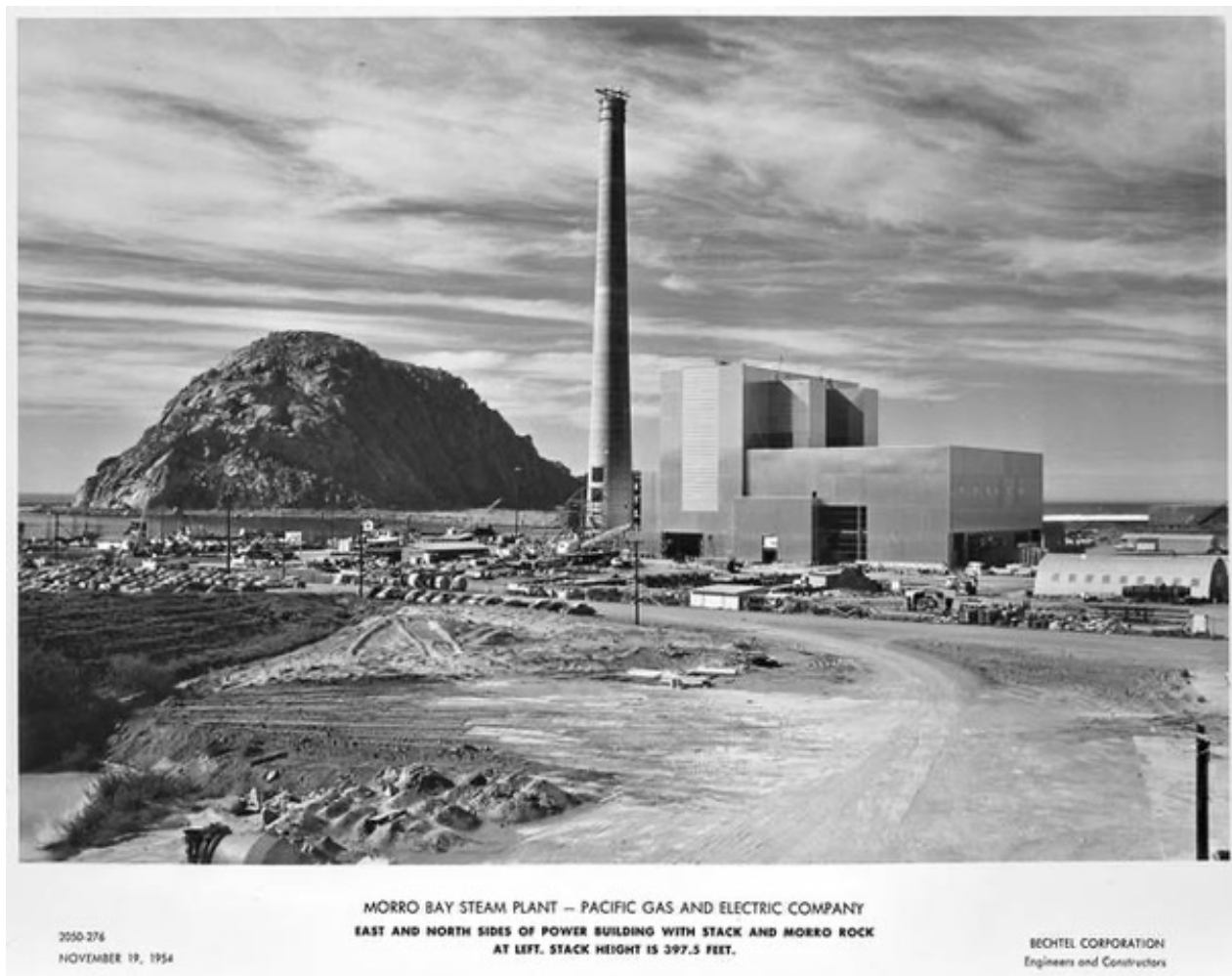




2050-276
NOVEMBER 19, 1954

MORRO BAY STEAM PLANT — PACIFIC GAS AND ELECTRIC COMPANY
EAST AND NORTH SIDES OF POWER BUILDING WITH STACK AND MORRO ROCK
AT LEFT, STACK HEIGHT IS 397.5 FEET.

BECHTEL CORPORATION
Engineers and Constructors

Source: PG&E. Morro Bay Steam Plant, c. 1955

PG&E Goes Live: Linking Morro Bay to the Grid

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

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The World War II navy base on the landfill that created the Morro Bay harbor infrastructure was perfect for a power plant: flat, close to cooling seawater and the fuel oil facilities supplied by Standard Oil, and as close as you could get from the coast to the Central Valley.

The first product of the plant design, construction crews, and materials was a steam plant with two generators and a single stack (shown almost completed in the photo). The new plant pioneered a seawater-based once-through cooling system with desalinization and innovative aluminum siding to conceal the industrial heart of

the plant. When the company turned on this immense and complicated machine it poured electricity into the wires heading to the Central Valley to pump groundwater for agriculture. It did not power the lights in Morro Bay.

The new plant was celebrated with a crowded dedication ceremony on July 8, 1955. The *SLO Tribune* reported that over 500 people joined the event to walk around the huge generator “gleaming with new paint.” At the time about 4,000 people lived in Morro Bay so a sizable portion of them (even allowing for visitors) turned up for this out-of-scale new thing on the Embarcadero.

The power plant was about where the military had used major federal investments to build the World War II amphibious assault training base in 1941-1943. These investments created the foundation, not just for the power plant, but for the transformation and growth of Morro Bay in postwar years. Commercial fishing grew rapidly after the war, with boats coming from ports ranging from San Pedro to San Francisco to take advantage of the new harbor infrastructure. At the same time, the new land created for the Navy south of Beach Street was changing from hosting fishing landings, a boatyard and other service businesses into a full-fledged tourist attraction.

For the next five decades after the dedication of the new power plant, electricity, fishing and tourism defined the economy and the character of Morro Bay. Its population grew from 4,800 to over 10,000 in the years between 1960 and 1980, driven by these thriving industries.