean sea level (amsl), and a taller conveyer tower at the south end that rises an additional 39 feet. The parapet around the boiler house roof extends approximately 114 feet above the ground floor elevation, with the two exhaust stacks rising an additional 72 feet. The turbine house is lower in height, extending approximately 70 feet above its operating floor elevation of 625'9" amsl (Reed 1995:77). It also includes two below-grade levels that extend approximately 30 feet below the operating floor of the turbine house. Other portions of the building include the cooling water intake gates, located at the canal level along the east edge of the power plant building, and a sub-surface discharge tunnel that extends under the canal and into the adjacent Landa Industries property (currently owned by the Wurstfest Association) before it empties into the natural channel of the Comal River.

Exterior Description

The overall form of the Comal Power Plant is rectangular but features some irregularities where several projections and subdivisions express certain internal operational zones. Among the most notable characteristics of the exterior is the carefully organized contrast between the red face brick and the white painted concrete bands that divide the elevations into three major horizontal zones and delineate individual details, such as the water table, lintels, windows, and parapets. The contrast between these materials, as well as the masterful and varied patterning of the brickwork, enhance the building's Classical Revival style. Distinctly classical details include: the use of red brick pilasters with contrasting white concrete bases and capitals to divide the massive banks of windows, the denticulated pattern of the painted concrete window surrounds below the parapet level, and the classically arched bank of windows below the LCRA sign at the south front facade. The most prominent and character defining features that clearly distinguish the building as an industrial power plant are the two tall exhaust stacks that are also painted with the same stark white color used elsewhere to emphasize architectural details around the building. It is important to note that the rear north wall of the building does not include the architectural detailing of the other three facades because the original plans anticipated an additional phase of construction on this end that would have doubled the size of the existing building.

The south front façade (see page 7-19) has three major components: a two-story partial-width entry block that housed the office, laboratories, and locker rooms; a three-story wing on the east side that corresponds to the turbine house; and the combined seven-story mass of the coal pulverizing and boiler. At the base of the south front is a projecting two-story office block that contains the front entryway. This block is accented horizontally by the broad white concrete bands that continue around the east and west facades. The entry block is symmetrically fenestrated with paired, double-hung, metal windows flanking the central entry bay. The entry bay is strongly accented by a white concrete surround, two stories in height. The entryway has double metal doors protected beneath a decorative semi-circular metal awning that is suspended from the front wall (see page 7-19). Above the entry, an intricately patterned brick panel surrounds a white concrete star, all of which is set beneath two double-hung windows. Similarly detailed brickwork occurs above the concrete water table and below the concrete parapet houses (see page 7-20 for original drawing of south façade).

The remainder of this façade, like those to the east and west, uses the striking contrast between the red face brick and white-painted concrete to emphasize its classical details. The western portion of the façade, which corresponds to the coal pulverizer house, is one bay in width as defined by pilasters that are four stories in height. The adjacent middle portion of the façade, which corresponds to the boiler house, features a distinctly classical Palladian window motif in the three-part organization of windows and pilasters above the entry block (see pages 7-1 and 7-21 for current and historic views). A white concrete band separates the sixth from the seventh floor. The metal windows on the seventh floor have a

continuous white concrete surround that is interrupted by a semicircular window light. Atop the south front façade is a large metal framework supporting large, lighted letters spelling "LCRA", and a small penthouse that contains the upper mechanical portion of the elevator shaft.

The west façade has nine symmetrical bays defined by massive banks of industrial awning windows and brick pilasters with white concrete capitals and bases (see page 7-22). A broad horizontal band of white concrete separates the two story basal portion of the façade from the four-story middle portion. Similar horizontal bands also occur at the parapet of the sixth floor, where the facade steps back, except at the southwest corner bay, to form an exterior rooftop over the pulverizer house. Metal awning windows at the sixth floor level are articulated with a continuous white concrete surround that give the appearance of classical denticulation. The awning windows at the seventh floor level, though taller, are treated in the same manner with a surrounding white concrete band.

The north rear façade is more utilitarian in character featuring none of the classical detailing that is used on all other facades (see page 7-23). As noted above, this facade lacks ornamentation because the original plans called for the plant to be expanded to twice its present size. For this reason, the north wall was intended to be temporary and features a type of red-orange brick different than the red brick of the other exterior walls. Despite the planned removal of this wall, the north rear façade has six bays of steel awning windows that extend in height to three different levels. The western three bays correspond to the turbine house and rise three stories above grade, with two additional unlighted levels below grade. The turbine bay also has a large overhead door at the northwest corner. The central boiler house portion rises seven stories above grade and has two bays of windows and a small overhead door. The pulverizer house portion has a single bay of windows, five stories in height, with two unlighted levels below grade.

The east façade features the same dark red face brick used on the south and west facades, and is composed of two levels: a three-story wing containing the turbine house, and a four-story block that contains the boiler house (see pages 7-23 and 7-24 for current and historic views). Each level is nine bays in length, with each bay of windows separated by brick pilasters with white concrete bases and capitals. The turbine house level has a broad water-table band of white concrete and two parapet level bands of the same material. The upper four floors of the boiler house have a single concrete band above the pilasters, an articulated band surrounding the seventh floor windows giving the appearance of classical denticulation, and a single white concrete band at the parapet level.

Interior

The interior consists of a large number of spaces with specialized operational, maintenance, and administrative functions. Materials used in the interior include concrete, tile, brick, and metal. Concrete is generally used for the structure, as well as some floors and ceilings. Vitrified tile is also used in some areas as a flooring material, although many of the operational spaces also use expansive areas of metal floor grating to allow the upward dissipation of heat produced by the boilers and turbines. The walls are almost entirely of brick. Doors throughout the plant are metal.

CONTROL ROOM

The Control Room is located at the south end of the Turbine Operations Floor and measures approximately 20 by 60 feet. In the Control Room, like most other rooms in the plant, the windows are painted metal awnings, although there are also some double-hung sashes. Notably, the existing concrete floors were once covered with rubberized flooring to prevent

friction and static electricity near the sensitive monitoring equipment (see pages 7-25 through 7-27 for current and historic views). None of this original flooring material is still present.

Turbine Operations Room

The largest internal space is the Turbine Operations Floor. The Turbine Operations Floor measures approximately 120 feet long, 60 feet wide, 45 feet high and is located in the three-story extension on the east side of the plant (see pages 7-28 and 7-29). Flooring throughout the Turbine Operations Floor is square red vitrified ceramic tile with a splash course of the same tile around the base of the walls and around several large openings through the floor. Decorative cast iron railings also surround these openings, as well as five of the six stairways that ascend and descend from the Turbine Operations Floor. Two of the large openings in the floor accommodated the massive Westinghouse turbine generators (see page 7-30) that were removed from the plant ca. 1974. Interior brick on the south, east, and north walls is a buff color with soldier, stretcher, or header courses at various levels on the east and south walls. Pilasters on the exterior are mimicked on the interior with flush decorative brickwork. Windows are painted-metal industrial awnings with wire-reinforced safety panes. There are three bays on the south wall that provide visibility between the control room and the main turbine floor, eight bays on the east exterior wall, and three bays on the north exterior wall. Each window bay is operated with a manually operated mechanical linkage system (see page 7-31) that simultaneously opens and closes all of the awnings within a single bay.

Two large Link-Belt hoists located in the turbine house are the only original mechanical elements still remaining in Comal Power Plant. Suspended from two massive I-beams that travel along steel tracks affixed to the east and west interior walls, the two hoists have capacities of 75 and 25 tons, respectively. Either can be utilized throughout the length of the Turbine house. The larger hoist (see page 7-32) was used primarily to repair and maintain the two turbine-generators by lifting the heavy metal covers away from the top of the turbine. Each turbine-generator was shut down once every two years for maintenance and repair (Lehmann 1999).

The ceiling of the turbine house is cast concrete supported by steel trusses. The east and west walls, which support the traveling crane-hoist, are braced with a series of steel I-beams. Brick on the west wall is an orange/red firebrick that is spliced at the location of the 1928 expansion to accommodate a second turbine-generator and a third boiler.

Boiler Room

The Boiler room measures approximately 202 feet long, 46 feet wide, and 96 feet high. It

housed the four steam boilers that supplied steam to the turbine-generators in the adjacent turbine room. All of the boilers were manufactured by Babcock and Wilcox. The first two were installed in 1926, the third in 1928, and the fourth in 1941. Each of the original boilers contained 17,950 square feet of heating surface that could produce 30,000 kWh. The fourth boiler had a steam capacity of 760,000 pounds of per hour (Comal Power Plant files at Sophienburg Archive). According to J.T. Thomas the boilers were stripped down by 1989 (Personal Interview 2000) and removed ca. 1997 due to environmental hazards associated with asbestos lining and mortar. (See 7-34 and 7-35 for historic views of the boilers.)

Offices

The Comal Power Plant Office spaces are located in the two-story entry block at the south front of the building. A central ground level hallway separated a two-room engineering office on the east from the plant laboratory on the west. The second floor contained shower and locker rooms. Windows on both floors are 3/3 metal double-hung sashes. Flooring was rectangular vitrified ceramic tile, similar to the Turbine Operations Floor (see page 7-35).

Pulverizer House

The Pulverizer House is located along the west side of the building and measures 23 by 202 feet. The floors and ceiling are of poured concrete and the walls are of exposed brick. Two exterior entry doors feature overhead and sidelight awning windows. There is a single bay of windows on the west wall and nine on the north wall. One interior door on the east wall leads into the Boiler Room. At the south end of the pulverizer house is the coal tower where raw coal from an underground bin was raised to the full height of the coal tower before descending to the pulverizers located at the ground floor.

Alterations and Additions

In a 1926 brochure announcing the opening of the Comal Power Plant, United Gas Improvement Company (UGI) anticipated the next phase of expansion to house a second turbine and a third boiler. They wrote "The ultimate capacity of the plant will be more than 100,000 kw [sic]. When it reaches the ultimate capacity, the building will be approximately three times as large as it is now. In locating the plant, the engineers again had in mind space for increased building capacity. It is unwise to build such a plant to its ultimate capacity until the demands for electricity require it. Constructing such a plant as and when needed conserves capital (Ballinger 1926:not paginated)."

The 1928-1929 expansion doubled the size of the original building from the l. west level on the pump room floor to the roof, added a second exhaust stack, and increased generating capacity to 60,000 kWh. The increased capacity contributed directly to the pool of power available to San Antonio Public Service Company's (SAPSC) client base as well as all local utilities in the Central Texas electric power grid (see page 7-36). To help process increased fly ash and sulfuric acid emissions, by-products from burning lignite coal, fly ash collectors were also installed on the roof of the building ca. 1929. These were removed ca. 1980s.

Because expansion was planned from the initiation of the project utilizing the same contractors, there is virtually no difference in construction methods or materials used. One of the few apparent indications of the 1928-1929 expansion program is visible at the north wall where the exterior brick is a different type and color than the face brick used on all other facades of the plant. This lower grade of brick was used because the north wall was considered to be temporary, in anticipation of yet another phase of expansion. These changes did not, however, diminish or alter the Classical Revival design used on the adjoining east and west side walls.

The planned expansion was so successful that the owners fully expected to continue expansion plans as the market for power generation in the Central Texas area continued to grow. The Great Depression, however, thwarted the expansion of the power generation business as industrial and residential users sought to reduce costs by using less electricity. In addition, the banking panic of 1931 and the Federal Trade Commission's (FTC) intense scrutiny and investigation of

utility companies led to a massive decline in the valuation of publicly held utility company stocks. The Congressional response to the FTC efforts was the 1935 Public Utility Holding Company Act that abolished the massive pyramid structure of public utility holding companies (Castaneda 1999:35). As the ownership of Comal Power Plant shifted from the national level to the regional level during the 1940s, the original exterior expansion plans were effectively halted (see page 7-37 for ca. 1926 sketch of the original design).

The third and last phase of expansion carried out at the Comal Power Plant was limited to interior construction only. In 1941 a fourth boiler was installed to meet the increased energy demands of World War II era production and training activities throughout the mid-western United States (Reed 1995:73; Fischer 1999). The massive mobilization of industrial production, labor, and resources during World War II required an enormous amount of electric power. Terry Adams and Raymond Fischer recall that Comal Power Plant was running at maximum capacity 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, throughout World War II, under special orders from the United States War Department.

This fourth boiler, as noted earlier, was larger than the previous three, although it was constructed and installed by Babcock and Wilcox, the same contractor used on the 1926 and 1928-1929 construction. Because this last phase of construction was entirely internal, it did not change the exterior appearance of the building. It did however, increase the generating capacity of the plant to approximately 70,000 kWh.

During the closing decades of the 20th century, the Comal Power Plant underwent some additional alterations externally and internally, particularly after the plant was closed on June 16, 1973. LCRA employees dismantled the original electric substation adjacent to the plant in the late 1970s (Welty 1999). During the late 1970s and into the 1980s, LCRA let various contracts for metal salvage on the interior of the building, rooftop, and grounds. Most of the original machinery, light fixtures, equipment, and fuel oil tanks were removed ca. 1980-1990s.

Abatement of hazardous materials inside the plant building and across the 32-acre plant site has been an ongoing concern for LCRA since 1989. During that year they expended $2.4 million to remove asbestos from the plant. Since 1998 LCRA contractors have abated and removed additional hazardous materials including asbestos insulation, asbestos containing brick and mortar, lead paint, and contaminated soil.

Site Features

The 1933 Site Plan of Comal Power Plant and Landa Hydroelectric Plant (see page 7-16) illustrates many of the other architectural, operational, and landscape elements of the plant site. Notable elements that still exist at the plant site include parallel rows of pecan trees along Landa Drive; a circular drive that runs from the main entry gate to the front entry of the building; a driveway along the west side; a footbridge across Comal Canal, and a Gas Metering House that controlled the natural gas supply to the plant and two small brick pump houses for fuel oil (see page 7-15 for boundary Map).

Footbridge

The power plant was linked to the adjacent Landa Industries complex by a suspension-type footbridge over the Comal Canal. The bridge measures approximately 100 feet in length and is constructed with metal framing and suspension cables, and is decked with wooden planks (See Continuation Sheet 39.) It was utilized by plant engineers to make

periodic checks at the old Landa Power Plant across Landa Park Drive, where control gates for the plant's discharge tunnel were located. This adjacent power plant was operated periodically by SAPSC and LCRA through the 1950s to boost overall electric power generation.

Outbuildings

The Gas Metering House is located southwest of the plant. It is a small rectangular red brick building with front gable roof and corner pilasters similar to those used on the exterior of the Main Building. Its windows have been boarded up. The single entry door is metal with four lights on the south side of the building (see page 7-39). The Fuel Oil Pump House No. 1 is located north of the plant. It is a small rectangular red brick building with a flat roof and corner pilasters. The windows are metal awning and the door is metal with one light (see page 7-40). The Fuel Oil Pump House No. 2 is located north of the plant and the Fuel Oil Pump House No. 1. It is also a small rectangular red brick building with a flat roof and corner pilasters. The windows are metal awning and the door is metal with four lights (see page 7-41).

Drought of the 1950s

The drought of the 1950s dramatically affected the operation of the plant by causing a severe reduction of chilled water flow from Comal Springs. Normal operating procedure was to take water into the below grade pump room along Comal Canal through two intakes on the east side of plant and expel the heated water downstream through the discharge tunnel. Without sufficient quantities of chilled water to cool the turbines and generators, LCRA instituted four measures to meet the plant's cooling water requirements.

First, plant engineers constructed the Comal Canal dam (Bartles 1999) and drilled a 1,000 foot water well north of the main building (Adams 1999). The sheetpile dam, constructed with interlocking metal plates, was located approximately 900 ft upstream from the main plant building and measured approximately 60 feet across. Water from the well provided abundant cooling water that was captured, stored, and recycled in the canal adjacent to the plant.

Second, plant engineers constructed long metal sprayers mounted on pedestals atop a concrete apron adjacent to the west bank of Comal Canal and upstream from the plant. Recycled water was pumped from below grade in the plant through the sprayers creating a fine mist, which allowed the cooler air in the atmosphere to reduce the temperature. The water was then recaptured in the canal and plant intakes. Condensate was visible from a distance and some vehicular traffic on Landa Park Drive Street got showered periodically when prevailing winds were high (Bartles 1999; Adams 1999). To achieve maximum efficiency the water had to be cooled before reentry into the plant. The sprayers helped accomplish this reduction in temperature, but ultimately could not cool the water sufficiently.

Third, City Public Services (owned by the City of San Antonio, who purchased the property in 1942 and was leasing it to LCRA) constructed a redwood cooling tower ca. 1953 (Adams 1999; Bartles 1999; Lehmann 1999), located in the Comal Canal on heavy metal pilings driven into the bedrock channel. Steel I-beams formed the foundation of the honeycombed cooling tower).

Barney Bartles explained the process. Hot water from the plant was recycled by pumping it into the cooling tower through elbow pipes, and then through the honeycomb redwood structure of the tower. Eight 14-foot diameter fans with 500 horsepower motors pulled cool air from Comal Canal through the honeycomb structure and expelled heat through the roof

of the cooling tower. The cooled water was expelled into the Comal Canal and recaptured through the intakes. Maintenance crews utilized the south stairway for efficiency and safety inspections, as well as repairs (Bartles 1999).

The Cooling Tower was utilized from c. 1953 to 1957 when the drought ended (Lehmann 1999). It was dismantled after Comal Power Plant closed by a crew from local entertainment facility, Schlitterbahn. Compensation for dismantling was possession of the redwood for Schlitterbahn structures (Adams 1999). The sheetpile, dam that kept water in the canal for plant usage throughout the Drought, was utilized in modern years to keep water in Landa Lake for recreation purposes. It was replaced with a concrete and rock dam in 2000 (Rohde 2000). Unfortunately, the concrete apron on the west bank of the Comal Canal is the last visible structure associated with Drought of the 1950s and Comal Power Plant Engineers response. The sheetpile dam, sprayers, and cooling tower have been dismantled and removed from the site.

