NPS Form 10-900 OMB No 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

902

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form.* If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

RECEIVED 2280
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Nat. Register of Historic Places
National Park Service

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Municipal Light Plant

Other names/site number: Electric Light Plant, 527 W Spring St., 589 Dublin Rd.

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing

2. Location

Street & number: 555 W. Nationwide Blvd.

City or town: Columbus State: Ohio County: Franklin

Not For Publication: N/A Vicinity: N/A

3. 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 at the following level(s) of significance:

___national ___statewide _X__local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

_X__A ___B ___C ___D

Barbara Ewen **DSHPO for Inventory & Registration** October 21, 2015

Signature of certifying official/Title: Date

State Historic Preservation Office, Ohio History Connection

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official: Date

Title : State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

✓ entered in the National Register

___ determined eligible for the National Register

___ determined not eligible for the National Register

___ removed from the National Register

___ other (explain:) _____

for Edson W. Beall 12·15·15

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private: [x]

Public – Local [ ]

Public – State [ ]

Public – Federal [ ]

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s) [x]

District [ ]

Site [ ]

Structure [ ]

Object [ ]

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
	1	structures
		objects
1	1	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use
Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)
GOVERNMENT/public works

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)
VACANT

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)
_19th-century Victorian__
_Mid-19th century Utilitarian/Art Deco__
_____

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)
Principal exterior materials of the property: ___BRICK; STONE_____

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with **a summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

Municipal Light Plant is an early 20th-century utilitarian Romanesque Revival building constructed in 1903-1904, with an Art Deco inspired addition at the east end constructed in phases between 1937-1954. The original building faces north at the west end of W. Nationwide Boulevard. Located along the Olentangy River, the building sits at the far edge of the arena district in downtown Columbus, Ohio. Three distinct building forms reflect the associated construction dates: the original electrical generation plant, the boiler house, and the new generation plant. All spaces of the light plant are connected and built as additions to the original structure. The original generation plant exhibits a nine bay red brick façade, original paired double-hung wood windows with fanlights, stone stills, arched window heads, brick corbelling, and a projecting central entry of matching details. A central roof monitor with clerestory windows runs the length of the rectangular building. The boiler house is located to the south of the generation plant, characterized by red brick and a nine bay façade of matching details. Metal industrial sash windows define two levels within each bay. The addition faces east and is defined by three masses, all constructed of matching orange brick with vertical bands of glass block windows and ceramic panels. A projecting entry includes a storefront and stone surround. The interior of the building consists of large open spaces that house existing equipment, boilers, and control rooms. Concrete floors, exposed steel structure, open metal catwalks and stairs remain throughout. The electric substation grid structure, dating to 1974, remains at the southeast corner of the property. The substation is considered non-contributing due to age. Columbus' Municipal Light Plant retains a high degree of historic integrity, with the overall

appearance and character of the building and secondary structures remaining largely unchanged from the historic period.

Narrative Description

Municipal Light Plant is an electrical generation facility located on the far west end of W Nationwide Boulevard in the west side of downtown Columbus. Sitting on the banks of where the Olentangy and Scioto Rivers join, the neighborhood has historically been an industrial and utilitarian part of Columbus' urban core. The site is bound by the Olentangy River to the west, W. Spring Street to the south, and an adjacent parcel to the east. This end of W. Nationwide Blvd. is largely open space, with a few two story industrial-office buildings set far back from the street, surrounded by paved parking lots. A railroad line that runs north-south through the city divides the west end of Nationwide from what is known as the Arena District. A stark contrast occurs from the new development and entertainment district on the east side of the railroad to the west side. The north side of Nationwide Blvd. is currently a razed site with the exception of a single parcel immediately across from the light plant. This two story brick building appears to date from a similar era as the original generation plant, and now houses the facilities management offices of the city. Municipal Light Plant sits as a beacon of the dead-end street as the surrounding area is expected to undergo new development in the near future.

The original single story light plant was constructed in 1903, consisting of two adjoined rectangular spaces oriented in the east-west direction that housed the generation plant and the boiler house at the rear. Although they are connected, the two spaces display distinct building forms from the exterior. The addition was constructed in phases between 1937-1954 and is located to the east of the original building. The addition stands separate from the original with one enclosed connection above grade between the two generation plants. An underground tunnel connects the basement of the boiler house to the lowest level of the addition.

