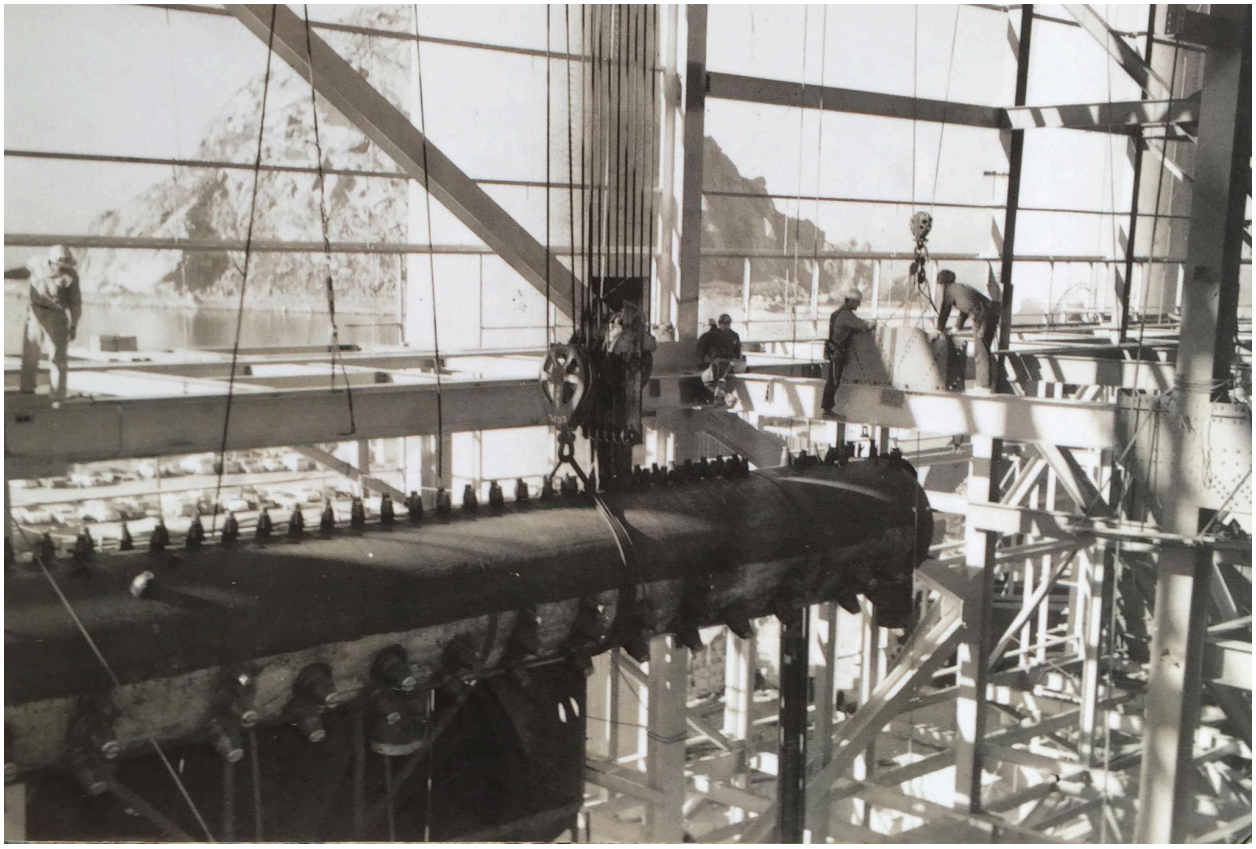

Source: PG&E. A Nice View of the Rock as the Girders Go Up. 1954

Major Construction in a Small Town

This is the second in a five-part series on the history of the Morro Bay Power Plant.

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The huge generators that produced up to 1000 megawatts of electricity when the power plant was completed signaled the great disruption about to confront Morro Bay. Built over the decade from 1954 to 1963, the plant was of a monumental scale that more closely matched Morro Rock than it did the little seaside village where it was planted.

The plant design consisted of turbine generators, main transformers, boilers, boiler feed pumps, fuel tanks, condensers, cranes, a switchyard, high purity station evaporators, and innovative sea water evaporators. Large pipes were installed to draw in seawater for cooling, while warm water was discharged through a long tunnel north of the Rock.

The main power plant structure was built to contain the power house and a 121-ton boiler. The massive boiler drum took three days in transit from the railroad at Camp San Luis Obispo to the construction location. A five-foot-thick concrete floor supported the heavy concrete housing walls.

Workers excavated the foundation for the 90-foot wide by 10-foot-deep concrete pad to support the equipment. The digging and subsequent destruction of Native American artifacts instigated future regulation on excavations.

A total of 289 piles were driven 68 feet into the ground and filled with concrete to provide a foundation for the first 450-foot smokestack. The stack itself was built with concrete and lined with acid-proof brick.

8,000 barrels of oil per hour would be burned to turn the generators. A temporary cofferdam (later removed) was built to lay 4,500 feet of oil pipes on a dry, bay floor to a fueling station where tankers could supply oil. Oil storage tanks surrounded by protective sand dikes were built near the power plant.

Construction of the first stage of the plant with the single stack used 40,500 cubic yards of concrete; 3,500 tons of reinforcing steel; 3,450 tons of structural steel; 230,000 feet of conduit; 2,500,000 feet of wire and cable; and 30,000 electrical connections.

Bechtel Corporation, which later constructed the Diablo Canyon nuclear plant, built the Morro Bay Power Plant, at one time employing 438 workers. It was the biggest private construction project in San Luis Obispo County at the time and became the fourth largest steam plant in the nation. It changed the definition of 'Morro Bay'.