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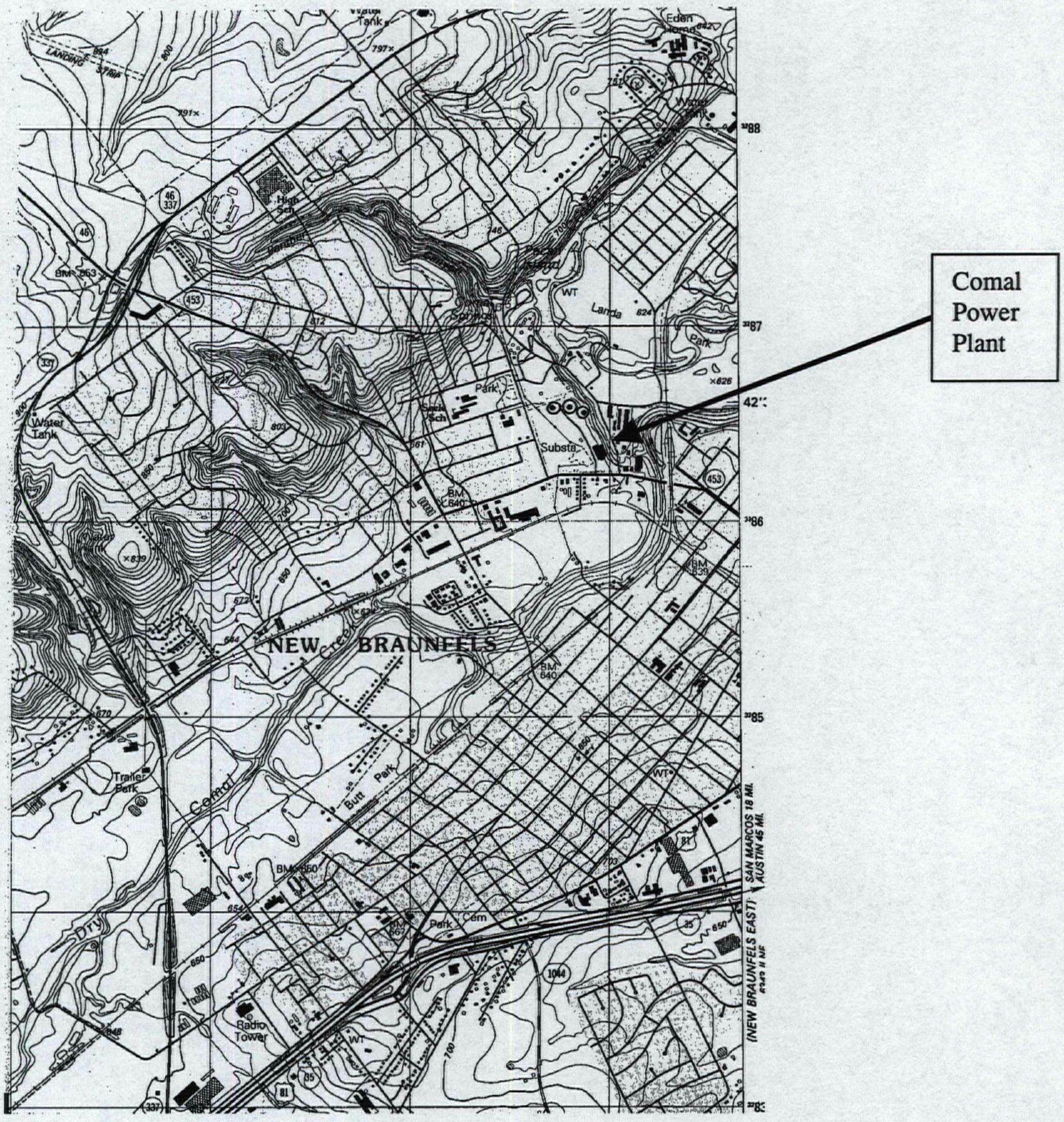
OMB Approval No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet



Comal Power Plant, Site Location Map
(Source: U.S.G.S. 7.5' New Braunfels West, Tex, Topographic Map, 1988)

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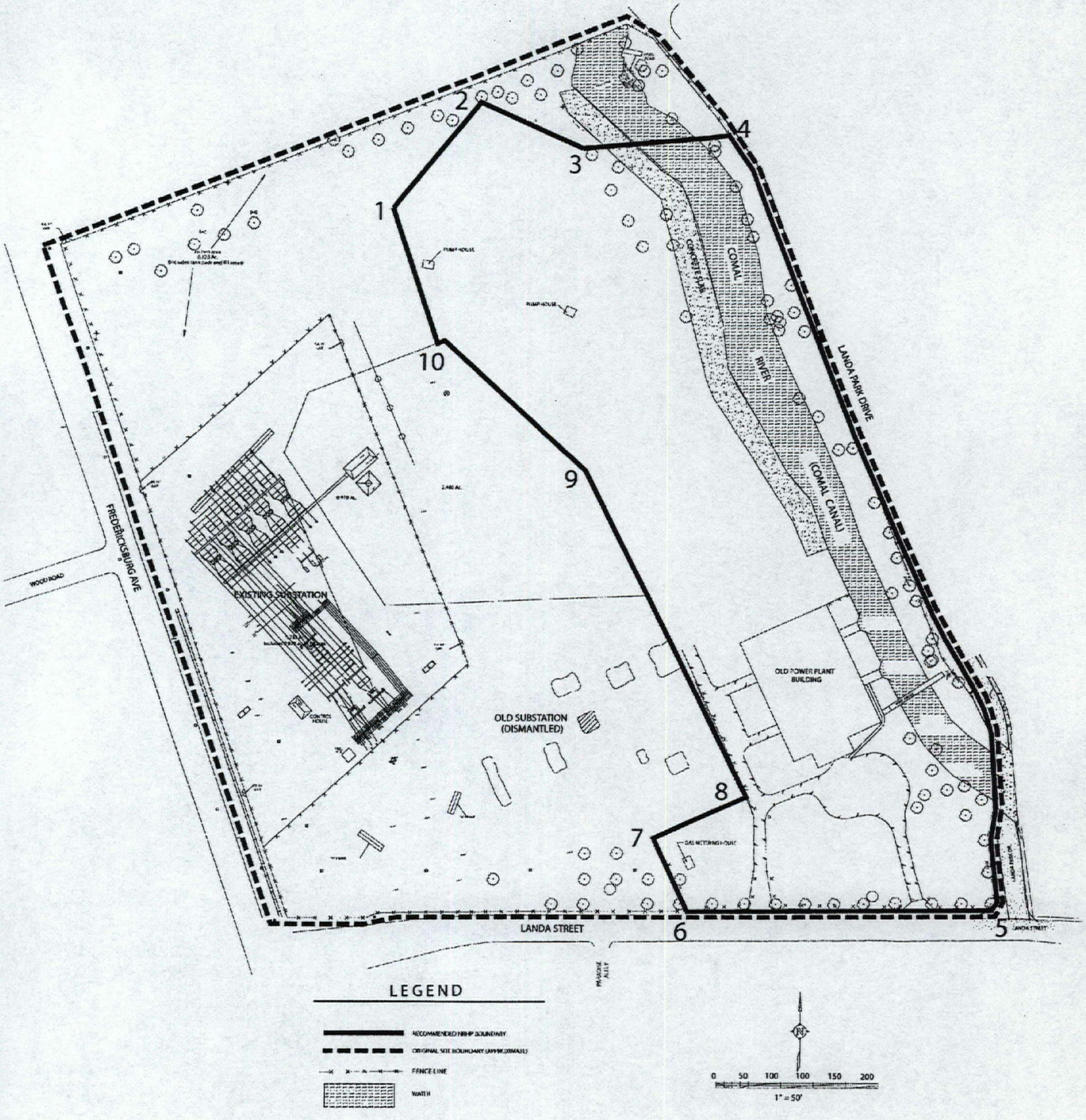
National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 15

Comal Power Plant
New Braunfels, Comal, Texas



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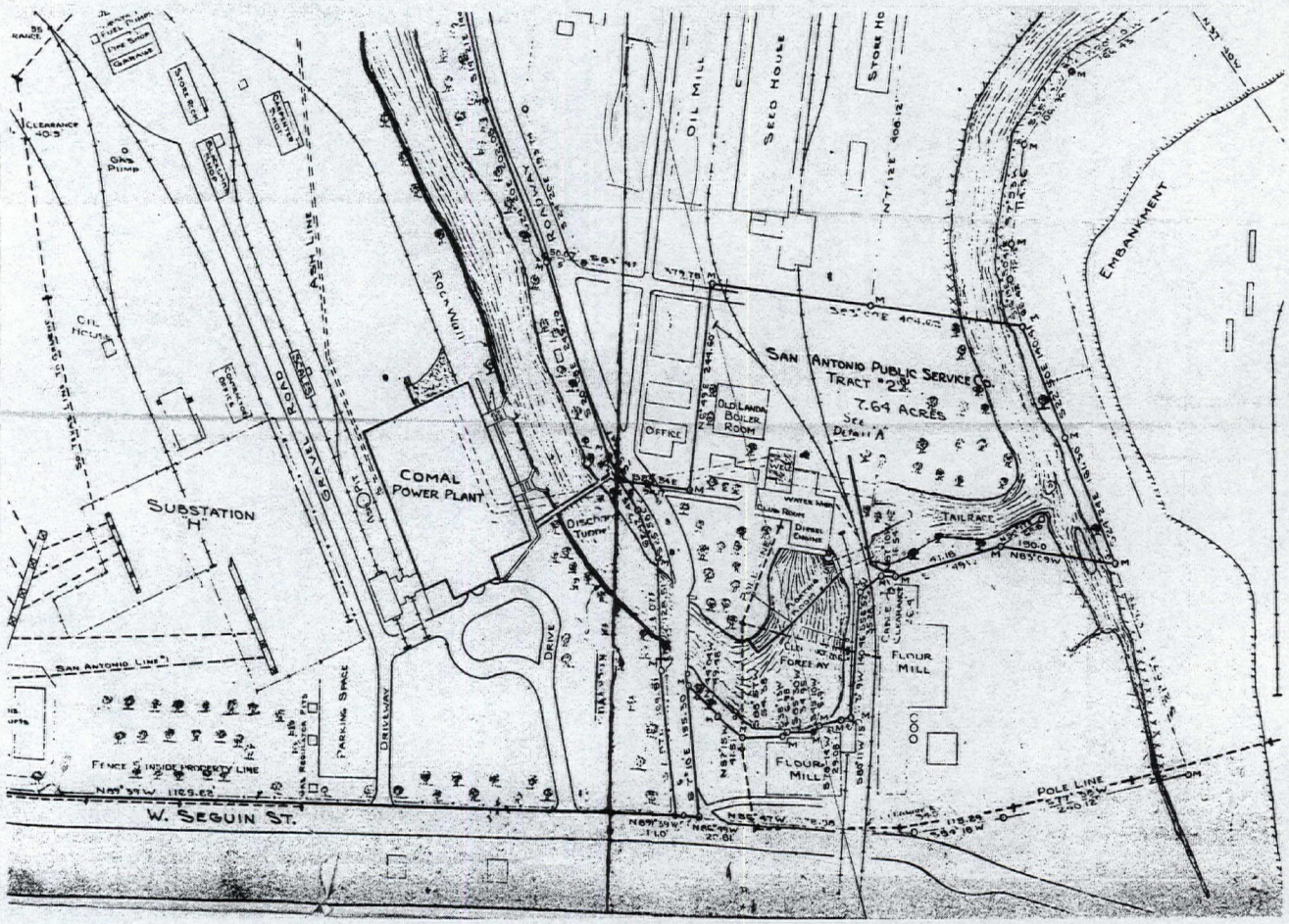
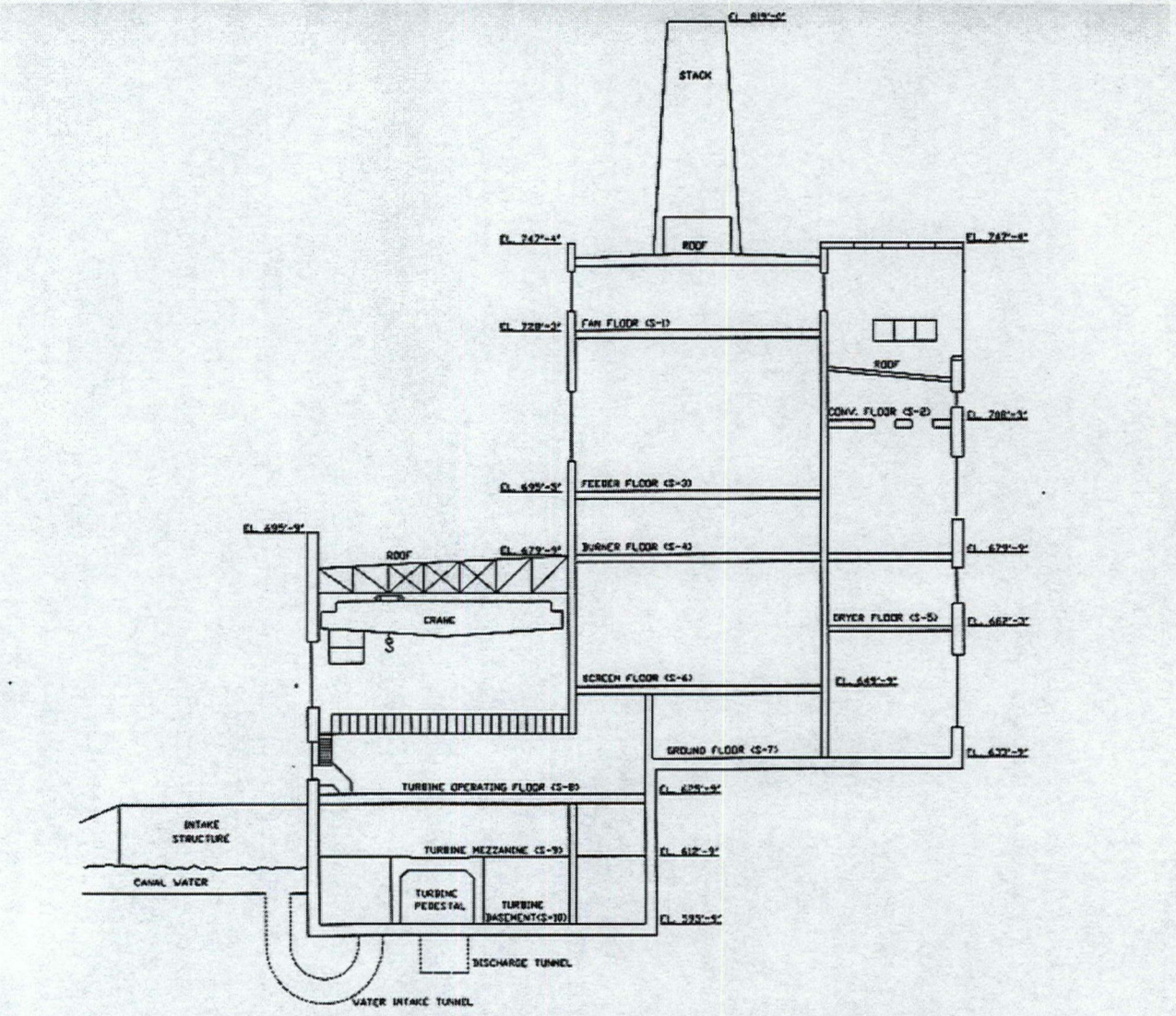


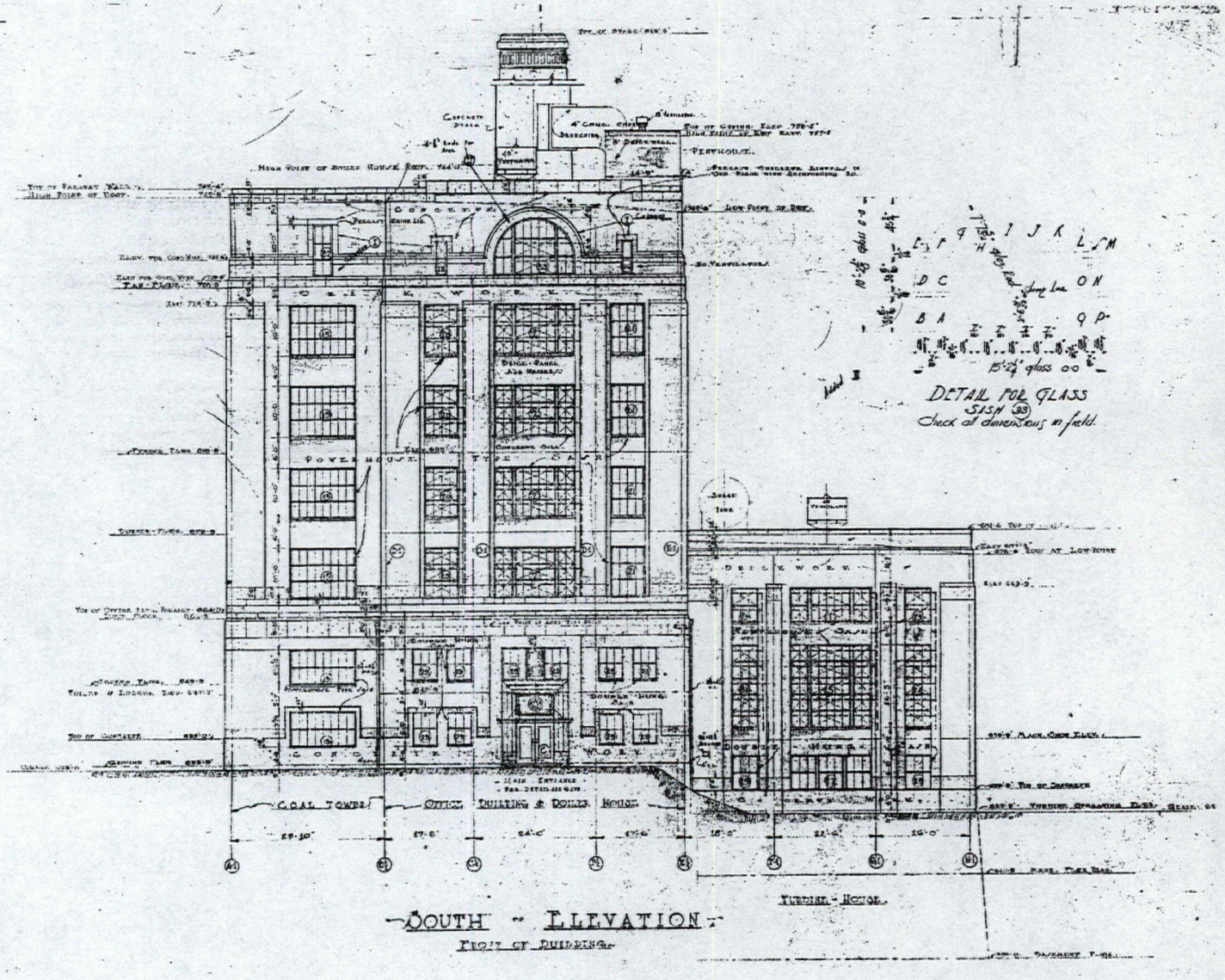
1933 City of New Braunfels Blueprint of Landa Mills and Comal Power Plant Area



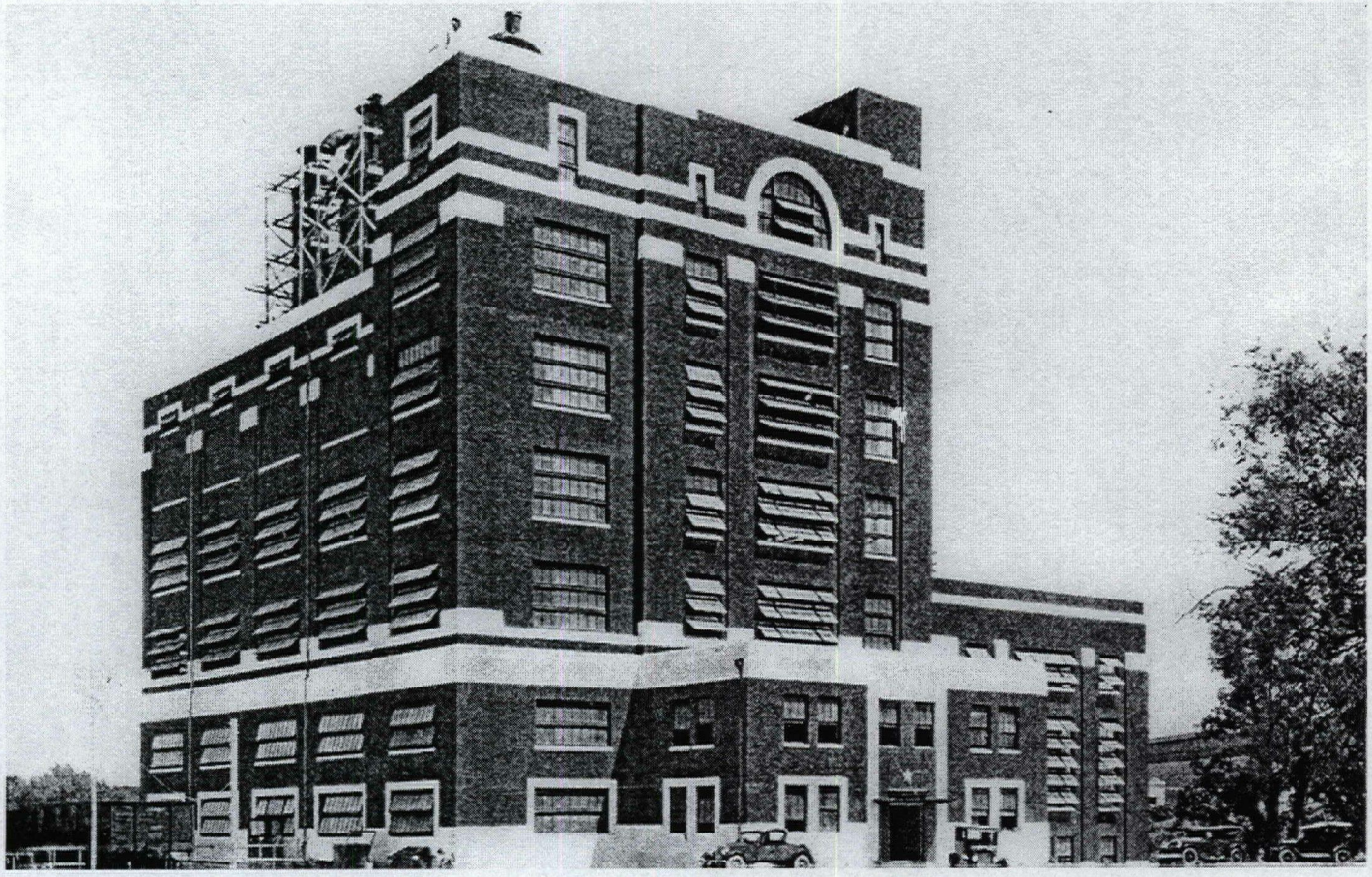
Comal Power Plant, Section Showing Operations Areas and Floor Levels
Adapted from ca. 1997 LCRA drawing

Comal Power Plant, South Front
Camera facing Northwest 2/2000 Eugene D. Foster, Jr.