The primary north façade of Municipal Light Plant is red brick with few stone accents (Photo 1). The building is defined by nine bays, with four bays flanking a minimally projecting entry bay. Each bay is recessed and includes one masonry opening with an arched brick window head and stone sill. The façade is broken into three vertical sections, with a simple stone band dividing the brick foundation from the upper exterior walls, and brick corbelling transitioning from the recessed wall plane to the upper wall that sits below an undecorated roofline. Original 1/1 double hung wood windows remain paired in each of the masonry openings, with a fanlight spanning both units. The entry is accentuated by a gabled parapet that included brick corbelling at the roofline, stone coping, and corner turrets with stone finials. The entry retains the original wood surround, paneled bulkhead, and large fanlight; the entry doors have been replaced with a metal overhead door. A stone band mirrors the rounded arch entry and is carved in relief to read 'MUNICIPAL LIGHT PLANT' in block letters. A concrete loading dock was constructed in front of the entry at an unknown date. The original generation plant is capped by a hipped roof with a central roof monitor that extends the majority of the building's length, which also has a hipped roof. Divided light clerestory windows are visible at the west end of the monitor, but the majority of the windows are covered by wood paneling. The storage house that is attached to the original generation plant is extruded off the west elevation (Photo 2). The primary façade of this

secondary space has three bays of masonry openings on two levels. These openings have rounded arch brick hoods with no sill. All six openings have been infilled with non-matching brick at an unknown date. Brick corbelling remains at the top of the second level, with a flat roof above. The new generation plant addition to the east of the original building is slightly taller than the original building but both elevations sit flush with each other (Photo 6). A smoke stack also sits flush with the buildings and rises to a significant height between the two structures.

The west elevation of the original generation plant is defined by the storage house projection, with matching details as described above (Photos 2, 3). Seven bays of single masonry openings on two levels include stone sills. The upper openings are infilled with painted wood. The lower openings have been modified and infilled; the two northernmost bays were once removed for what appears to be a large garage door opening, which was later infilled with non-matching red brick. The remaining openings on the lower level are infilled to match the appearance of the north elevation. The spatial differences between the original generation plant and the adjoined boiler house are distinctly apparent on the west elevation (Photo 3). The boiler house is a two story space, divided into three vertical bays. The north bay is covered by the storage house off the generation plant. The second and third bays contain entry doors at the ground level and two large round windows above on the second level. A stone sign carved in relief reads 'BOILER HOUSE', located in the center of the elevation below the flat roofline. Roof alterations are evident at the top of the building where an original gabled roof was removed for the construction of a flat roof in 1941.

The south elevation of the boiler house reflects a similar nine bay configuration as the primary façade of the original generation plant (Photos 4, 5). These bays are defined by a recessed exterior wall between brick pilasters. Three levels are evident on the south elevation as the grade slopes toward the south end of the site. On all three levels each bay contains one masonry window opening. The lowest level contains paired 9-light industrial windows. The second level contains rounded arch openings with matching brick window heads, as well as stone sills. These openings are all infilled with a painted wood covering with a small vent. The third level reflects the 1941 roof alterations when the gabled structure was removed and a half story of masonry walls were constructed to establish a flat roof system. 15-light industrial windows define this top level (Photo 4). The east elevation of the boiler house mirrors the west and faces in toward the west elevation of the new generation plant addition.

The new generation plant differs in style and scale of the original 1903 building, using an orange brick masonry construction with stone and ceramic panel accents (Photos 5, 6). The new generation plant reflects a utilitarian take on the streamline Art Deco style, exhibiting strong verticality and geometric shapes throughout. Constructed in three phases, the new generation plant consists of three distinct building forms that match in material and design. The primary façade of the addition faces east; the building steps down from the tallest mass at the south end to the smallest at the north end along W. Nationwide Blvd (Photo 6). Four bays break the east elevation of the five-story building. The first level contains one 12-light industrial sash window in each bay. A smooth stone band divides the lower level from the upper stories. Four narrow bands of glass block span from the stone band to the bottom of the fifth level. A divided light casement window sits within the glass block band above the stone band. The top level contains

two single light fixed windows in each bay, set within glass block matching the levels below. The fifth level is divided by teal-colored ceramic panels. A ramp leads from grade down to the basement of the new generation plant, accessed through a metal overhead garage door.

The south elevation of the five story building matches the east, with the exception of there being six bays instead of four. The westernmost bay on the south elevation contains an access door in place of a typical industrial sash window. Bays 2-4 have been infilled at an unknown date. Bays 5-6 maintain the matching windows as described above.

The west elevation is a windowless façade of painted metal paneling (Photo 5). The 1951 Sanborn map notes this elevation as being constructed of transite siding, an asbestos-based paneling product commonly used in the 1950s. The modification to metal is likely to have been completed within the past ten years, and is compatible in style and material to the original design. These materials were often removed as part of asbestos abatement efforts in recent years.

A two story entry mass projects from the new generation plant in the center of the east elevation. The entry and adjacent three story mass at the north end of the addition was constructed c.1950. The entry is defined by a wide stone entry surround, with a storefront door system, metal ribbon windows, and triangle awnings. The three story mass is divided by one large fenestration bay in the center of the elevation. Stone banding matches the 5-story structure, dividing the level at grade from the upper floors. The fenestration is essentially one large glass block wall, divided into six “lights” by metal mullions. Three six-light metal sash windows sit within the glass block above the stone band. One large overhead garage door matching the width of the center bay is located at grade. Matching blue ceramic paneling defines the top of the fenestration bay, extending to the top of the building. The final addition of the new generation plant was constructed c.1954 at the north side of the building. This two story structure matches the rest of the addition in orange brick construction with simple stone banding dividing the lower level. One vertical fenestration bay sits centered on the east elevation; two 15-light industrial sash windows are located within the masonry opening divided by a blue ceramic panel. The north elevation is defined by painted corrugated paneling (Photo 6). It is likely this is the original transite siding that has been painted. One large exhaust vent and one metal door with an adjacent vertical fire escape ladder are located in the center of the upper level.

A steel-framed coal elevator is located at the southwest corner of the facility, with two conveyors leading to the two halves of the building (Photo 4). This structure remains despite connections into the buildings being covered at an unknown date. A large smokestack located at the center of the boiler house is visible above the generation plant regardless of perspective on site.

An open-air electric substation grid structure remains at the southeast corner of the nominated property (Photo 11). This steel structure was constructed in 1974 and has experienced various alterations due to the necessity to keep the substation functioning at modern standards. The substation is currently still in use. The substation structure is considered non-contributing due to its construction date outside the period of significance and ongoing alterations.

The stand-alone masonry building at the east end of the site (shown on the included location maps) was demolished in c.2014. The first time this building appears on any historic map is the 1937 Baists Real Estate map, which labels the structure as a garage. The 1951 Sanborn map deliberately cuts off the northeast corner of the site when depicting the light plant on a detail sheet, providing evidence that the building was never tied to the function of the facility as it is not called out as part of the light plant. Historic maps show various small outbuildings located around the site over the years that were demolished due to expansion efforts, providing a precedent of secondary outbuildings that were not critical to the function of the plant. Recent use of the garage building before demolition by the City was a warehouse/storage facility, with no functional relationship to the generation plant.

The interior of the building is dominated by remaining equipment, boilers, and coal hoppers. The original generation plant has an exposed steel frame structure and reflects a large open space that once housed generators (Photos, 7, 9). A metal mezzanine at the west end provided a second level platform for controls and additional equipment and remains intact. Exposed steel trusses, concrete floors, and the long roof monitor define the interior character of the building. Access to the boiler house is located at the southeast corner of the original generation plant. The boiler house retains three large boilers, exposed steel frame structure, and a large coal hopper at the top of the building (Photo 8). There are no catwalks or upper floors within this space. The basement is an open space used formerly as storage, and provided access through an underground tunnel to the lower level of the new generation plant. This tunnel consists of rough stone walls and a brick barrel vault ceiling. The new generation plant echoes similar language of design and functionality on the interior. The five story space at the south end contains additional boilers and another large steel coal hopper at the top of the building. Concrete floors, exposed steel and concrete structure, and exposed masonry walls define the main boiler and generator space. Four levels of metal catwalks provide access to the top of the building, connected by open metal stairs (Photo 10). The smaller masses at the north end of the new generation plant include three levels of control rooms and the entry, which consists of painted concrete block, glazed block, terrazzo flooring, exposed concrete flooring, and dropped ceilings.