Comal Power Plant, Detail of South Front Entry
Camera facing Northwest 2/2000 Eugene R. Foster, Jr.



1925 Front Elevation



Comal Power Plant, Oblique View of South Front and West Side, 1926
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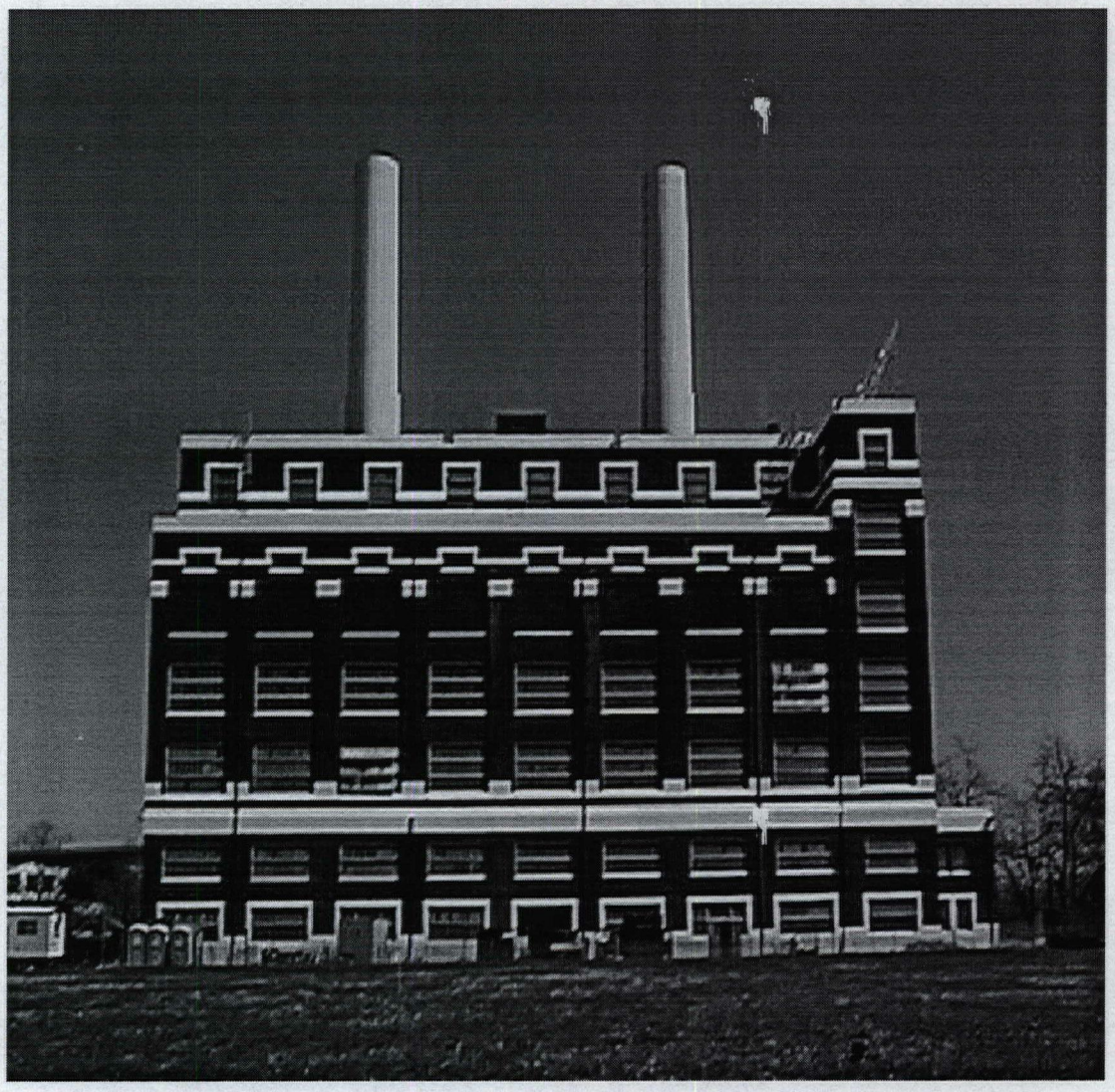
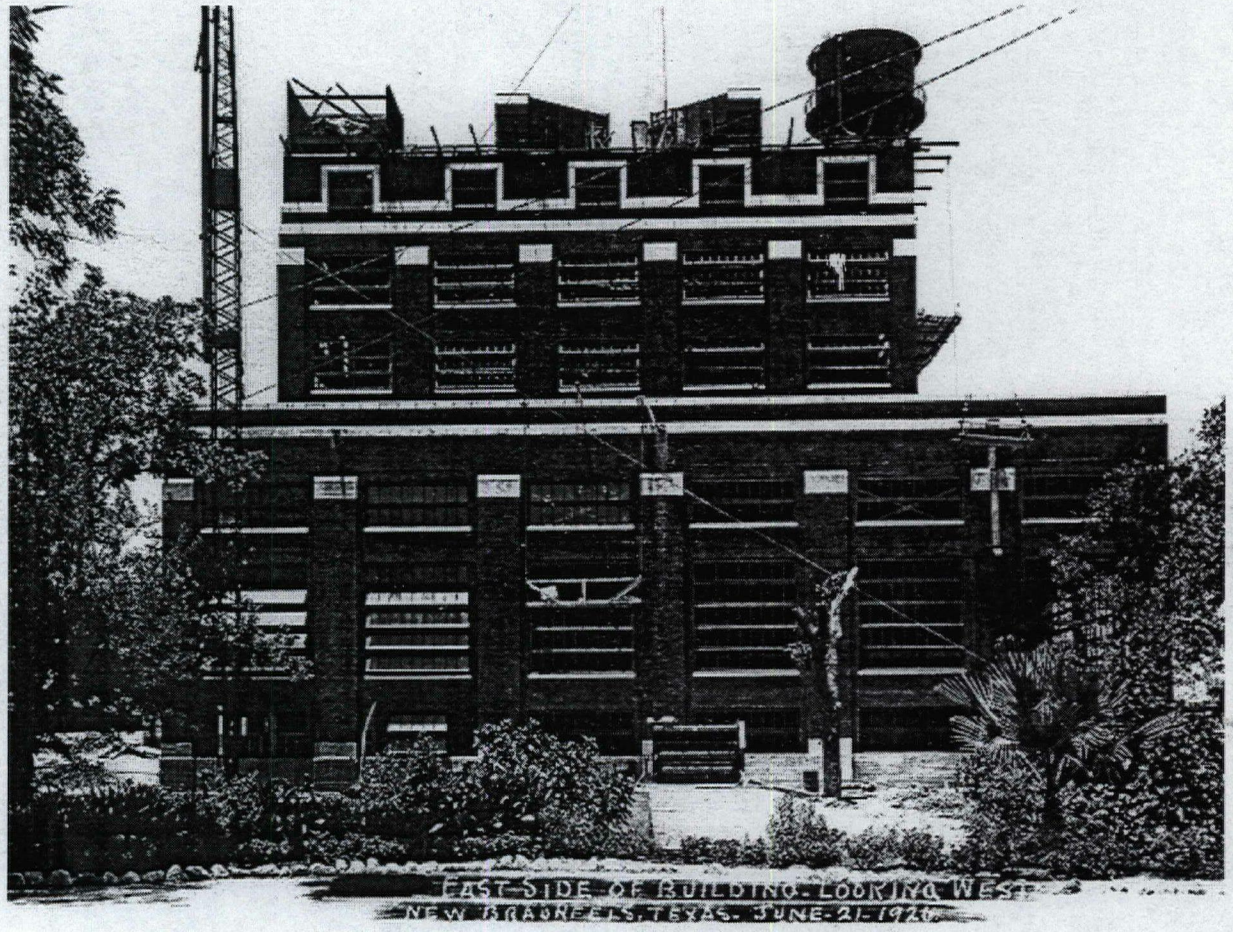


Comal Power Plant, West Side
Camera facing East 2/2000 Eugene R. Foster, Jr.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Comal Power Plant, North Rear and East Side
Camera facing Southwest 2/2000 Sally S. Victor



Comal Power Plant East Facade, 1926
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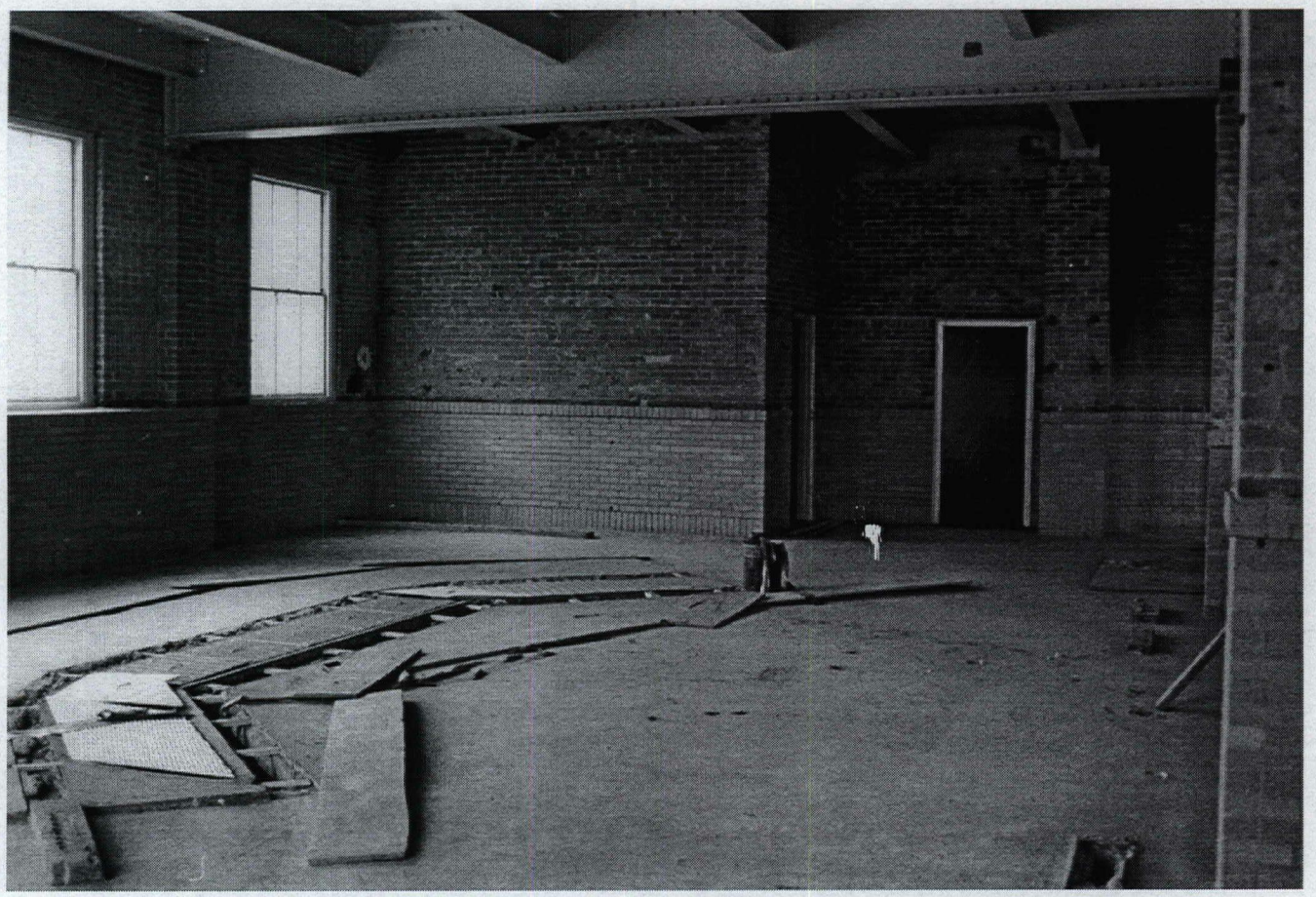
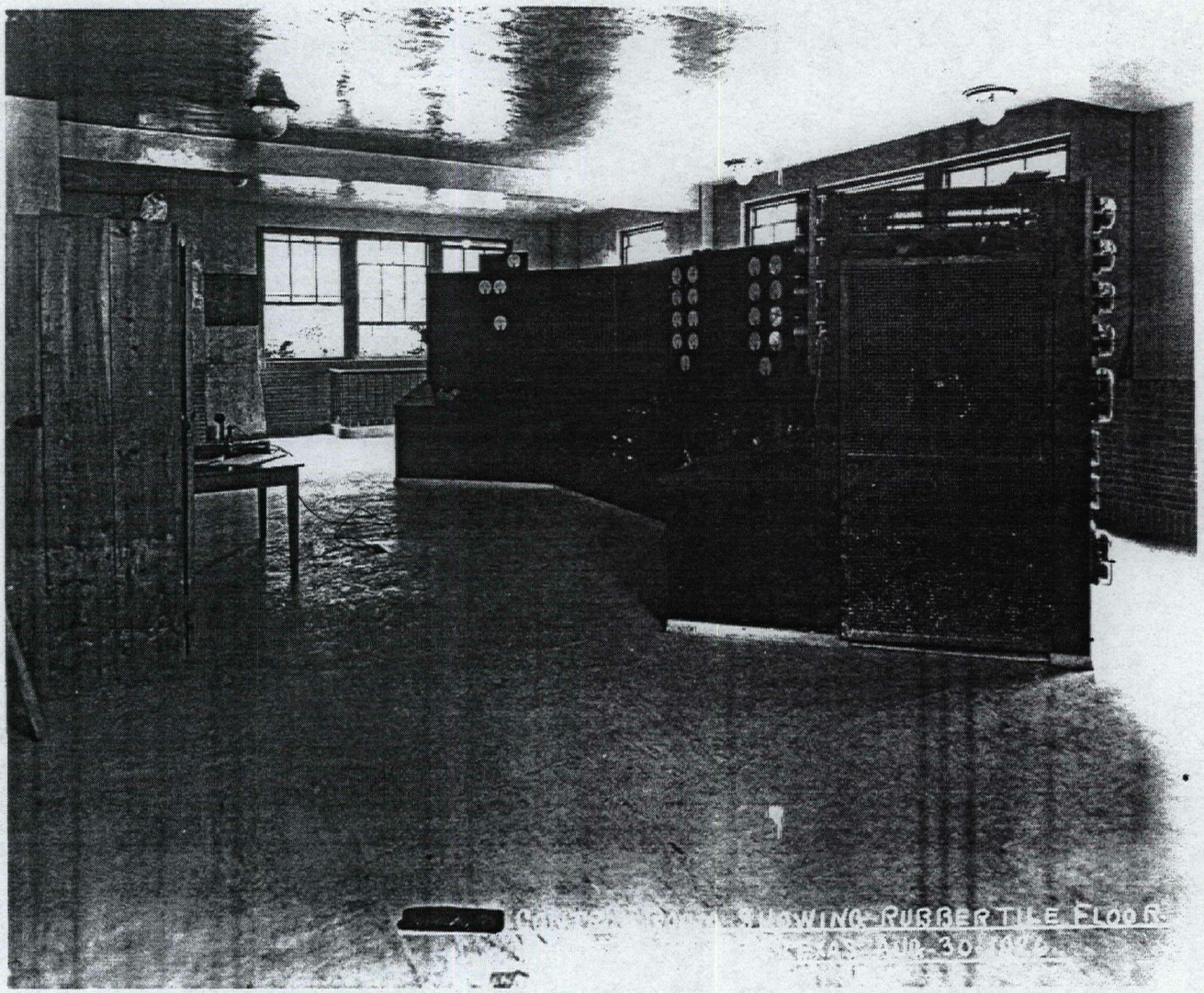
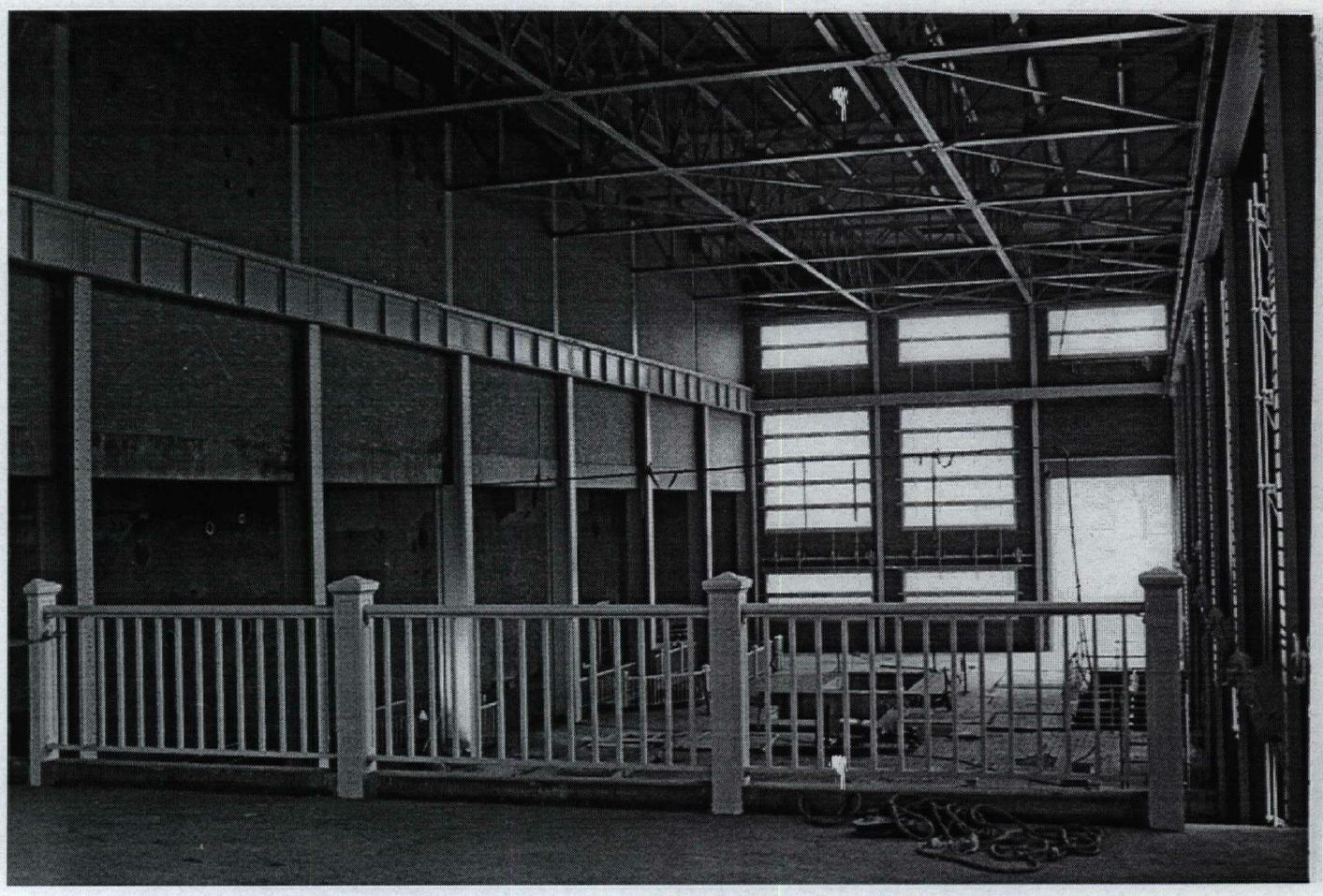
Comal Power Plant, Control Room Exterior with Stair at
South end of Turbine Operations Floor
Camera looking West 3/2000 Eugene R. Foster, Jr.