Municipal Light Plant retains a high degree of historic integrity, despite minor alterations to masonry openings on secondary elevations and modifications in equipment systems over the years. The façade of the original generation plant remains effectively unchanged from its original construction and design, displaying a utilitarian use of the Romanesque style through the use of brick corbelling, arched openings, and stone trim. Original wood windows, trim, stone details, historic signage, and the roof monitor all remain intact. The boiler house reflects the original fenestration pattern as well as alterations within the period of significance. The new generation plant also remains effectively unchanged from its original design, reflecting the mid-century influence of aesthetics and materiality. Dominating bands of glass block, industrial sash windows, stone detailing, ceramic panels, and original signage all remain intact. The majority of historic interior materials remain as well, despite the little amount of finishes used in original construction given the industrial nature of the space. Glazed block, terrazzo flooring, exposed steel structure, metal catwalks, and much of the historic electrical equipment remains in the building.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- [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.
- [ ] 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 values, 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.

Criteria Considerations
(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- [ ] A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- [ ] B. Removed from its original location
- [ ] C. A birthplace or grave
- [ ] D. A cemetery
- [ ] E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- [ ] F. A commemorative property
- [ ] G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions.)
__COMMUNITY PLANNING/DEVELOPMENT_____
__INDUSTRY_____
_____

Period of Significance
1903-1965

Significant Dates
1903
1937
c.1950
c.1954

Significant Person
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder
Unknown

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Municipal Light Plant is significant at the local level under Criterion A in the area of industry and community development, as the building reflects the progression of electric power production in Columbus from the late 19th-century to the late 20th-century. Originally constructed in 1903 as an experimental facility to test the viability and efficiency of civic-controlled electric power for street lighting, the building steadily grew to support widespread electric service. Municipal Light Plant experienced several expansions to keep up with increasing demand of community usage, eventually turning profitable figures that allowed for the City to power civic buildings and street lights without cost. The light plant would function into the early 1970s when capacity and operation costs became too great for the facility. The period of significance begins with construction of the building in 1903 and ends in 1965 per National Register guidelines; this date also reflects the approximate period in which the plant had reached capacity and began to be phased out as the city's primary source of public utility electricity.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

The Rise of Electric Amenities

By the end of the 19th century the city of Columbus was geographically expanding at an unprecedented rate, expanding beyond the downtown core that defined the State's capitol for many years. Growth was in all directions, reaching beyond German Village to the south, north of The Ohio State University campus, and beyond the east-west boundaries of the familiar downtown. The cause for this growth came during a time of industrial revolution, fueled by the railroad, and more importantly the streetcar. Despite being predominantly a walking city, the horse drawn transportation allowed people to move away from the polluted and noisy centers of downtown factories. Another revolution would occur in the early 1890s when the streetcars were electrified, sparking even greater development in what would be referred to as streetcar suburbs.[1]

On the banks of the Scioto River where it meets the Olentangy, this section of Columbus was part of the city's industrial hub. Buggy companies, stone and lumber yards, railroad yards, ironworks, and warehouses lined the edges of the river. Among the manufacturing efforts were the utility companies that provided the foundation for the city's daily activities. In 1887 Columbus Water Works pumping station was constructed at the intersection of Dublin Avenue and Spring Street, on the east bank of the Olentangy River. A reservoir and elaborate filtration and pump system drew water from the river for purification.

Just a few blocks to the east, the Columbus Street Railway power house was also located on the north bank of the Scioto River. The private streetcar company provided transportation to the growing city and would quickly become a catalyst in the modernization of Columbus transportation. In 1891 Columbus Consolidated Street Railway Company made the big shift from horse to electric power streetcars, and their power house along the river would become one of few companies leading the market in supplying the city with electricity. Companies such as Columbus Street Railway or The Columbus Edison Company privately furnished contracts for electricity. Contracts included civic utilities, as street lights and the grand illuminated arches that defined the urban streets of Columbus were being converted from gas to electric lights by the 1890s. But the city of Columbus began to realize that charges were excessive for power from these private utility companies that were supplying street lighting, and it was decided that a municipal facility was necessary to support the advancing technologies.

In November 1897 a bond issue was authorized by city council, granting $68,000 to construct an electric light plant to provide current for street lighting. The new plan was installed in the existing Water Works pumping station, and operations are noted as beginning in March 1899. The 1901 Sanborn shows Columbus Electric Light Company occupying an existing structure on the site of Columbus Water Works for electrical storage. At this time approximately 325 arc lamps were supplied with power, located between Gay Street and Second Avenue, and between the Scioto River and Washington Avenue. An early engineering study notes that the plant would

[1] Ed Lentz, *Columbus: The Story of a City* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2003), 98.

operate streetlights from dark until dawn with the exception of "moonlight nights" in which case the streetlights would remain off.[2] The plant was operated until July 5, 1900, when it was then closed due to a lack of funds to operate. It would remain closed until October 19, 1901 when operations were resumed under the direction of the Director of Public Improvements. At this time the plant cost $14,028.10 to operate per year, with the operating cost of each lamp therefore estimated to be $62.83 including bond interest and equipment depreciation. These studies were imperative as this period of time was a trial to see if a municipal electric plant was cost effective. In comparing the operating cost to the paid contract with The Columbus Edison Company paying $74.50, the city was saving $11.67 per year, per lamp. This figure roughly translates to $300 to the inflated 2015 dollar, a significant cost savings when accounting for the increasing number of lamps being erected. In 1901, City Council approved the issuance of $110,000 bonds in addition to the $300,000 issue approved by vote in 1896. With these approvals, the Director of Public Improvements was authorized and directed to "erect, equip and establish an electric light plant for the purpose of lighting the entire city and in the performance of the duty to utilize, as far as possible, the machinery and appliances of the existing plant."[3]

In the late 1880s Thomas Edison and Nikola Tesla were both developing competing electrical current types. Edison had developed direct current (DC) in the early years of electricity, which was standard in the U.S. at this time. The issue with this type of current was its difficulty in converting to higher or lower voltages depending on use. As a result, Tesla had developed alternating current (AC) which allowed different voltages to be converted fairly easily using a transformer. The result was a battle between the two inventors to gain widespread support and preference for their own method. In 1893 the "Current War" came to head when the Chicago World's Fair awarded George Westinghouse the contract to power the fair using Tesla's alternating current for $399,000. General Electric's rejected bid using Edison's direct current was $544,000. By 1896 the city of Buffalo was completely lit by alternating current from Niagara Falls, with General Electric making the switch to AC in the same year.[4] By the turn of the century, AC power would continue to gain traction in the industry as more examples of successful conversions became known.

The new municipal light plant had specifications that called for a facility with the capacity of 1,500 arc lamps. Two systems were requested for bid in 1900-1901: reciprocating engines connected to alternating current generators, or steam turbines directly connected to generators of the same type that were supplied by steam boilers. The system was not necessarily new, but it was uncommon in these types of buildings due to increased cost. The city chose to adopt the steam turbine system, which had a more uniform turning movement, less cost of maintenance, occupied less space, and reduced the labor needed to operate. The steam turbine consisted of one moving part, unlike reciprocating engines which need continual adjustment, repairs, and replacement. The steam system was estimated to reduce fuel expenses by six percent. The downside to this system was the increased overhead cost of construction. According to the Annual Report of the Electric Light Plant superintendent in 1903, the new plant was expected to

[2] Free Street Lights, 2.
[3] Okey, 6.
[4] U.S. Department of Energy. *The War of the Currents: AC vs. DC Power,* 2.

reduce operation cost per lamp to approximately $35.00 per year.[5] Regardless of the system type, it should also be noted that the City was only considering an alternating current facility, reflecting the growing trend towards what was becoming the preferred system at this point. The new plant was to be the most up to date facility possible in both electric current type and mechanical system type. Construction on the new plant began in 1903 on the west end of the Water Works site on Dublin Avenue (W. Nationwide Blvd.). Municipal Light Plant was expected to be put in service by December 1904.