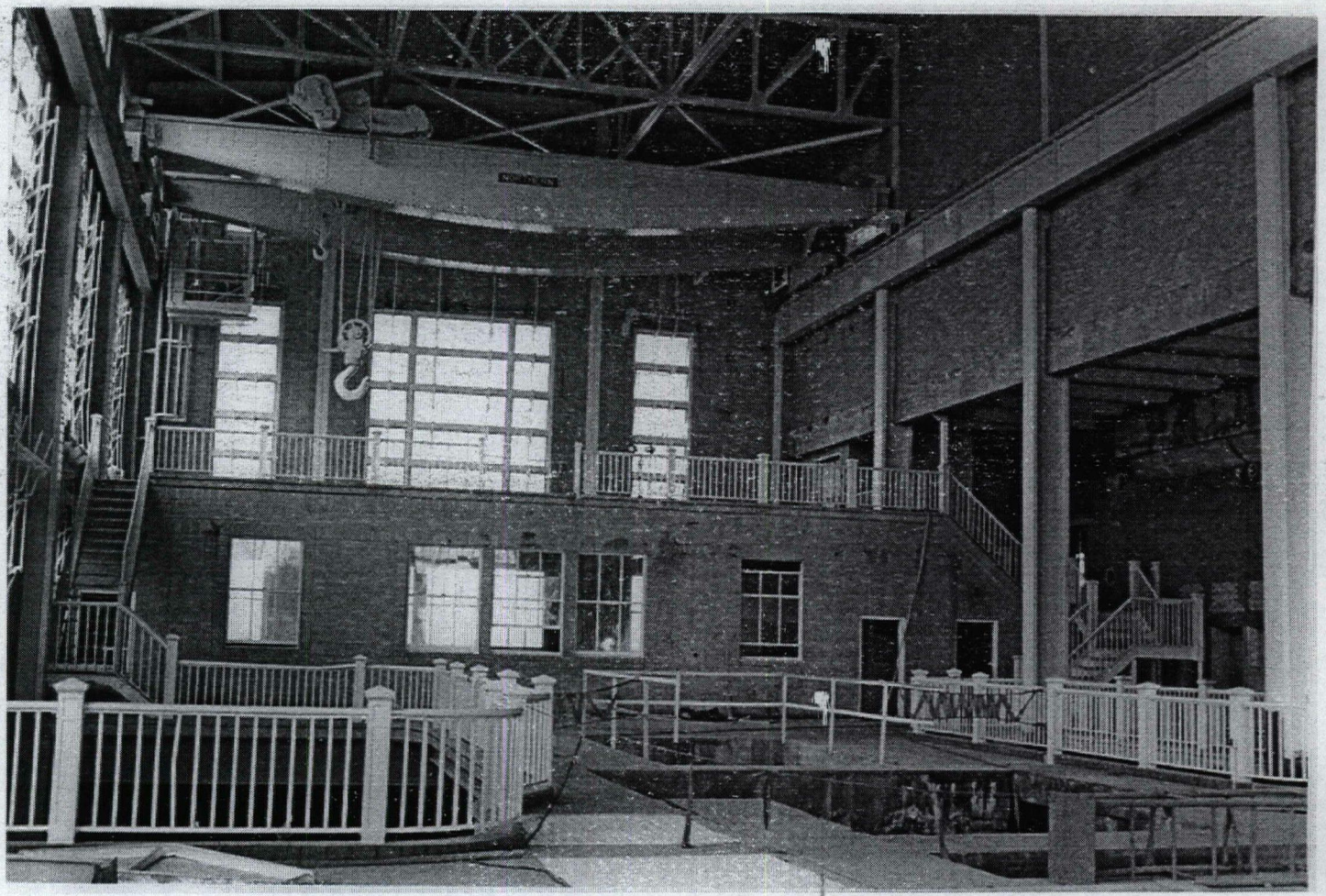
Comal Power Plant, Control Room Interior
Camera facing Southwest 3/2000 Eugene R. Foster, Jr.



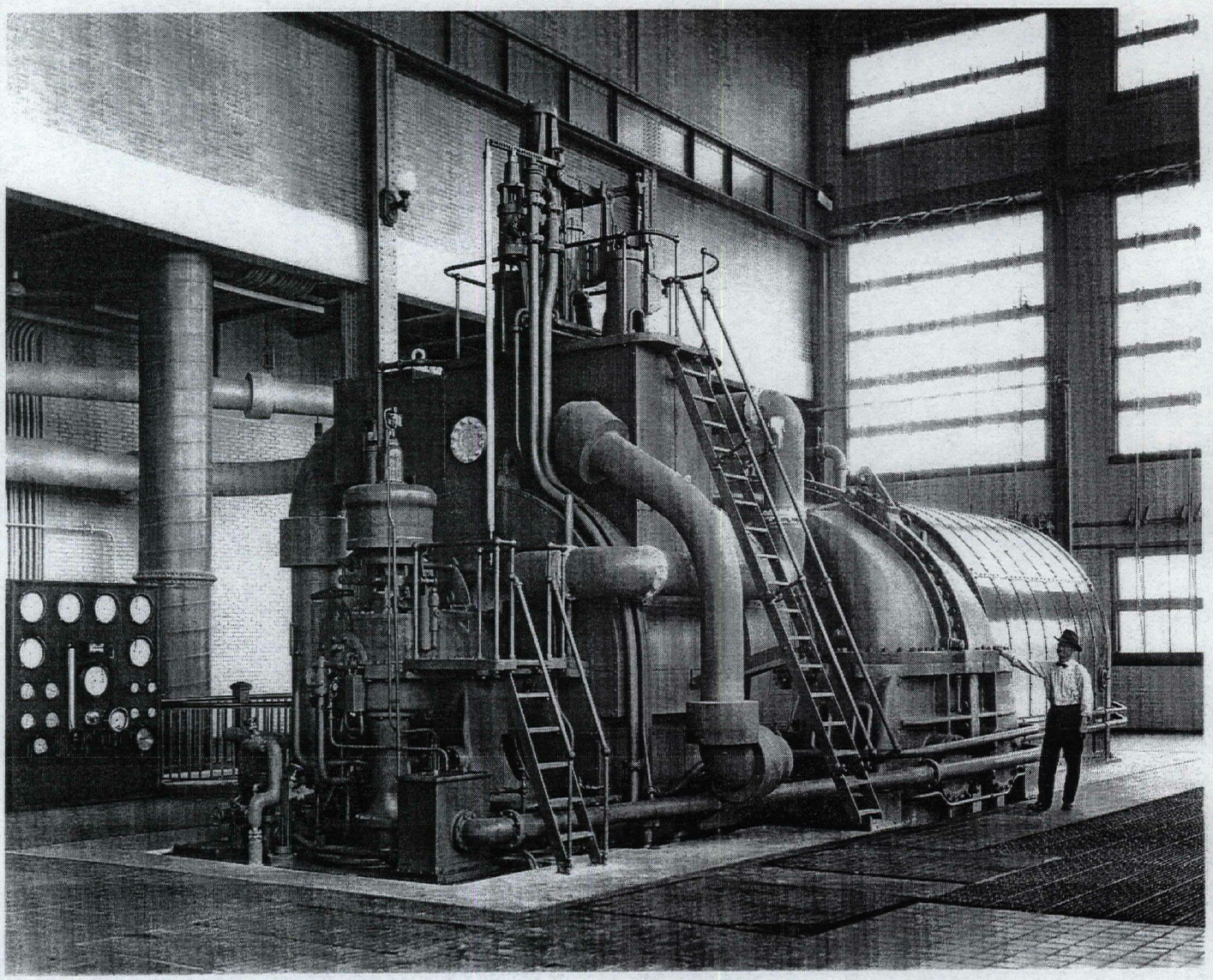
Historic View of Control Room, 1926
Reproduced by Permission of Sophienburg Library and Archives



Comal Power Plant, Turbine Operations Floor
Camera looking Northwest from roof of Control Room 3/2000 Eugene R. Foster, Jr.



Comal Power Plant, Turbine Operations Floor
Camera looking Southwest toward Control Room 3/2000 Eugene R. Foster, Jr.



Westinghouse Turbine Generator No. 1, Comal Power Plant (ca. 1926)
Camera facing Northwest, Photographer umknown
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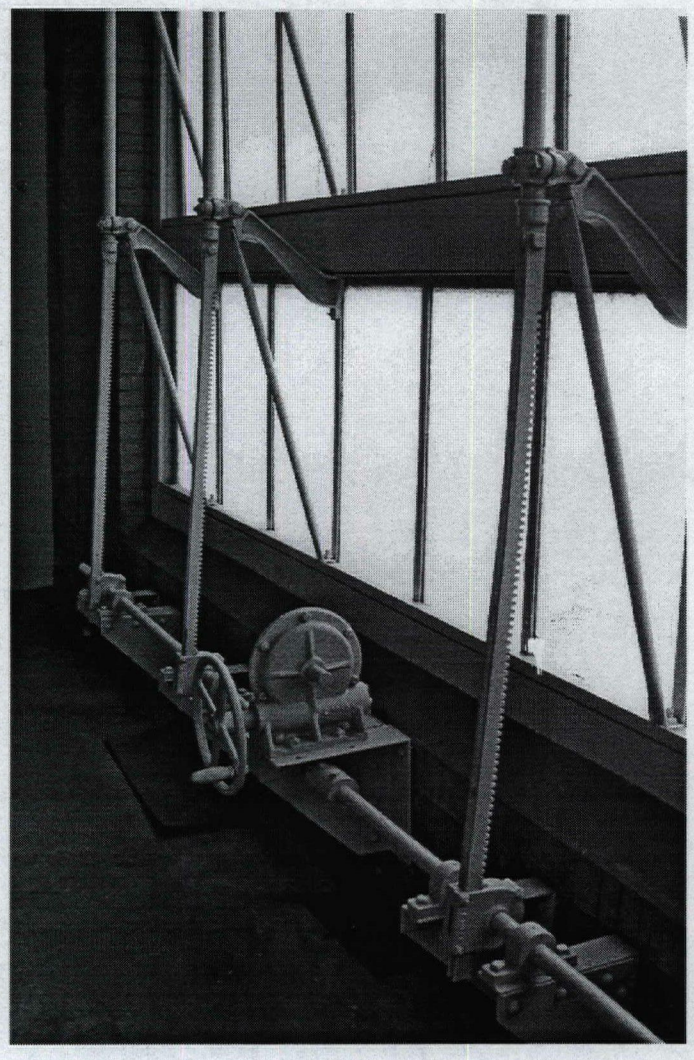
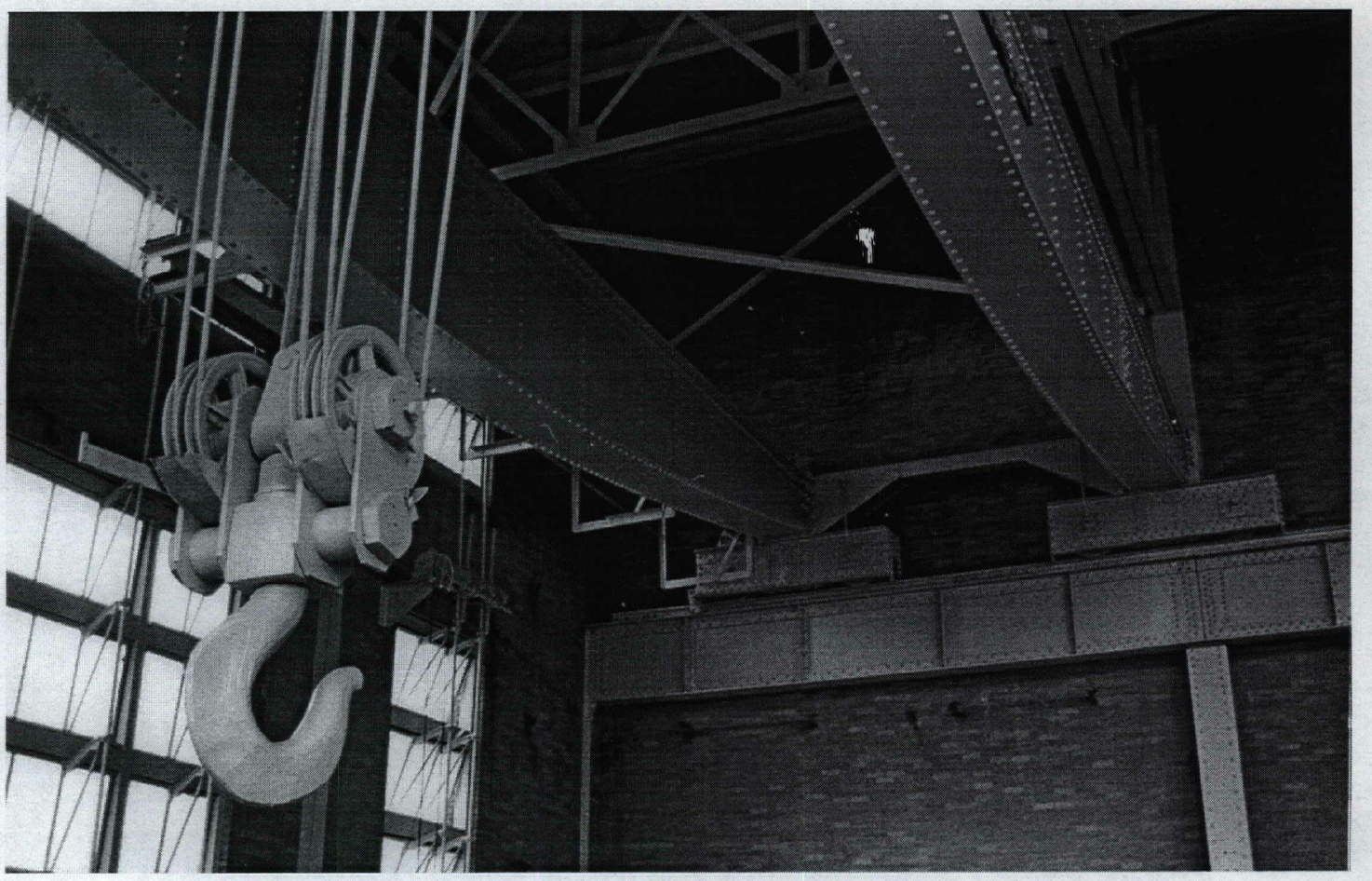
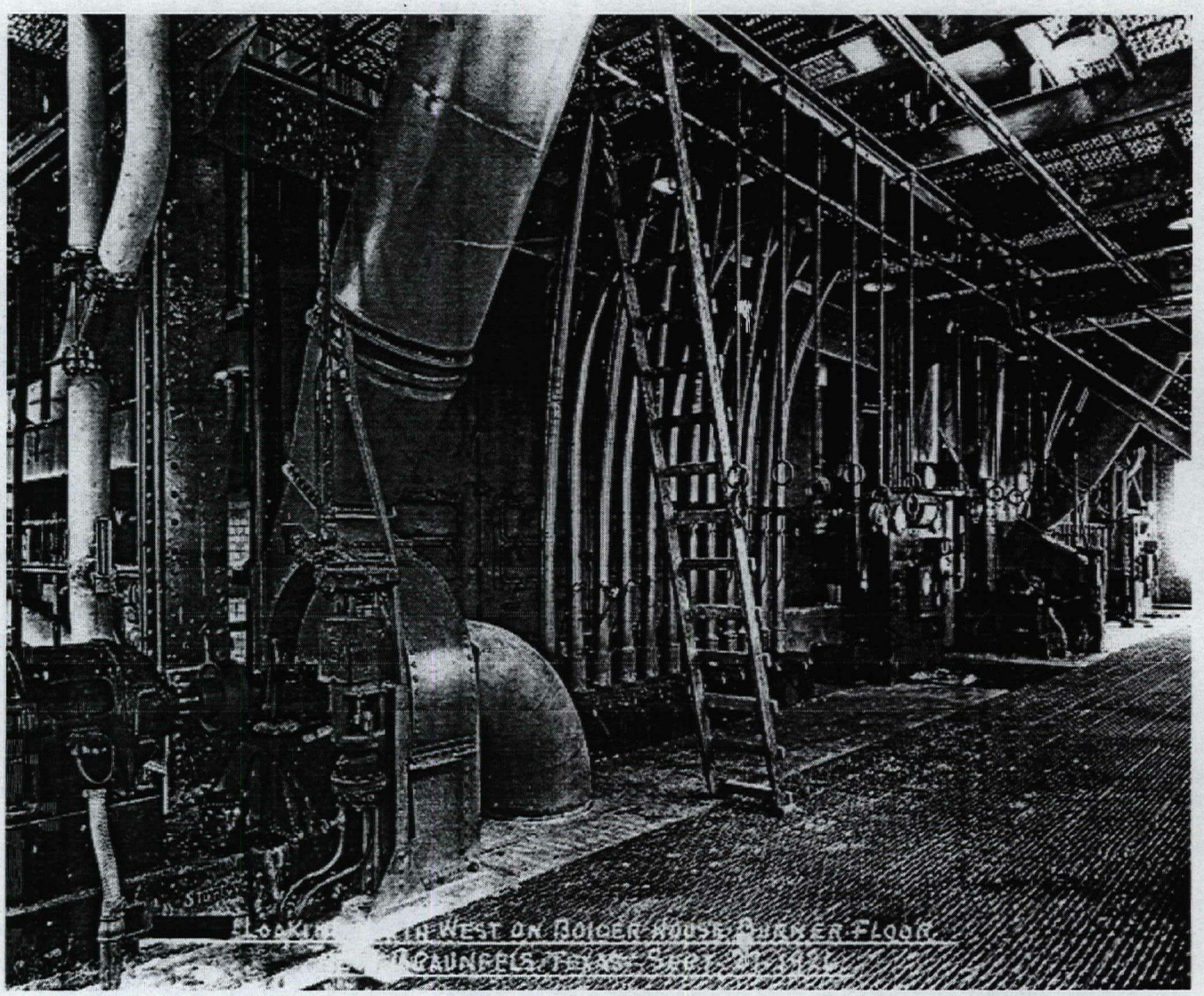


Comal Power Plant, Detail View of Awning Window Control Mechanism
Camera facing east on roof of Control Room 3/2000 Eugene R. Foster, Jr.