A Turbulent Beginning

Construction of Municipal Light Plant was heavily criticized, despite the utopian efforts of establishing an exemplary new utility. Political disputes caused significant delays, poor communication would led to construction mistakes. Due to political reasons, the incoming city administration of the Board of Public Service fired the light plant superintendent, Perry Okey, who had drawn up the plans and specification for the new facility. Due to the incompleteness of these drawings when forced to leave his position, Okey was the only person at the time qualified to oversee the work. This political feud paved the way for one of the biggest construction blunders possible, in which the building was constructed in the wrong location. The initial plans called for the building to be placed on the site to allow a railroad switch from the Water Works track to turn along the south wall of the new boiler room. From here cars could be directly unloaded through "coal ports" into the open space in front of the fire doors. Despite the fact that construction began on the foundation while Okey was still superintendent, months went by before the mistake was discovered. As a result the building was constructed within six feet of the railroad track and the switch was described as being physically impossible. It was estimated that the error cost approximately $10,000 as coal conveying machinery was then required, with an additional two to three thousand dollars of operating expenses each year for the duration of the plant's operation.[6]

Following the setbacks in constructing the experimental light plant, the building was finally completed in 1904 to meet the completion date initially proposed. Unfortunately due to the shifts in personnel and a lack of experienced contractors with such systems, the new light plant experienced yet another setback. In December 1904 Municipal Light Plant was to be placed in service for the first time, but when the steam turbine started up it immediately began to show signs of misconstruction, vibrating forcefully and creating unusual noise as the equipment rotated. Operators quickly shut the machines down for fear of causing extensive damage.[7] To make matters worse, allegations of contractual corruption and misappropriation of construction funds were rampant. With little patience remaining in the administration of progressive mayor Robert Jeffrey and within the community, an investigation committee was established by City Council to sort through the turmoil of the past 18 months. After eight months of extensive interviews, hearings, and examination the Committee quickly recognized fault. It was estimated that Municipal Light Plant cost between $60,000-$80,000 more than it would have for a private corporation to build a similar station. As of July 1, 1905 nearly $550,000 was invested on a

[5] Okey, 9.
[6] Electric Light Investigating Committee, 1905. Ohio History Connection.
[7] Ibid, 15.

plant that would support an estimated 2000 arc lamps "of a nominal 2000-candle efficiency".[8] Inflation statistics estimate that figure to be equivalent to just over 14 million dollars in 2015.

Despite the staggering statistics of construction for such a small building footprint, the investigating Committee determined that the annual operating cost per lamp with the new plant was $60.00, compared to the $74.50 price of the former contract. The Committee also noted in their concluding report that the city was better lighted than it had ever been, and the equipment in the new station was the most efficient available at the time. With a new superintendent in place and over twenty employees to properly manage the plant, the Committee was positive the facility could produce a profitable return on the investment.

By the end of 1905 Municipal Light Plant was back on track and the number of lights had increased to 1,940. By the end of 1907 the number of city-operated street lights was 2,400. The plant continued to operate only at night for the purpose of providing street light service. The street lighting arches were taken over by the city from private contracts on July 1, 1909 and construction of transmission lines to city buildings was initiated.[9] The light plant was seemingly past the early growing pains of the new civic program, expanding service and beginning a long history of power production.

Starting in 1910 Municipal Light Plant shifted to 24-hour operation and began to sell surplus energy to customers located adjacent to the system. In February 1910 the City began to furnish electric power to City Hall, the public library, Ohio State Penitentiary, the city patrol barn, and the Front Street Industrial School. The City had been paying $10-12,000 each year in electric bills to the Rail-Light Company at 4-7 cents per kilowatt, while Municipal Light Plant could supply the same power for 1.5-2 cents per kilowatt.[10] The city's utilities began to grow and with the maturation of the facility a true municipal function was being implemented.

James M. Butler, a local Columbus citizen, filed a lawsuit against the city mayor, the light plant superintendent, and other city officials on March 14, 1913. The suit intended to call foul on Municipal Light Plant and the City for selling "day load" light and power to private consumers at reduced rates. Butler asserted these low contract rates would not pay the interest on bonds for the plant and the taxpayers would be responsible to make up the deficit as a result. Butler's suit also pointed out that the sale of power to private consumers was overloading the plant's capacity to the point of damaging the facility and the city's streets were not being lighted properly. The final charge against the light plant was that no uniform rate schedule was applied, resulting in some consumers paying more than others within the same geographic region.[11] It appeared that another step in a developing municipal utility was the standards of operation, which were beginning to be called into question as the civic plant continued to grow. By December 1913 the Ohio Supreme Court ruled that Municipal Light Plant had to establish a non-discriminatory rate schedule, but the plant was not barred from selling light and power below cost. An engineer's

[8] Ibid, 98.
[9] Free Street Lights, 2.
[10] Free Street Lights, 3.
[11] Municipal Journal, 36.

report from 1913 in response to the plant's capacity recommended Municipal Light Plant be restricted to street lighting service, as that was all the existing facility could adequately handle.