Comal Power Plant, Detail View of Crane-Hoist Mechanism
Camera Facing west from roof of Control Room 3/2000 Eugene R. Foster, Jr.



Comal Power Plant Boiler House, 1926
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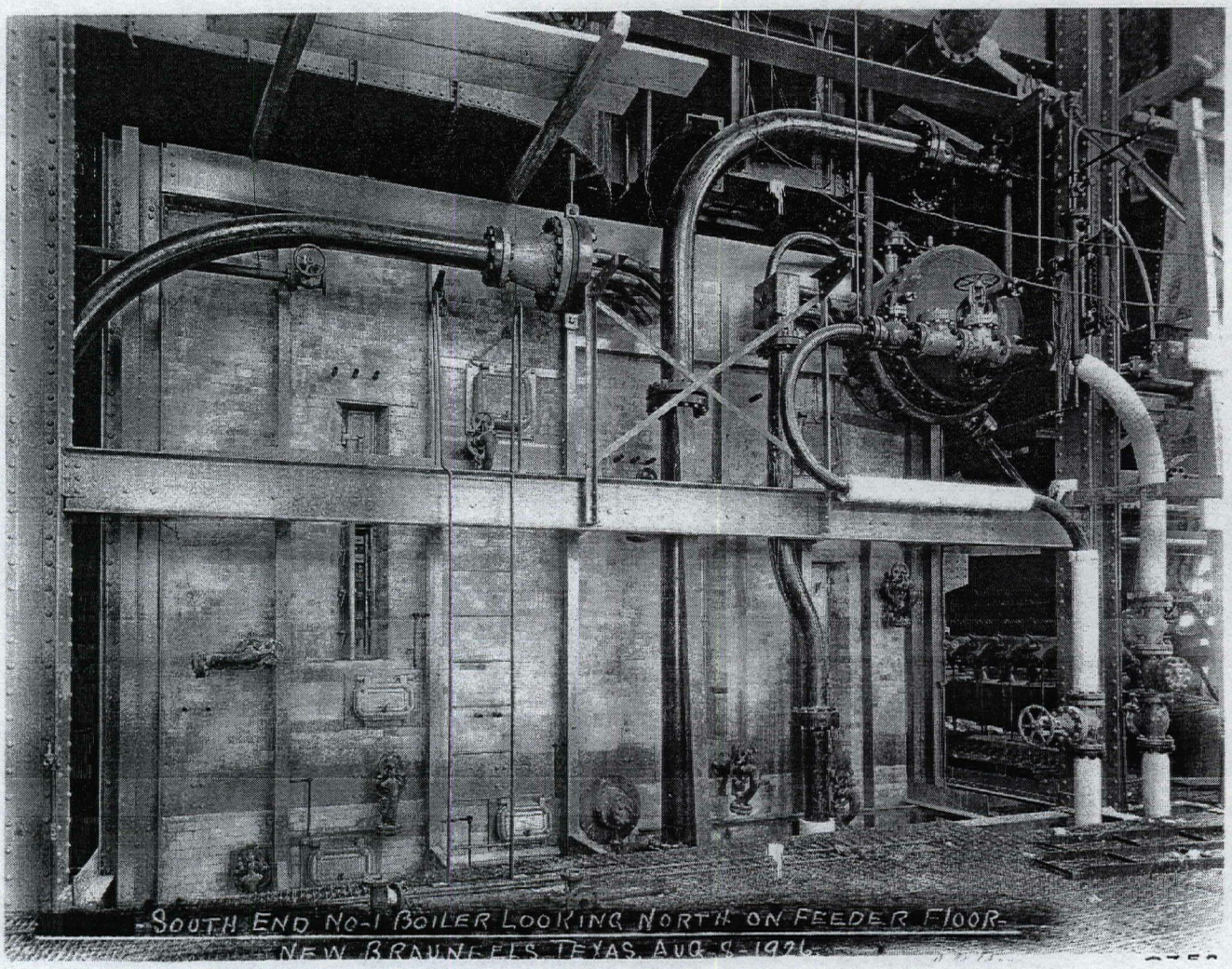

Comal Power Plant Boiler Number One, 1926
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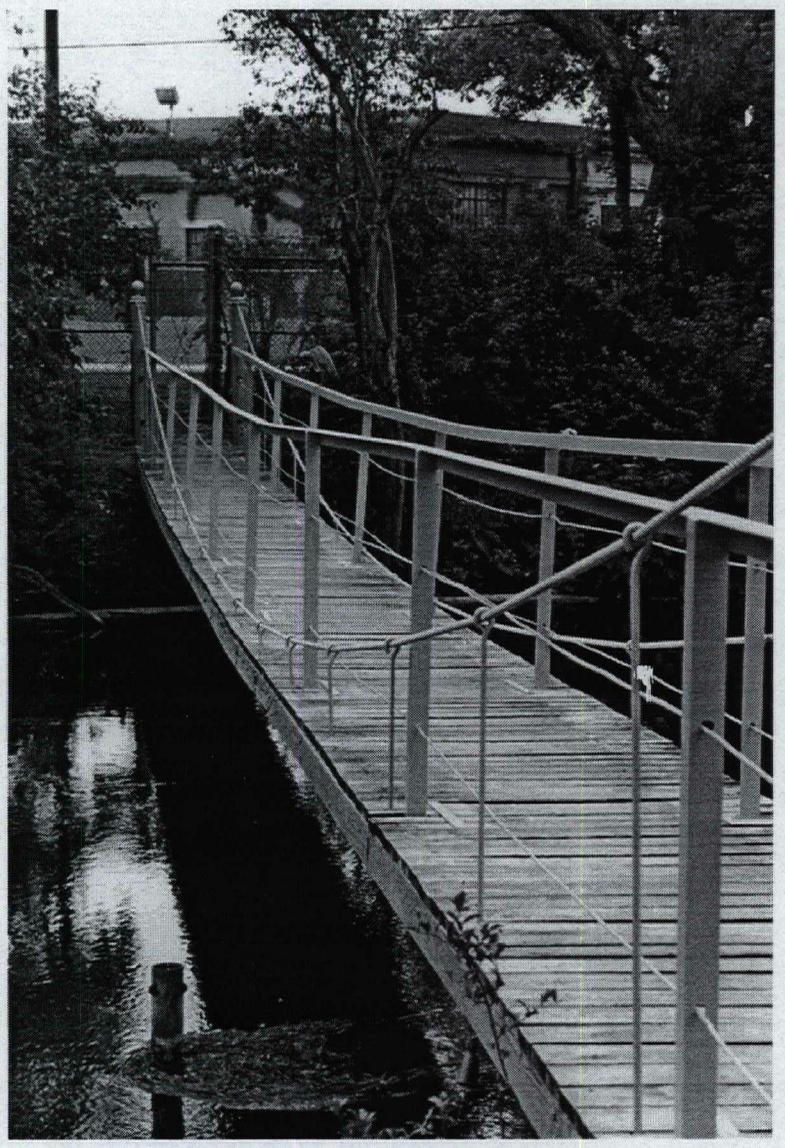
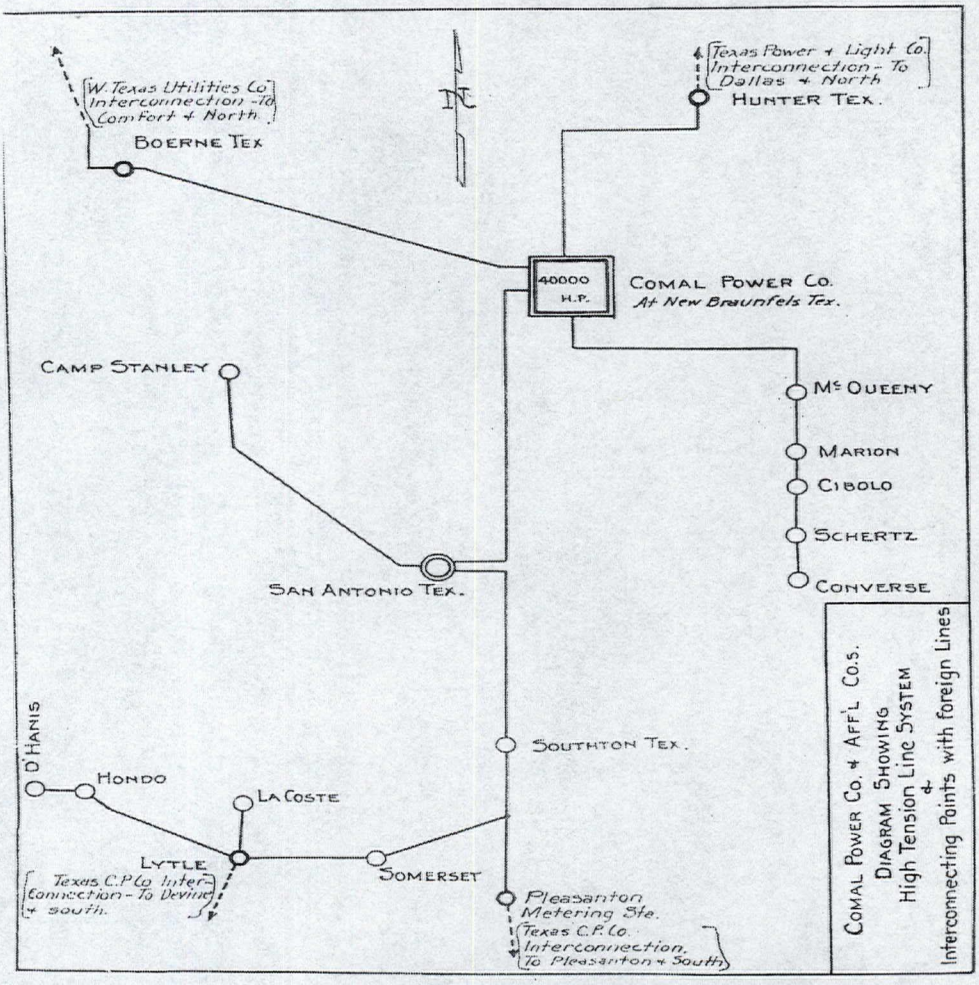
View of second floor office.
Camera looking Southwest 2002 Eugene R. Foster, Jr.

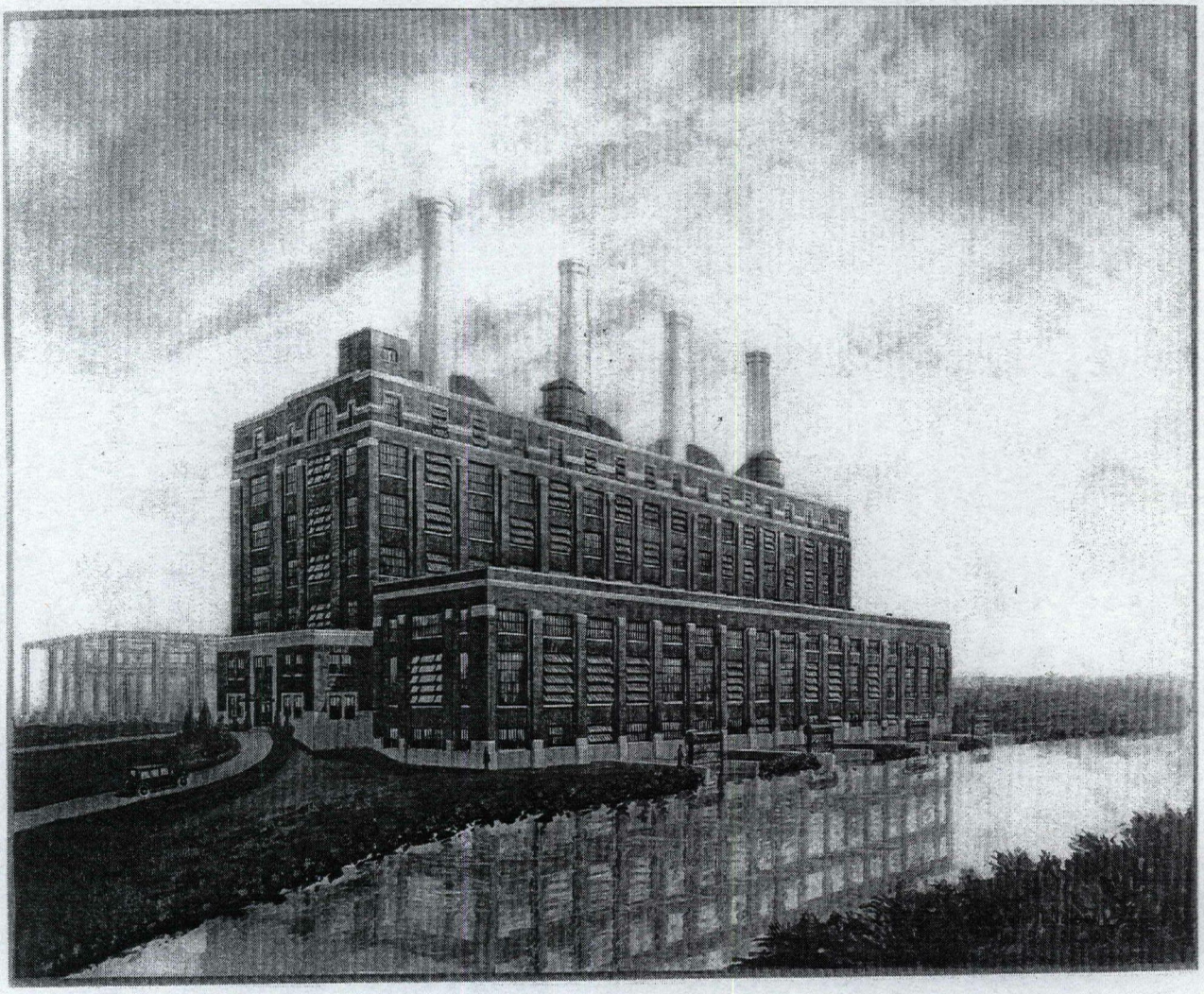


Comal Canal Foot Bridge
Camera facing East 2/2000 Eugene R. Foster, Jr.

Camp Stanley and Camp Bullis were both established in 1917 as part of the Leon Springs Military Reservation. Between 1918 and 1940 the U.S. Army greatly expanded the facility and built permanent cantonment and arsenal facilities. The 32,000 acre facility provided training for Fort Sam Houston troops. During the 1920s and 1930s Camp Bullis also provided training facilities for U.S. Army, CCC, and ROTC personnel. Other military facilities in the San Antonio area included Kelly Field Brooks Field in 1917 and Randolph Field in 1928.



Comal Power Plant, Relationship to the Central Texas Power Grid ca. 1926
Adapted from *Power of a Million Men*, published by UGI Company, 1926
Reproduced by permission of the Sophienburg Library and Archives



Comal Power Plant, Original Concept Drawing, ca. 1926
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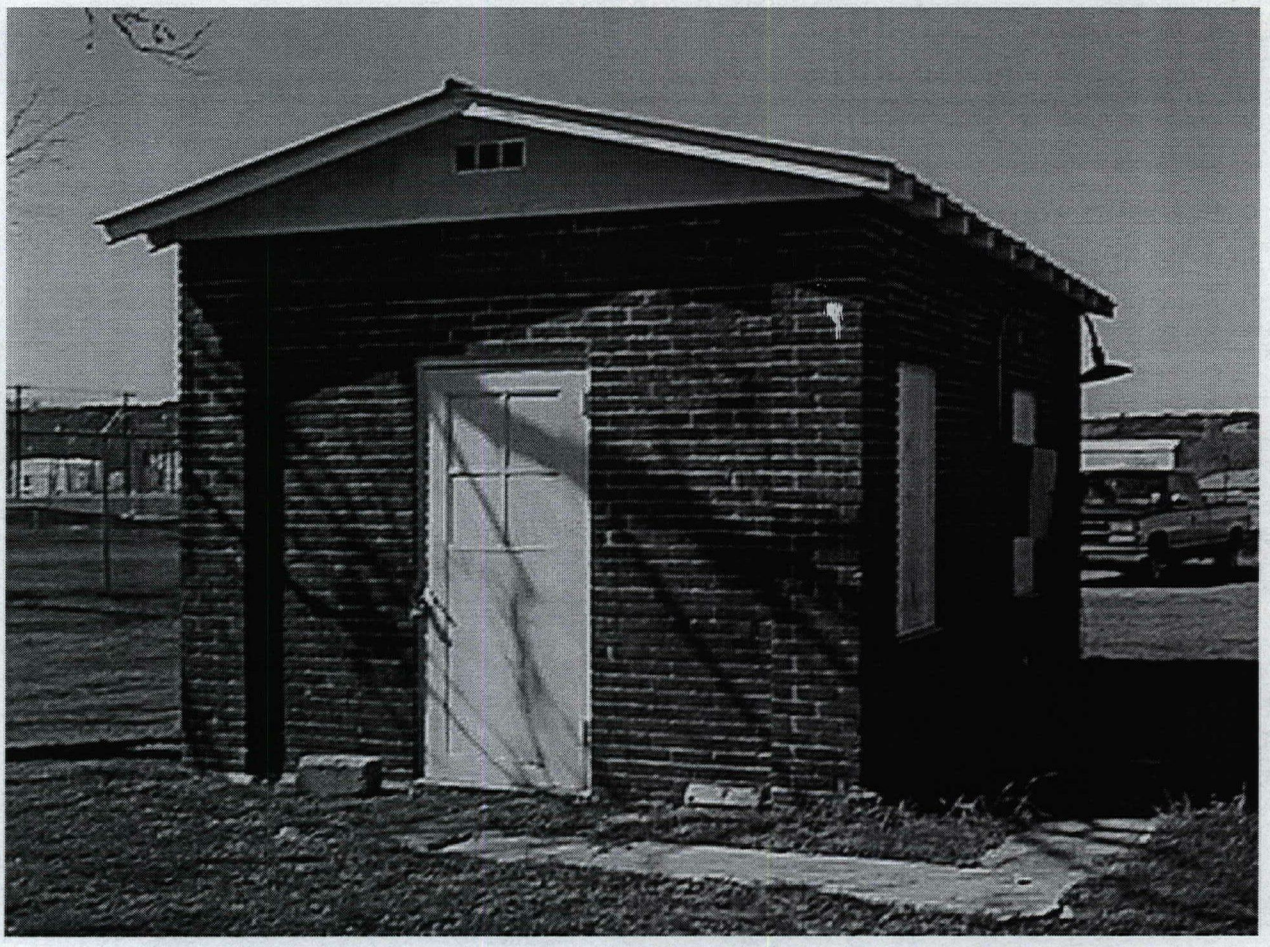


Natural Gas Metering House
Camera facing Northwest 2/2000 Eugene R. Foster, Jr.

Fuel Oil Pump House No. 1
Camera facing South 2/2000 Eugene R. Foster, Jr.