Improvements were made to existing equipment over the next decade while maintaining a competitive rate with private companies in the city. By 1933 revenues exceeded the operating costs of the light plant and street lighting and city building service was afforded without cost. Within one year the light plant was selling nearly 61 percent of the facility's gross generation. A report published in July 1935 describes 3,777 residential, 2,265 commercial, 216 secondary power, and 7 primary power as consumers of Municipal Light Plant power, providing free energy for City Hall, Safety Building and 12,212 street lights.[12] These statistics demonstrate significant growth and reliability of a civic experiment that began three decades prior. From an investment disaster to producing "free" street lighting, Municipal Light Plant was fulfilling the visions civic leaders trusted would prove beneficial.

Municipal Light Plant Expansion

Before any new customers or street lights could be served, an expansion of the existing facility was required. Construction began in 1937 on an addition to the east of the existing boiler house. This five story building was constructed in modern materials and style, reflecting an Art Deco inspired aesthetic. The addition would consist of a multi-story open space to house additional boilers, a large coal hopper, and catwalks to navigate the expansive equipment. The two boiler house buildings were connected underground from the basement of the 1903 building to the lowest level of the addition. This would begin a two-decade long history of incremental expansion as the plant reached capacity and called for additional production. In c.1950 the next section of the new generation plant was constructed. This effort included two additional bays on the initial 1937 structures, as well as a three story mass extending towards the street. In 1954 the final expansion effort resulted in the growth of the new generation plant towards the east. New control rooms and a large entry block would be the final construction project for Municipal Light Plant. The addition of the new generation plant is significant as it embodies the importance of the light plant within Columbus. With a growing demand from the increasing population, Municipal Light Plant supported countless facilities and amenities that citizens relied on. The construction of the addition reflects the continued modernization of a facility that was meant to be cutting edge when originally constructed, proving invaluable in establishing a stronger civic business plan. The expansion of the light plant also parallels other civic efforts that were occurring during this time; M.E. Sensenbrenner was elected mayor in 1954 serving until 1959, and again from 1964-1971. Sensenbrenner's terms in office are associated with the aggressive city annexation that tripled the size of Columbus. Conclusions can be drawn between the rapid growth of the city and the challenges in capacity of Municipal Light Plant.

In 1962 an engineering consulting firm out of Dayton was hired to provide a study on the operation costs and predicted load growth of Municipal Light Plant. The study concluded that the facility was to reach the limit of firm capacity before 1965 unless restrictions were placed on load growth. It would take nearly two years to design and construct additional generating facilities, and the report pointed out the threat of reaching capacity before additional facilities

[12] Free Street Lights, 3.

could be provided even if designs were available immediately. Another expansion was discussed, although existing auxiliary systems were deemed inadequate for expanded production. Based on Chamber of Commerce documents that note the options for continued use, it is believed an alternative plan of rehabilitating existing equipment was instated over the next several years. Despite efforts of prolonging the use of the building, a new light plant was built in the early 1970s after due to increasing operational costs and capacity limitation of the existing Municipal Light Plant. A photograph from 1974 (Figure 6) shows the light plant through a fence at the southeast corner of the property, capturing the beginning of construction on the non-contributing substation in this location. The City maintained the building for minor electric functions, although the electric substation remained in use for many years to follow. Columbus Dispatch newspaper articles from the early 1970s document the City's experimental interest in converting the old light plant into a trash incinerator. This plan was not pursued after initial tests due to cost of upkeep and concerns of pollution. Municipal Light Plant formally closed in 1977. The electric substation at the south end of the site continued to be used by the city and is still producing power today. Over the past 30 years the nominated building has been subject to dozens of real estate and development proposals, but none have come to realization. The vacant building has maintained all the old boilers, generator equipment, and control panels that illuminated the streets of Columbus for over seventy years.