Fuel Oil Pump House No. 2
Camera facing South 2/2000 Eugene R. Foster, Jr.

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

APPLICABLE NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA

x **A** PROPERTY IS ASSOCIATED WITH EVENTS THAT HAVE MADE A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE BROAD PATTERNS OF OUR HISTORY.

___ **B** PROPERTY IS ASSOCIATED WITH THE LIVES OF PERSONS SIGNIFICANT IN OUR PAST.

x **C** PROPERTY EMBODIES THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF A TYPE, PERIOD, OR METHOD OF CONSTRUCTION OR REPRESENTS THE WORK OF A MASTER, OR POSSESSES HIGH ARTISTIC VALUE, OR REPRESENTS A SIGNIFICANT AND DISTINGUISHABLE ENTITY WHOSE COMPONENTS LACK INDIVIDUAL DISTINCTION.

___ **D** PROPERTY HAS YIELDED, OR IS LIKELY TO YIELD, INFORMATION IMPORTANT IN PREHISTORY OR HISTORY.

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE: Industry, Community Planning and Development, Architecture

PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE: 1925-1954

SIGNIFICANT DATES: 1925, 1926, 1928, 1941

SIGNIFICANT PERSON: N/A

CULTURAL AFFILIATION: N/A

ARCHITECT/BUILDER: United Gas Improvement Construction Company

NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (see continuation sheets 8-42 through 8-51).

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

BIBLIOGRAPHY (see continuation sheets 9-52 through 9-54).

PREVIOUS DOCUMENTATION ON FILE (NPS): N/A

x preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
_ previously listed in the National Register
_ previously determined eligible by the National Register
_ designated a National Historic Landmark
_ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
_ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

PRIMARY LOCATION OF ADDITIONAL DATA:

x State historic preservation office *(Texas Historical Commission)*
_ Other state agency
_ Federal agency
_ Local government
_ University
_ Other -- Specify Repository: Sophienburg Archives, New Braunfels, TX; LCRA Archives, Austin, TX

NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Designed and constructed in 1926 by the United Gas Improvement Construction Company (UGI), the Comal Power Plant was one of the largest lignite-fueled power plants in the country at the time. Built to supply power for San Antonio Public Service Company (SAPSC) and the surrounding central Texas region, the plant was also important for San Antonio's commitment to provide land and support for the growing number of military installations in the area. The industrial purpose of the building, however, did not prevent the builders from incorporating into its design and construction classically inspired architectural design elements that were further enhanced by a beautiful setting of manicured lawns and trees along the banks the Comal Canal echoing some of the elements found in the City Beautiful movement. With these qualities, the Comal Power Plant is nominated under Criterion A at the local level of significance for its ability to represent the importance of electrical power generation in Central Texas' community and regional development between 1925 and 1954. Additionally, the Comal Power Plant is nominated under Criterion C at the local level of significance because the building today retains its distinctive combination of industrial and classical design qualities.

Historical Setting

Since prehistoric times, people have occupied the Comal Power Plant vicinity. In the Spanish Colonial period, the Comal Springs area was a focal point for missionary and military efforts to convert indigenous people to European monotheistic culture. In the 19th century, Anglo-American and German immigrants recognized the importance of the nearby Comal Springs as a source of hydraulic power for early ginning and milling industries. German immigrants who settled in what is now Comal County in the mid-1840s under the leadership of Prince Carl de Solms-Braunfels called the springs "Las Fontanas," borrowing a Hispanic term referring to the artesian character of the springs. They purchased 1297 acres surrounding the springs for $1,111.

Most of the early water-powered industries in New Braunfels were built between 1847 and 1859 by William Meriwether, a Virginia planter who immigrated to the New Braunfels area. Meriwether's milling operation was purchased on May 15, 1860, by Joseph and Helena Freidlander Landa, who immigrated to San Antonio, Texas, from Kempen, Prussia, c. 1840 (Victor 1989: not paginated). The Landas expanded the milling operations in New Braunfels to include a three-story stone structure, called the Landa Rock Mill, an ice plant, a cottonseed oil compress, and a hydroelectric plant. In 1890 the Landa Power Plant provided the first electric lights to New Braunfels residents and businesses (Nash 1993: 11-12; Tyler, et al. 1996: Vol. 4 pp. 53-54; Reed 1995:72).

After Joseph Landa's death in 1896, his wife and son, Harry Landa, continued operating the businesses. Harry Landa later sold the milling operation to the Comal Power Company in 1925. The deed for the transaction shows that the sale included the Landa Flour Mills, the Landa Cotton Oil Company, the Landa Electric Light and Power Company, the Landa Water Works System, the Landa Corn Shelling Plant, Landa Park, and two railroad spur tracts needed as coal transport connections to the MKT and I&N railway lines (Comal County Deed Records vol. 51, pp 374-375; Utley 1995: 10). The 1922 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map (see page 8-49) shows the extent of industrial development on the Landa properties, including a few small buildings located on a portion of the subsequent Comal Power Plant tract, near the intersection of Landa Park Road and Landa Street.

Landa's Electric Light and Power Company provided service to the local community. In this sense it represented the typical pattern of electric power generation during the first decades of electrification in the United States when power

plants were typically isolated facilities built to serve only a local community or industry. However, the introduction of alternating current in the 1890s dramatically changed this technology, allowing long-distance transmission of electrical current (Nye 1990:139). As a result, utility companies were able to sell power to one another through interconnected regional and eventually national power grids. When the Comal Power Plant was designed and constructed in the 1920s, the plant immediately became a part of the Central Texas Power Grid (see page 7-37) providing service to a broad, multi-county area surrounding New Braunfels, including both SAPSC and San Antonio's surrounding military facilities. The 1930 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company map shows the completed Comal Power Plant facility (see page 8-50).

Raymond Fischer, one of six individuals participating in a 1999 Comal Power Plant oral history project, recalled that during World War II the Comal Power Plant was connected to every power plant east of the Rocky Mountains (Fischer 1999). Mr. Fischer also stated that New Braunfels was buying a fraction of the power generated by Comal Power Plant when he began his career at the plant in 1941. By the time he retired in 1974, New Braunfels was using all the power that Comal Power Plant could generate. In this manner, the Comal Power Plant represents the importance of the early 20th century electrical power generating industry and the importance of that industry in community and regional developments across much of Central Texas. For 47 years following its construction in 1926, the Comal Power Plant provided vital electrical generating service to Central Texas, making particularly important contributions during World War II when it came under the direction of the United States War Department.

Design, Construction, and Operation

Following the creation of the Comal Power Company about 1925 as a subsidiary of SAPSC, United Gas Improvement Company (UGI) of Philadelphia was selected to design and construct the Comal Power Plant. Original architectural and engineering plans for Comal Power Plant indicate that it was designed by UGI Contracting Company, a subsidiary of UGI. In April 1919, the UGI Contracting Company was incorporated to design and construct engineering projects. Some of the steam power plants designed and constructed by UGI include the Stevenson Dam and Power House on the Housatonic River at Stevenson, Connecticut, for Connecticut Light & Power in 1917 (listed in the NRHP September 2000); a 50,000 kV installation on Barbados Island for the Philadelphia Suburban-Counties Gas & Electric Company of Norristown, Pennsylvania, in 1921; the Big Sioux steam power station in Sioux City, Iowa, for Sioux City Gas & Electric Company in 1925 (UGI 1927:not paginated). These facilities all have a rectangular Classical Revival plan with corner tower, large window bays, and contrasting flat belt courses. They are very similar in overall design to the Comal Power Plant. (See Continuation Sheet 8-55 for illustrations of UGI power plant projects).

The Philadelphia Electric Company (PEC), acquired by UGI in 1927, had an in-house engineering/architect team of W.C.L. Eglin and John Windrim. They were responsible for designing a series of power plants in Pennsylvania utilizing the Beaux-Arts style. The Chester Power Station in Chester, Pennsylvania, constructed in 1916 incorporated classical details, and stained glass skylights. In addition Eglin and Windrim utilized principles of the City-Beautiful movement to incorporate high-style design elements to industrial facilities.

Although, no architect or engineer was given individual credit the designers of the Comal Power Plant proposed a facility that could ultimately produce 120,000 kilowatt (kWh) hours, four times the actual output at the end of the first phase of construction (UGI not dated: 1). A conceptual drawing of the engineers' original vision that hung in the Comal Power Plant entry hall for many years shows four smokestacks, indicating usage of four turbines, eight boilers, and four condensers (see page 7-37). Although the plant's construction and power production never achieved the scale shown in

the drawing, the plant eventually did produce 70,000 kWh from two Westinghouse turbines, four boilers, and two condensers.

Because fuel-powered generating plants require a significant and steady supply of chilled water for maximum efficiency, the project engineers looked beyond the local San Antonio River to the nearest available source of cold water, the Comal River at New Braunfels (Adams 1997). The original site recommended for the Comal Power Plant was a tract of land below the junction of the Comal and Guadalupe rivers known as Camp Comal. However, the recommended site was changed to a location nearer the Comal Springs, a location that had sufficient cooling water required for a coal fired steam plant. "This change of location required some small changes in design allowing for the use of 70 degree instead of 80 degree cooling water for the condenser" (Adams nd: 1). Another advantage of the new site location was the sloping topography of the Comal Canal, which allowed for natural gravity flow via a system of intake and discharge tunnels without using pumps. These two factors, cooler water and natural gravity flow, significantly increased the efficiency of the plant's design and ultimately resulted in lower operation costs (UGI not dated).

UGI initiated the first phase of construction on August 18, 1925. Just more than a year later, power generation for commercial service began on September 16, 1926, and the initial phase of construction was concluded on November 1, 1926. Terry Adams, who worked at the plant from initial construction in 1925 until its closure in 1973, recalls that "[the] first unit consisted of a 30,000 kWh turbine-generator and two 250,000 pounds-per-hour boilers along with supporting equipment (Adams nd: 2)". Various subcontractors provided and installed the massive equipment required to turn lignite into electrical power. A system of railway tracks was built on site to enable deliver and installation of the heavy turbines and other components.

During the first quarter of the 20th century, fuel resources in Central Texas included lignite coal, natural gas, and oil. Of these, lignite was the fuel chosen by the project engineers for the Comal Power Plant. Commercial use of lignite coal for steam generation of power was relatively new at the time, having begun about 1918 (Ballinger 1926: not paginated; Adams 1999). Lignite coal itself was an inexpensive commodity at $.37 per ton in 1926, and freight charges were $1 per ton. However, handling and processing lignite was complicated business.

According to former employees interviewed in 1999, lignite was hauled from Rockdale, in Milam County, to New Braunfels, a distance of approximately 90 miles, in specially designed rail cars with hopper bottoms. At the plant, the coal was moved about by a small steam engine and stored in below-grade coal bunkers (see page 7-17). From the raw coal stored in the coal bunkers, the lignite was raised to the top of the coal tower and thereafter descended to the ground floor through a series of hoppers, crushers, conveyors, pulverizing mills, hoists, and feeders. As a fine powder, consistency of flour, the pulverized coal traveled back up to the roof to the dryers and collectors. Next it went to the pulverized coal bunker and was blown into the boiler on the feeder floor in a spiraling stream to keep it from forming clumps and dropping to the bottom of the furnace. Combustion of the pulverized coal heated the boiler water, turning it to steam. Ash hoppers at the base of each boiler caught the ash that resulted from burning the coal. Some of the ash, called fly ash, escaped up the stack with the furnace exhaust (Adams 1999).

Steam produced in the boiler was piped through a tunnel valve into the turbine where it turned the turbine blades, which ranged in size from three inches to 36 inches long. The rotation of the turbine thereby enabled the generator to create electric current. Steam from the turbine then traveled to the condenser, a series of pipes kept cool by water from Comal Canal. The condensed steam created a vacuum that sent additional power to the turbine. The condensed water was then

pumped out to be chemically analyzed and processed before being used again. The boiler water was contained in a closed system that included special surge tanks and had to be very pure and pH balanced. Minerals and solids could coat the boiler tubes and incorrect pH could eat away the tubes. The boiler water was analyzed each day in the plant laboratory and chemicals were added as required to maintain the proper pH (Fischer 1999; Rohde 1999a). Finally, the power generated by the plant was sent to the original substation on the west side of the plant to be distributed throughout the utility line grid (Ballinger 1926: not paginated; Adams 1999; Bartles 1999; Fischer 1999).

One of the major constraints on the Comal Power Plant as a result of utilization of lignite fuel was the environmental pollution created by its combustion. Once the lignite coal was spent in the furnace, by-products included slag and fly ash. Fly ash was a powdered ash containing sulfur carried into the atmosphere through the boiler stacks. The heavier byproducts, called slag, that collected beneath the boiler floor had to be contained and discarded. During an interview between Terry Adams and LCRA Archaeologist Bruce Nightengale, Mr. Adams described the fly ash problem:

> ...and burning this coal, they got a lot of coal dust. They had no dust collectors in these stacks at all; no scrubbers, no nothing. It just came out of the boiler through the ducts, into the stack, and out. Then the prevailing wind happened to be blowing most of the time...over [to] the nursery...Mr. Locke came over and said, "Say that sulfur, that dust out of your smokestacks, is killing my plants... You people are going to have to do something (Adams 1997: not paginated).

Several consultants, including Robert Cummings from New York, were brought to New Braunfels in 1928 to recommend a solution to the fly ash problem. The solution that was implemented involved construction of ash collectors from the boilers to the stacks on the roof of the plant in 1928-1929, and ultimately, the purchase of Mr. Locke's nursery (Adams 1999).

A better solution to the fly ash problem became available following the introduction of natural gas service to New Braunfels by United Gas Company on December 15, 1927. Terry Adams recalls that gas company officials "came over and talked to [SAPSC] and said, 'Say, we've got a fourteen-inch main out here. You people ever thought of going to gas as fuel, go without coal?' So the people they talked to in San Antonio, they were very interested. They said, 'Okay,' and ...the gas company said, 'We'll build a little house over there. We'll put [in] all of our instruments and our meters... and we'll build [the pipeline]. We'll continue that fourteen-inch line as a twelve-inch line after your specs.' We could take off the conveyor and go to gas as a primary fuel and fuel oil as secondary. That took place in [ca.]1928" (Adams 1997). Some design changes to the boilers were completed in 1928 or 1929. Subsequently, at full capacity, the Comal Power Plant burned approximately 20 million cubic feet of natural gas daily.

Despite designing and constructing the Comal Power Plant to utilize lignite coal with all the extensive equipment and floor space requirements, lignite was only utilized for approximately two to three years. With the advent of natural gas as primary fuel, the need for pulverizing units, storage bins, crushers, conveyors, railroad cars, personnel, etc., involved with lignite was completely eliminated. Terry Adams recalled "..... when we went from coal to gas .... I tell you, [the savings] went beyond the fifth decimal point..." (Adams 1997: 2, 4; Adams 1999).

During the three years when lignite coal was utilized as the primary fuel, the plant employed as many as 135 workers. With the advent of natural gas ca. 1928 that number was reduced by half, because the plant no longer needed as much manpower to process the lignite. To cope with the effects of the Great Depression, the employees at Comal Plant went

from a six-day workweek to a five-day workweek so that additional personnel could be added to the payroll (Adams 1999).

Military-Industrial Context

The dramatic growth of military facilities in and around San Antonio during the early decades of the 20th century greatly increased the SAPSC's calculated need for electric power generation. The United States' military presence in and around San Antonio was initiated with the construction of Fort Sam Houston (1873). However, by the early 20th century European usage of airplanes for air duels and bombing of military and/or civilian targets rapidly changed the focus of United States military aeronautics from defensive to offensive. By 1917, San Antonio was chosen as the location for Kelly Field, partly because San Antonio offered a mild climate and weather favorable for training of military aviators. The same rationale, combined with San Antonio's desire to bring in additional military bases for the economic benefits that they provided, also contributed to the location of Brooks and Randolph airfields in the San Antonio area in the 1920s. In a competitive effort to secure an agreement regarding the location of the planned military facilities, the City of San Antonio acquired and provided much of the land for the proposed fields (Clow 1998; 4-6). SAPSC, as the local electrical producer, provided the power needed to run these installations (Thomason 1994).

During World War II, the Comal Power Plant was of high strategic importance as it helped supply power to the military installations in and around San Antonio. "Blackout" orders were issued by the War Department, requiring that every window in the plant be sealed against light leakage. In addition, the electric sign atop the roof reading "Public Service Company" remained dark throughout World War II. Blackouts were imposed because the military believed that essential services, such as power plants, could be targets for bombardment in the event that the continental United States was invaded.

Terry Adams was in charge of procuring the fiberboard to complete this enormous task of masking all the windows. He further recalls that:

> We sent out an emergency (crew) to every little lumber yard in this part of the state to try and get all the fiber board and stuff we could corral to close up – to shut off those windows. The War Department didn't want any light going out. Because this is the largest power plant in this area, (it) would be the first place the enemy bombed...so we ended up closing all those windows. It was something else ...price didn't make any difference. If they had fiberboard, we'd take all of it. We sent trucks with people to Comfort and Prairieville and Boerne and (wherever) a lumberyard might be to pick up something (Adams: 1999).

Understandably, the temperature inside the plant skyrocketed during hot weather. Additional lighting was also installed as a substitute for the natural light that normally came through the windows (Adams: 1999; Fischer 1999). Another safety measure was to post extra guards at the plant that checked the special identifications cards that were issued to employees (Reed 1995: 73).

Recent Events

Following World War II, the Comal Power Plant continued to serve the Central Texas region and San Antonio's military facilities. In 1971 LCRA purchased the Comal Power Plant from the City of San Antonio. During 1972-1973 it was

necessary to shut down and start up the plant several times utilizing fuel oil. Reno Lehmann (1999) described the procedure for shutting down the generator.

> It had to be very coordinated between the control operator, turbine room, and the boiler room. And the pump room, too .... We'd get [orders] from the dispatcher. 'Ok,' he'd say, 'we've got too much generation, so shut No. 1 turbine down.' And we'd call the boiler rooms and we'd come off slow, they'd cut five burners, then cut five more burners, till they get down to three burners.... When we shut the plant down they could generate 1600 rpm's, but...it took a long time for that [generator] to slow down...because it was freewheeling...When it got down to 6 or 8 rpms...,the engineer would count the revolutions and the turbine tender would stand up on this little platform ....to engage [a] little motor...[that] would keep it turning...The generator had to keep turning or otherwise it would warp. When the orders from LCRA dispatcher required firing up the plant again, it took only about 24 minutes to have the generator producing 30 megawatts.

During the energy crisis of the 1970s, natural gas was much more difficult to obtain at its previous volume and price when the natural gas contract for Comal Power Plant expired on January 1, 1973, requiring the plant to generate power with fuel oil, this change in primary fuel effectively sounded the death knell for the Comal Power Plant. The utilization of fuel oil for power generation was significantly more difficult than utilization of natural gas because it required additional personnel to clean all the numerous valves, pipes, etc. for generation of power. The plant continued generating power on a periodic basis with fuel oil until the final shut down on June 16, 1973 (Lehmann 1999). The original turbine-generator units were sold during the late 1970s to another power generating plant (Adams not dated: 2-3). By the 1980's, additional support equipment, including air compressors, pumps, motors, fans, etc., were removed and moved to other LCRA plants. At this time, remaining portions of the equipment were disassembled and sold as scrap metal (Adams not dated: 3).

Comparable Examples

Other historically noteworthy examples of industrial power generating plants have been identified in Texas. Two are related in various ways to the Comal Power Plant, but lack the Comal Power Plant's architectural integrity. Others have been determined eligible for NRHP listing, but represent entirely different types of power plant design and construction. Of the four power plants currently NRHP-listed or eligible for listing in Texas, each is remarkably different from the Comal Power Plant in scale and/or design. For example, the Municipal Power Plant (1931) in Yoakum, DeWitt County, is a relatively small building that is currently utilized as a Public Library. Similarly, the Cuero Hydroelectric Plant (1908); also in DeWitt County, is a relatively small metal-clad frame building that no longer operates. West Texas Utilities Company Power Plant (1920) in Abilene, Taylor County, is approximately the same scale as the Comal Power Plant; however, it is utilitarian in design and has no distinctive architectural stylistic features. The City of Austin's Seaholm Power Plant in Travis County, was designed by the engineering firm of Burns & McDonnell from Kansas City, Missouri, in the Art Deco style but built between 1950 and 1955. The operating equipment has been removed from the Seaholm Power Plant and the City of Austin is seeking an alternative use.

The most closely related examples include the North Main Steam-Electric Generating Station in Fort Worth and the former Trinidad Generating Station at Trinidad. The North Main Electric Generating Station, constructed in 1912 by a Cleveland banker, Joseph Randolph Nutt, along the Trinity River in Fort Worth, is quite similar in style and engineering to the Comal Power Plant. The North Main plant, like the Comal Power Plant, features classical architectural detailing

and was initially operated with coal before being adapted during the 1920s to natural gas with fuel oil backup. This plant also utilized Babcock and Wilcox boilers similar to those used at the Comal Power Plant (Reed 1995:95-100). While this plant is the only recorded example of its type and period that still functions as a power plant, recent alterations include the shortening of the two exhaust stacks for safety reasons (H. Glenn Reed, personal communication, March 2000).

The Trinidad Generating Station, located on the Trinity River sixty miles south of Dallas, was constructed at the same time and by some of the same partners as the Comal Power Plant. Electric Bond and Share Company (also involved in ownership and construction of Comal Power Plant and North Main Steam-Electric Generating Station in Fort Worth) purchased and consolidated the facilities of seven Texas utility companies in 1911 and 1912 thereby creating Texas Utilities Electric Company (TUEC). TUEC built this plant in 1926 to burn lignite fuel. Eventually, it was converted to natural gas ca. 1940, like the Comal Power Plant had been more than a decade earlier. Although the Trinidad Generating Station had more pronounced Art Deco details, its overall design and materials of construction were similar to Comal Power Plant. The Trinidad facility was demolished in the 1990s.

Integrity Considerations

With regard to setting, the southeast corner of the Comal Power Plant site retains its designed relationship to the Comal Canal, its original entry drive, the original footbridge across Comal Canal, and the adjacent street intersection at Landa Park Drive and Landa Street. Additionally, three of the plant's ancillary structures, the Gas Metering House and two small brick pump houses, also survive from the plant's early period of use and contribute to the Comal Power Plant's NRHP eligibility under Criterion C. The Gas Metering House and the brick pump houses are constructed in a compatible manner using the same type of red, scratch-faced brick, used in the main plant building. Each played an integral role in the plant's operations. However, the western portion of the original power plant site is excluded from nomination because the original electrical distribution switchyard has been replaced by more modern facilities, and because all other ancillary buildings that once existed in this area have been removed (see Proposed National Register District Boundary Map Continuation Sheet No.7-16).

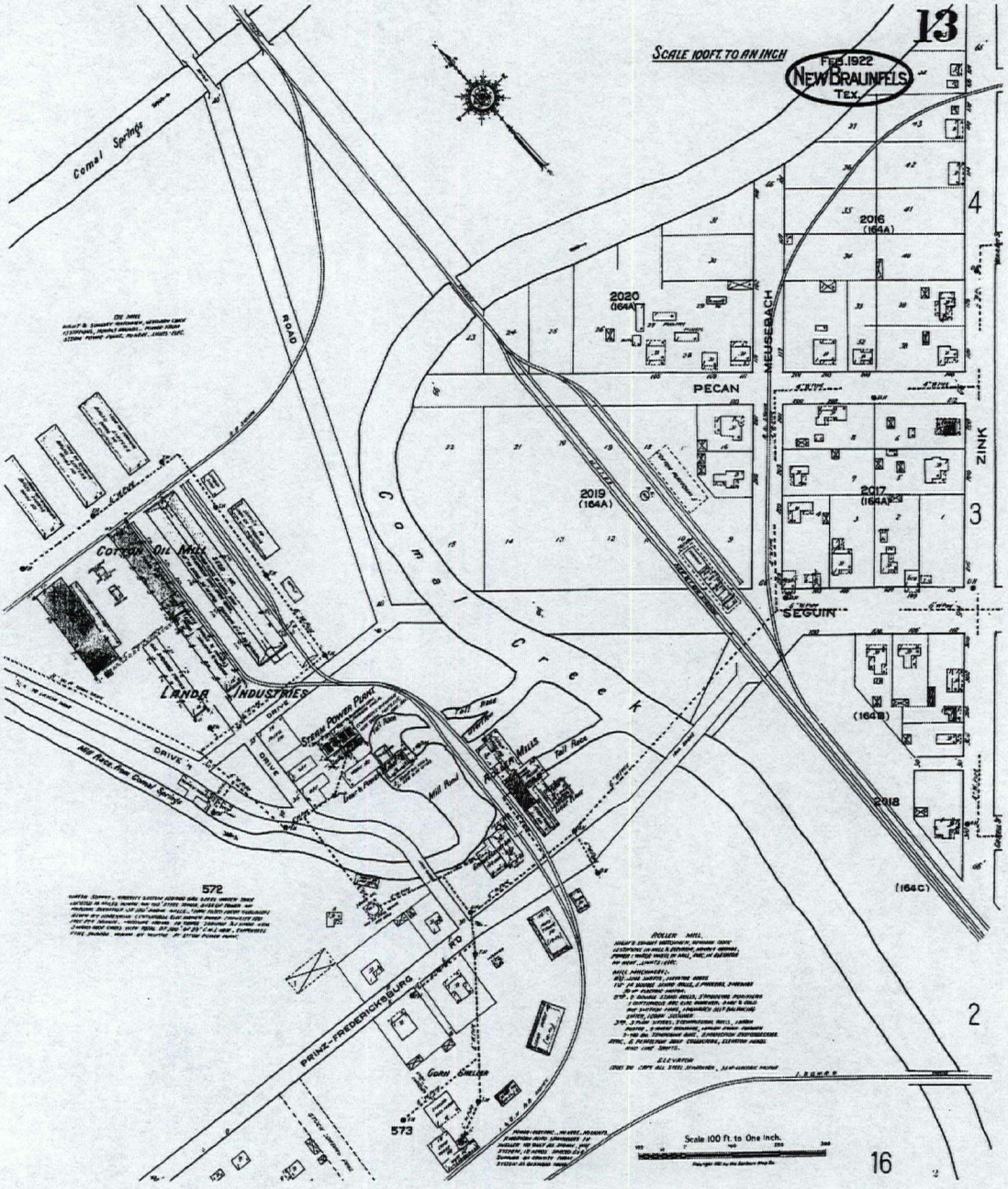
Architecturally, the Comal Power Plant retains its integrity of materials, design, workmanship, and feeling, particularly in its exterior form, fenestration, brickwork, and architectural detailing. In the interior, the building retains its original arrangement of operation, maintenance, and control spaces, as well as a few original structural and ornamental details. The most important interior details include the exposed structural steel and concrete framework, tile floors, brick wall detailing, cast iron railings and stair cases, a massive traveling crane-hoist, and the large banks of mechanically operated awning windows. Recent hazardous materials abatement measures have included removal of layers of asbestos insulation, removal of the asbestos brick lined boilers, and removal of lead-based paints, resulting in a well maintained and structurally sound interior. Unfortunately, virtually all original ornate metal lighting fixtures, as well as all of the power generating equipment were removed after the plant was closed in the 1970s.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 49

Comal Power Plant
New Braunfels, Comal, Texas



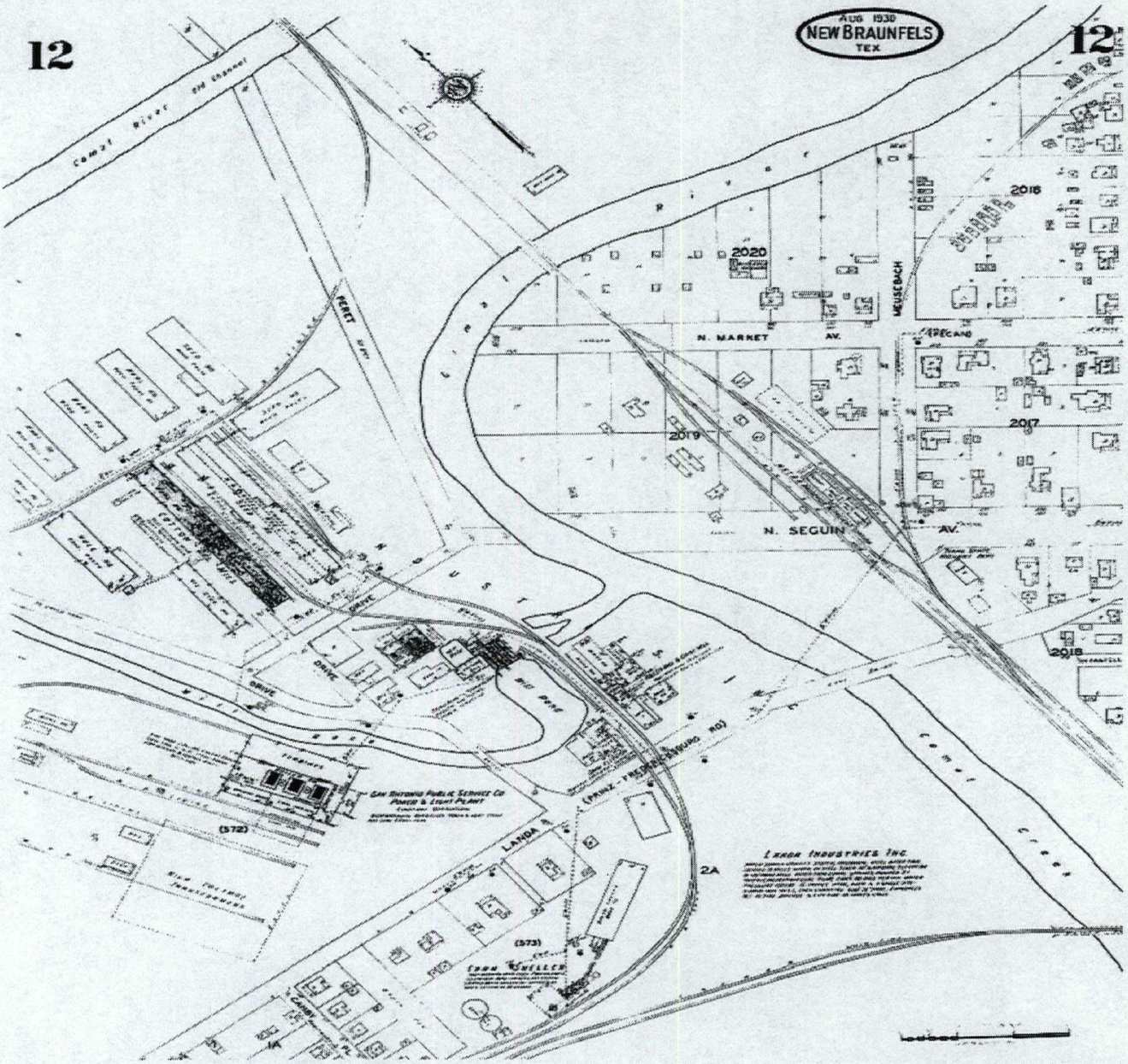
1922 Sanborn Fire Insurance map

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

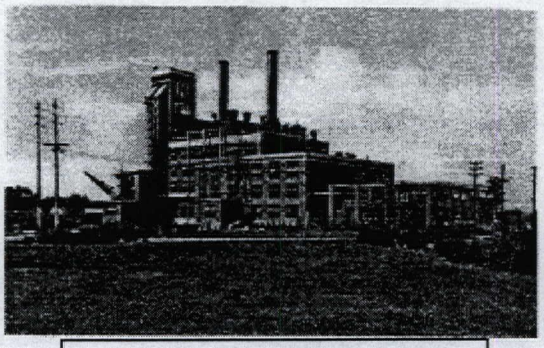
Section 8 Page 50

Comal Power Plant
New Braunfels, Comal, Texas

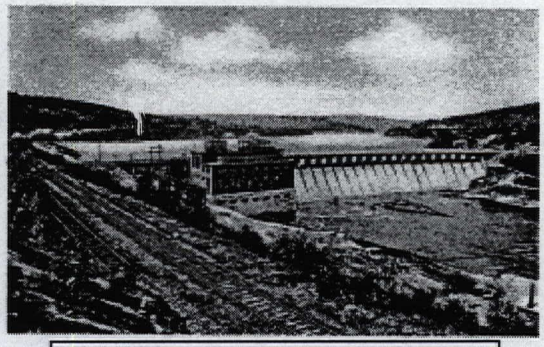


1930 Sanborn Fire Insurance map

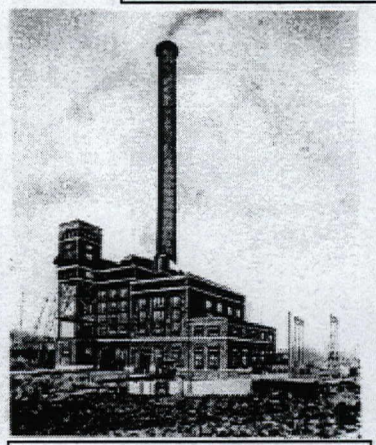
ELECTRIC POWER PLANTS ERECTED BY THE U.G.I. CONTRACTING COMPANY



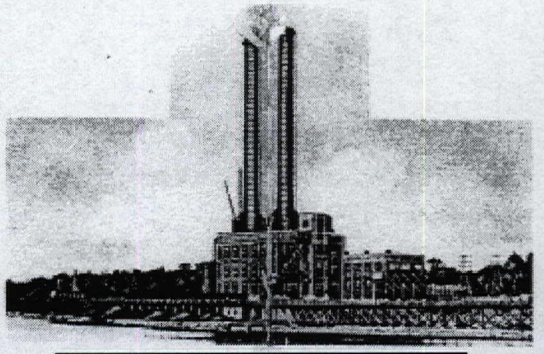
Big Sioux steam power station (25,000 K.V.A) Sioux City Gas & Electric, Sioux City, Iowa.



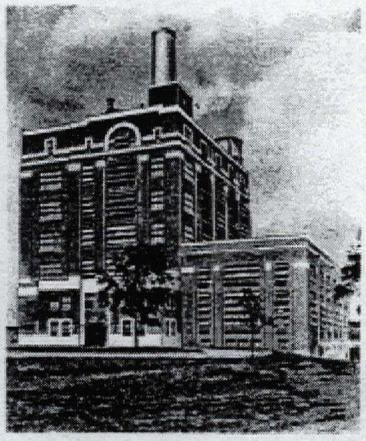
Housatonic River dam and power house, Stevenson, Conn.



Barbadoes Island 50,000 K.V.A. steam power station, Norristown, Pa.



Devon 75,000 K.V.A. steam power station Devon, Conn.



33,333 K.V.A. steam power station designed and built for the Comal Power Company, at New Braunfels, Texas

UGI Contracting Company Electric Power Plants

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF PROPERTY: approximately 13.66 acres

UTM REFERENCES:

1. 583886 E, 3286831 N
2. 583768 E, 3286846 N
3. 583726 E, 3286796 N
4. 583870 E, 3286457 N
5. 583853 E, 3286492 N

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION: (see continuation sheet 10-55 through 10-57)

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION: (see continuation sheets 10-55 through 10-57)

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE: Eugene R. Foster, Jr., Senior Staff Historian, Sally S. Victor, Staff Historian

ORGANIZATION: PBS&J, Inc. **DATE:** September 30, 2002; rev. May 2004

STREET & NUMBER: 206 Wild Basin Rd, Suite 300 **TELEPHONE:** 512/327-6840

CITY OR TOWN: Austin **STATE:** Texas **ZIP CODE:** 78746

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

CONTINUATION SHEETS

MAPS (see continuation sheet 10-57)

PHOTOGRAPHS (see continuation sheet Photo-58)

ADDITIONAL ITEMS

PROPERTY OWNER

NAME: Larry Peel, Builder-Developer

STREET & NUMBER: P. O. Box 248 **TELEPHONE:** 512/327-3333

CITY OR TOWN: Austin **STATE:** Texas **ZIP CODE:** 78767

ACREAGE OF PROPERTY: 13.66 acres (approximate)

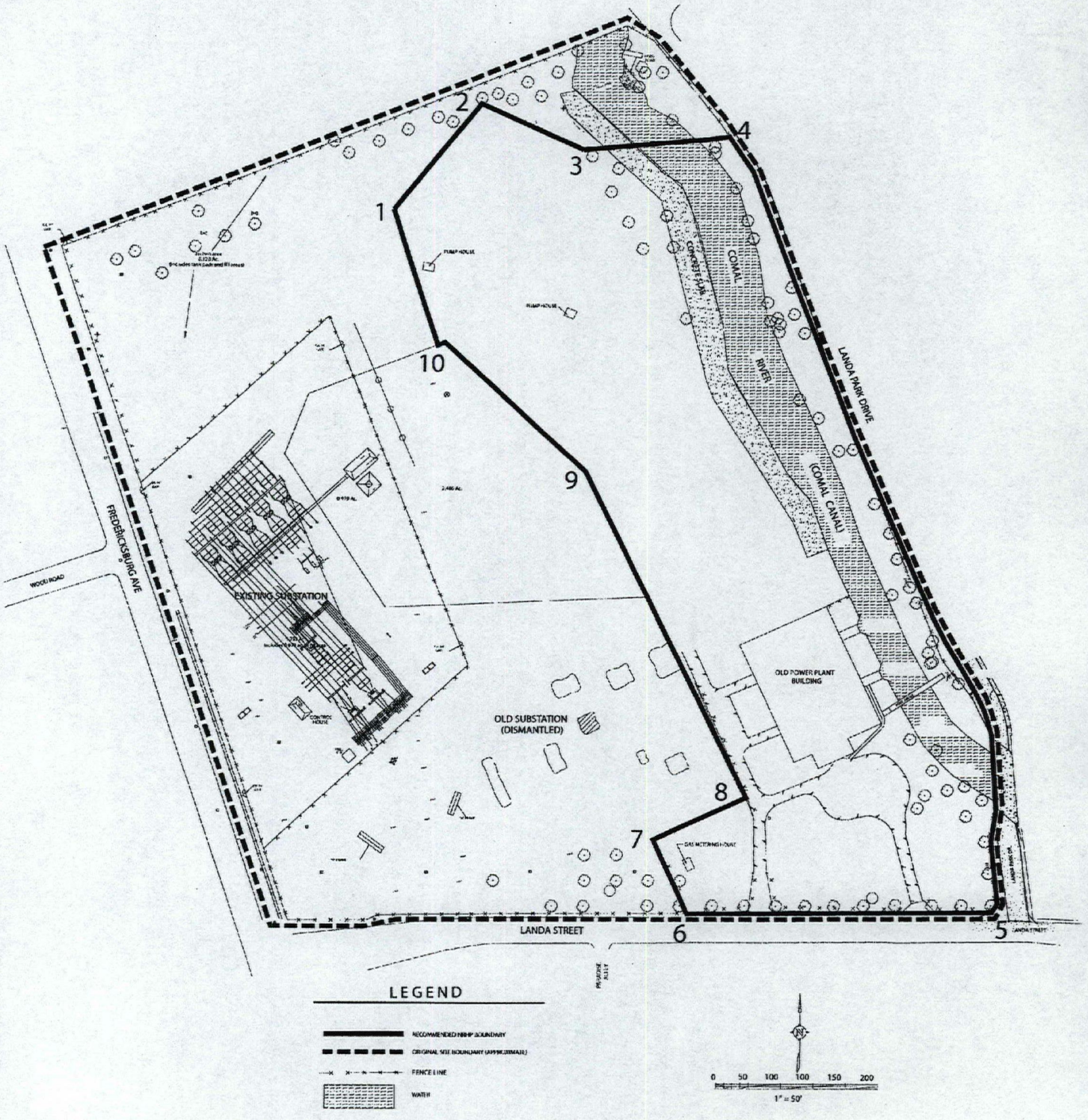
UTM REFERENCES
Note: All coordinates are located in NAD 83 ,UTM Zone 14.

1. 583726.83027E, 3286796.59357N
2. 583768.00554E, 3286846.32768N
3. 583816.99746E, 3286824.66488N
4. 583886.22172E, 3286831.06431N
5. 584013.54696E, 3286458.15827N
6. 583870.31000E, 3286457.20000N
7. 583853.82649E, 3286492.28161N
8. 583896.62205E, 3286512.53537N
9. 583819.65284E, 3286670.46344N
10. 583748.50291E,3286731.59128N

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION: The nominated boundary of the Comal Power Plant Historic District begins at a point approximately midway along and south of the original northern property boundary (see Boundary Reference Point No. 1 on Continuation Sheet 7-16). The district boundary then continues northeastward to Boundary Reference Point No. 2, south of the original northern property line, then turns southeast to a corner at Boundary Reference Point No. 3. The district boundary continues across Comal Canal to a corner located near the eastern bank of Comal Canal and the western curb of Landa Park Drive at Boundary Reference Point No.4. The district boundary then meanders generally southeast with the original eastern property boundary to a property corner near the intersection of Landa Park Drive and Landa Street (see Boundary Reference Point No.5 on Continuation Sheet 7-16). The district boundary then continues westward with the original property boundary, across the main entrance drive, to a corner located generally south of the Gas Metering House (see Boundary Reference Point No.6. on Continuation Sheet 7-16). The district boundary then deviates generally northwestward from the original property boundary to a corner labeled as Boundary Reference Point No.7 on Continuation Sheet 7-16. The district boundary then continues east-northeast to the western edge of a driveway located west of the main power plant building (see Boundary Reference Point No.8 on Continuation Sheet 7-16). The district boundary then runs north-northwest to a corner labeled as Boundary Reference Point No. 9. The district boundary then continues north-northwest to a corner labeled as Boundary Reference Point No. 10. The district boundary then returns to the point of beginning labeled as Boundary Reference Point No.1 on Continuation Sheet 7-16 to enclose an area approximately 13.66 acres in size.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION: The nominated portion of the original 32-acre Comal Power Plant site includes slightly less than one-half of the area utilized by the facility during the historic period. As nominated the district includes the surviving architectural and landscape components of the original power generating facility as it existed through its period of greatest utility and importance prior to ca. 1950. Contributing elements within the district boundary include the main power plant building, an adjoining portion of the Comal Canal, a gas metering building, two fuel oil pump houses, concrete gate pylons, a circular entry drive, planted pecan trees, a front lawn area, and a suspension type footbridge over Comal Canal. Areas and components excluded from significance of the district include New Braunfels Electric

Cooperative's replacement substation, the discharge tunnel, demolished building and structure locations, discontinuous segments of the former railway track system, and a concrete apron that once supported sprayers used in the 1950s era drought. These excluded elements do not survive with sufficient integrity to contribute substantially to an understanding of the Comal Power Plant facility. In contrast, the nominated area and the identified contributing elements provide the greatest possible opportunity for preservation, adaptive reuse, and public appreciation of the historically significant roles and functions that this property has served for New Braunfels and surrounding portions of Central Texas.


1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
COMAL RIVER (COMAL CANAL)
CONCRETE PIER
PUMP HOUSE
LANDA PARK DRIVE
FREDERICKSBURG AVE
WOOD ROAD
EXISTING SUBSTATION
CONTROL HOUSE
OLD SUBSTATION (DISMANTLED)
OLD POWER PLANT BUILDING
GAS METERING HOUSE
LANDA STREET
LEGEND
RECOMMENDED NRHP BOUNDARY
ORIGINAL SITE BOUNDARY (APPROXIMATE)
FENCE LINE
WATER
N
0 50 100 150 200
1" = 50'

Comal Power Plant
Northwest Corner Landa Road and Landa Park Drive
New Braunfels, Comal County, Texas
Photographed by Eugene Foster
March 2000

Photo 1
Entry gate on Landa Road
Camera facing south

Photo 2
Southeast oblique
Camera facing northwest

Photo 3
Northeast oblique
Camera facing southeast

Photo 4
East elevation
Camera facing west

Photo 5
Turbine operations floor, from roof of the control room
Camera facing northwest

Photo 6
Crane and awning windows, from control room roof
Camera facing east

Photo 7
Turbine operations floor
Camera facing southeast

Photo 8
Detail of typical window and door arrangement at northwest corner of the plant (west elevation)
Camera facing east

Photo 9
Detail of typical window bay arrangement at northwest corner of west elevation
Camera facing east

Photo 10
Comal Power Plant site (north side, from Comal River)
Camera facing south

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Comal Power Plant

MULTIPLE NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: TEXAS, Comal

DATE RECEIVED: 7/08/04 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 7/27/04
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 8/11/04 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 8/21/04
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 04000895

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL:	N	DATA PROBLEM:	N	LANDSCAPE:	N	LESS THAN 50 YEARS:	N
OTHER:	N	PDIL:	N	PERIOD:	N	PROGRAM UNAPPROVED:	N
REQUEST:	N	SAMPLE:	N	SLR DRAFT:	N	NATIONAL:	N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

_✓_ACCEPT ___RETURN ___REJECT 8/20/04 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Entered in the
National Register

RECOM./CRITERIA_____

REVIEWER_____ DISCIPLINE_____

TELEPHONE_____ DATE_____

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.

COMAL POWER PLANT

NORTHWEST CORNER LANDA ROAD
AND LANDA PARK DRIVE

NEW BRAUNFELS, COMAL CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 1 of 10

COMAL POWER PLANT

NORTHWEST CORNER LANDA ROAD
AND LANDA PARK DRIVE

NEW BRAUNFELS, COMAL CO., TEXAS

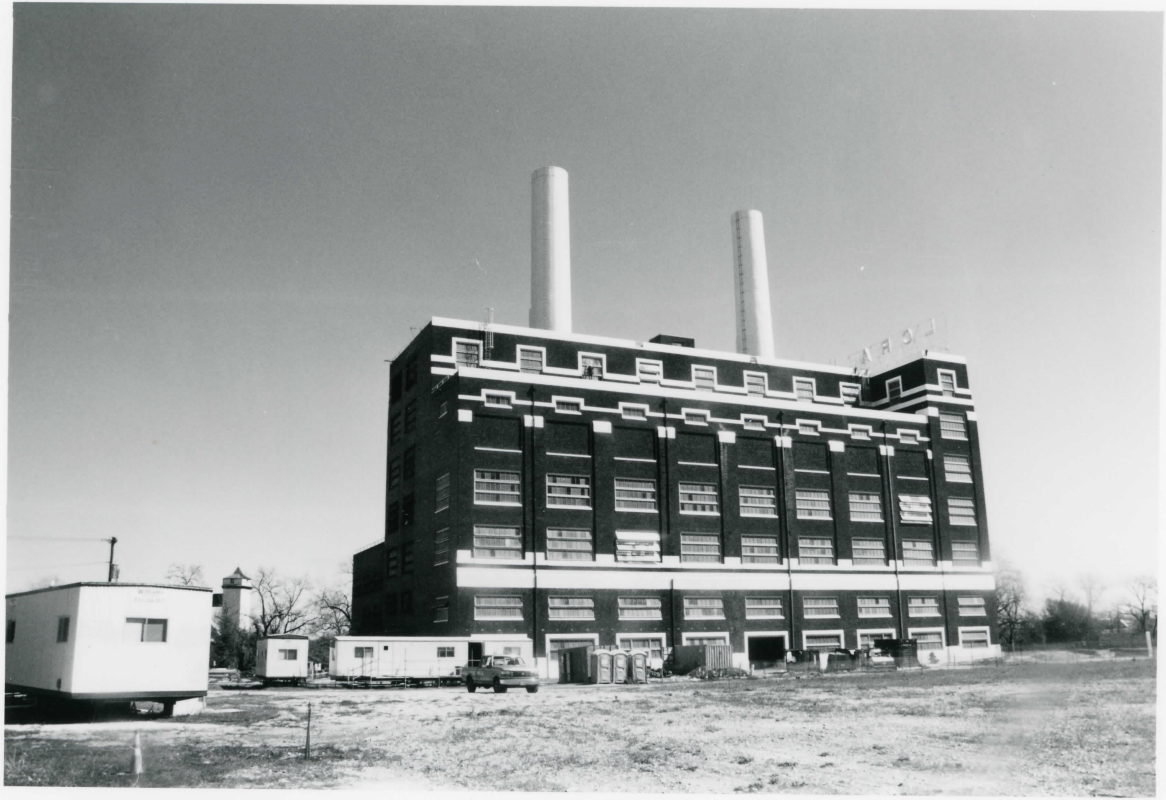
PHOTOGRAPH 2 of 10

COMAL POWER PLANT

NORTHWEST CORNER LANDA ROAD
AND LANDA PARK DRIVE

NEW BRAUNFELS, COMAL CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 3 of 10

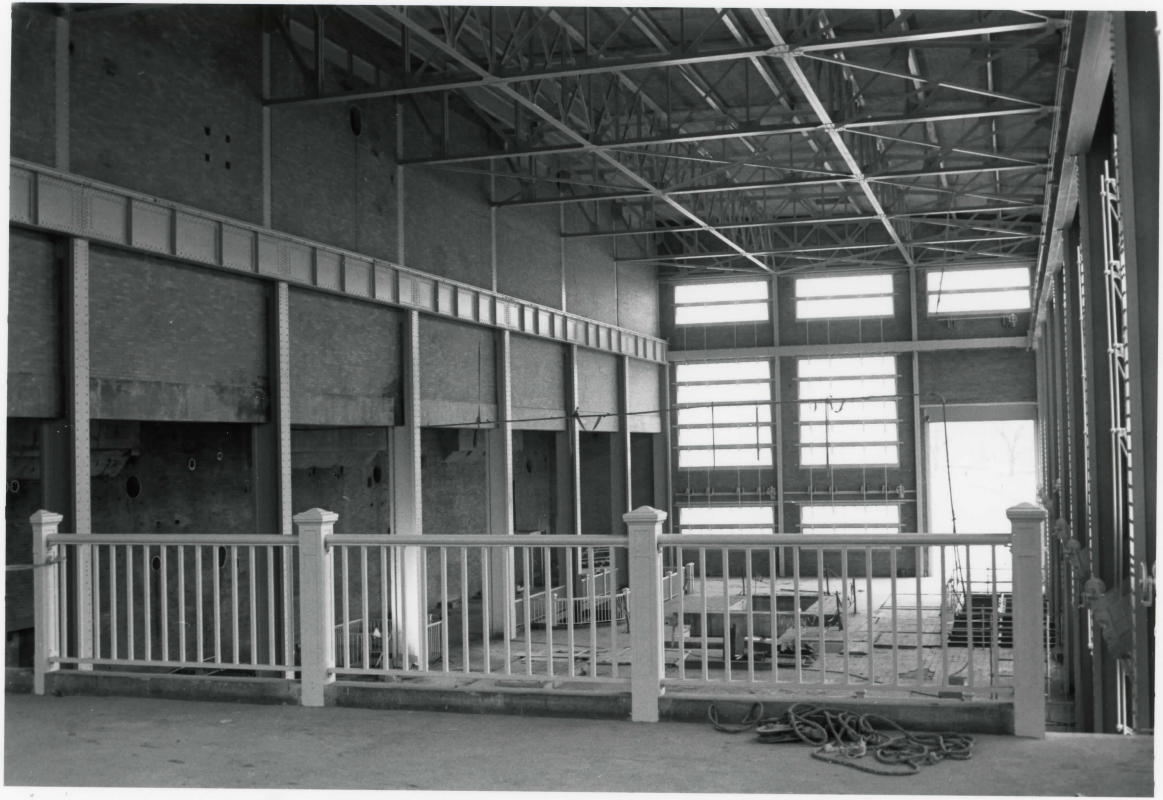


COMAL POWER PLANT

NORTHWEST CORNER LANDA ROAD
AND LANDA PARK DRIVE

NEW BRAUNFELS, COMAL CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 4 of 10



COMAL POWER PLANT

NORTHWEST CORNER LANDA ROAD
AND LANDA PARK DRIVE

NEW BRAUNFELS, COMAL CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 5 of 10

COMAL POWER PLANT
NORTHWEST CORNER LANDA ROAD
AND LANDA PARK DRIVE
NEW BRAUNFELS, COMAL CO., TEXAS
PHOTOGRAPH 6 of 10


NORTHERN

COMAL POWER PLANT

NORTHWEST CORNER LANDA ROAD
AND LANDA PARK DRIVE

NEW BRAUNFELS, COMAL CO., TEXAS

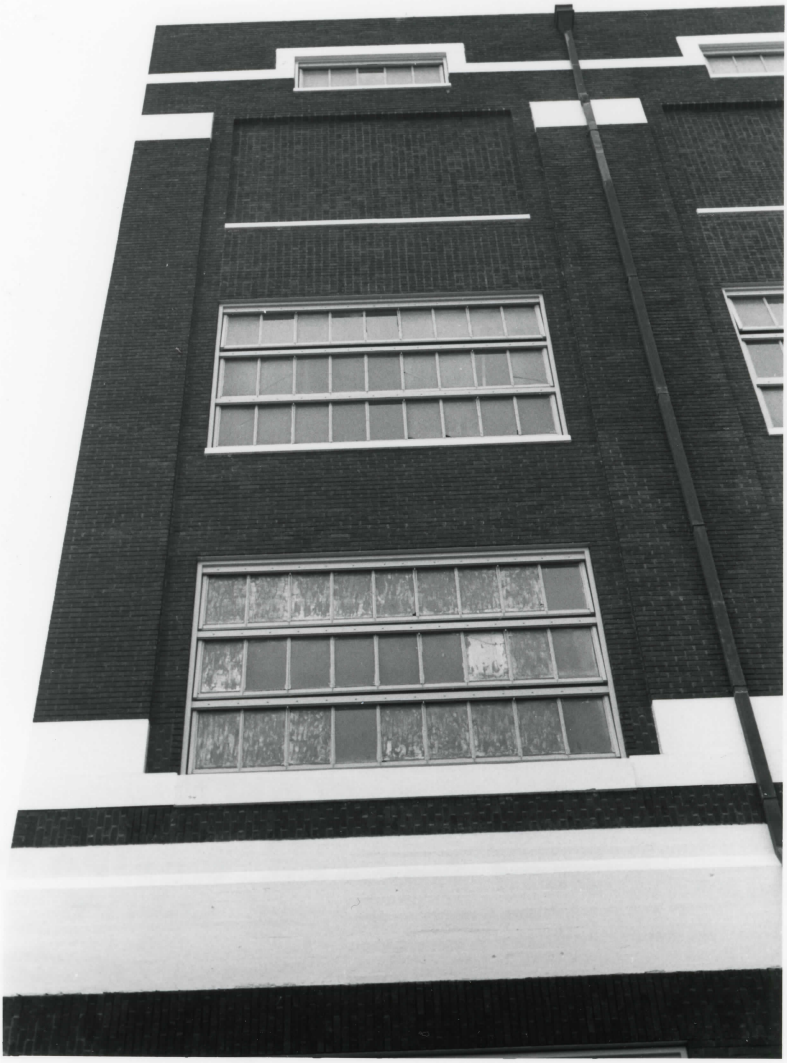
PHOTOGRAPH 7 of 10

COMAL POWER PLANT

NORTHWEST CORNER LANDA ROAD
AND LANDA PARK DRIVE

NEW BRAUNFELS, COMAL CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 8 of 10



COMAL POWER PLANT

NORTHWEST CORNER LANDA ROAD
AND LANDA PARK DRIVE

NEW BRAUNFELS, COMAL CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 9 of 10

COMAL POWER PLANT

NORTHWEST CORNER LANDA ROAD
AND LANDA PARK DRIVE

NEW BRAUNFELS, COMAL CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 10 of 10

6343 IV SE (SMITHSON VALLEY)

USGS science for a changing world

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

NEW BRAUNFELS WEST QUADRANGLE
TEXAS
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

6343 I SE (HUNTER)

Comal Power Plant
NW corner Landa Park Drive
New Braunfels, Comal County, Texas

1. 583886 E 3286831 N
2. 583768 E 3286846 N
3. 583726 E 3286796 N
4. 583870 E 3286457 N
5. 583855 E 3286426 N

Produced by the United States Geological Survey
Revised in cooperation with the Texas Water Development Board

Control by USGS, NOS/NOAA, and USCE

Compiled by the Army Map Service by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs taken 1956. Field checked 1958
Revised from aerial photographs taken 1986. Field checked 1987
Map edited 1988

Projection and 10,000-foot grid ticks: Texas coordinate system, south central zone (Lambert conformal conic)
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid, zone 14
1927 North American Datum
To place on the predicted North American Datum 1983 move the projection lines 20 meters south and 28 meters east as shown by dashed corner ticks

Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence and field lines generally visible on aerial photographs. This information is unchecked

Gray tint indicates area in which only landmark buildings are shown

UTM GRID AND 1988 MAGNETIC NORTH DECLINATION AT CENTER OF MAP DIAGRAM IS APPROXIMATE

20% TOTAL RECOVERED FIBER

SCALE 1:24 000

1000 0 1000 2000 3000 4000 5000 6000 7000 8000 9000 10 000 FEET
1 .5 0 1 MILES
1 .5 0 KILOMETERS 1 2
1000 0 METERS 1000 2000

CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET
NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, P.O. BOX 25286, DENVER, COLORADO 80225
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

TEXAS
QUADRANGLE LOCATION

2998-413

ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Primary highway, hard surface
Secondary highway, hard surface
Light-duty road, hard or improved surface
Unimproved road
Interstate Route U. S. Route State Route

NEW BRAUNFELS WEST, TEX.
29098-F2-TF-024

1988

DMA 6343 II NW–SERIES V822

ISBN 0-607-52038-5

INTERIOR-GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, RESTON, VIRGINIA—1988

TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

TO: Carol Shull, Keeper
National Register of Historic Places

FROM: Gregory W. Smith, National Register Coordinator
Texas Historical Commission

RE: Comal Power Plant, New Braunfels, Comal County, Texas

DATE: June 28, 2004

The following materials are submitted regarding: Comal Power Plant

x	Original National Register of Historic Places form
	___ Resubmitted nomination
__	Multiple Property nomination form
x	Photographs
x	USGS map
__	Correspondence
	Other:

COMMENTS:

_____ SHPO requests substantive review

_____ The enclosed owner objections (do__) (do not__) constitute a majority of property owners

_____ Other: _____