Municipal Light Plant is significant as it reflects an early civic endeavor, rooted in concepts of entrepreneurship and experiment, for the intended benefit of the city of Columbus as a new age of modernity unfolded. When street lights, streetcars, and facilities gained electricity in the late 19th-century, the development of the city was a direct reflection of technological advancements in amenity access. Civic programs such as Municipal Light Plant provided these amenities while promoting civic pride. The building reflects the progressive changes between two distinct eras of electric light generation. The service produced at Municipal Light Plant reached far beyond the downtown core of the initial 1903 experimental facility, and supported a utility that defines the urban landscape and modern lifestyle. The building retains a substantial level of architectural integrity. For its association with the progression of Columbus public utilities and community development throughout the city, Municipal Light Plant is nominated to the National Register under Criterion A at the local level of significance. The period of significance begins with the building's construction in 1903 and ends in 1965 per National Register guidelines.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

Barrett, Richard E. *Columbus 1910-1970*. Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2006.

Columbus Area chamber of Commerce, *Who Pays for Free Street Lights?* Columbus: 1963.

Columbus City Directories. Columbus Metropolitan Library. Columbus, Ohio.

Garrett, Betty, and Edward R. Lentz. *Columbus: America's Crossroads*. Tulsa: Continental Heritage Press, Inc., 1980.

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Okey, Perry. *Annual Report of Superintendent, Municipal Electric Light Plant.* Columbus: 1903.

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Samuelson, Robert E. *Architecture: Columbus*. Columbus: The Foundation of the Columbus Chapter of The American Institute of Architects, 1976.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps. Columbus Metropolitan Library. Columbus, Ohio.

Unite State Department of Energy. *The War of the Currents: AC vs. DC Power*. 2014.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

____ 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 # _____
____ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

____ State Historic Preservation Office
____ Other State agency
____ Federal agency
_X_ Local government
____ University
____ Other
Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property ___0.09 acres_____

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates
Datum if other than WGS84:_____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: Longitude:

2. Latitude: Longitude:

3. Latitude: Longitude:

4. Latitude: Longitude:

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

[x] NAD 1927 or [ ] NAD 1983

1. Zone: 17	Easting: 327625	Northing: 4425817
2. Zone:	Easting:	Northing:
3. Zone:	Easting:	Northing:
4. Zone:	Easting :	Northing:

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The nominated property consists of two parcels (Franklin County Parcel #010-066777-00, 010-294235-00), bounded by West Nationwide Boulevard on the north, the Olentangy River on the west, Spring Street to the south, and an adjacent parcel on the east.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The proposed boundary includes all property historically associated with Municipal Light Plant.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: __David Trayte and Peter Ketter_____
organization: __Sandvick Architects Inc._____
street & number: ___1265 W. Sixth Street_____
city or town:___Cleveland_____ state: __Ohio_____ zip code:_44113___
e-mail__dtrayte@sandvickarchitects.com_____
telephone:__216-621-8055_____
date:__May 1, 2015_____

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Municipal Light Plant

City or Vicinity: Columbus

County: Franklin State: Ohio

Photographer: Peter Ketter

Date Photographed: August 2014

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

Photo #1 (OH_FranklinCounty_MuniLightPlant_0001)
North elevation, original generation plant, camera facing southwest

Photo #2 (OH_ FranklinCounty_MuniLightPlant _0002)
Northwest oblique, storage house, camera facing southeast

Photo #3 (OH_ FranklinCounty_MuniLightPlant _0003)
West elevation, original generation building and boiler house, camera facing east

Photo #4 (OH_ FranklinCounty_MuniLightPlant _0004)
South elevation, boiler house, camera facing northwest

Photo #5 (OH_ FranklinCounty_MuniLightPlant _0005)
Southwest oblique, new generation plant, camera facing northeast

Photo #6 (OH_ FranklinCounty_MuniLightPlant _0006)
East elevation, new generation plant, camera facing southwest

Photo #7 (OH_ FranklinCounty_MuniLightPlant _0007)
First floor, original generation plant, camera facing west

Photo #8 (OH_ FranklinCounty_MuniLightPlant _0008)
First floor, boiler house, camera facing north

Photo #9 (OH_ FranklinCounty_MuniLightPlant _0009)
First floor, connection between generation plants, camera facing east

Photo #10 (OH_ FranklinCounty_MuniLightPlant _0010)
First floor, new generation plant catwalk levels, camera direction south

Photo #11 (OH_ FranklinCounty_MuniLightPlant _0011)
Northeast oblique, existing substation structure, camera direction southwest

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).
Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

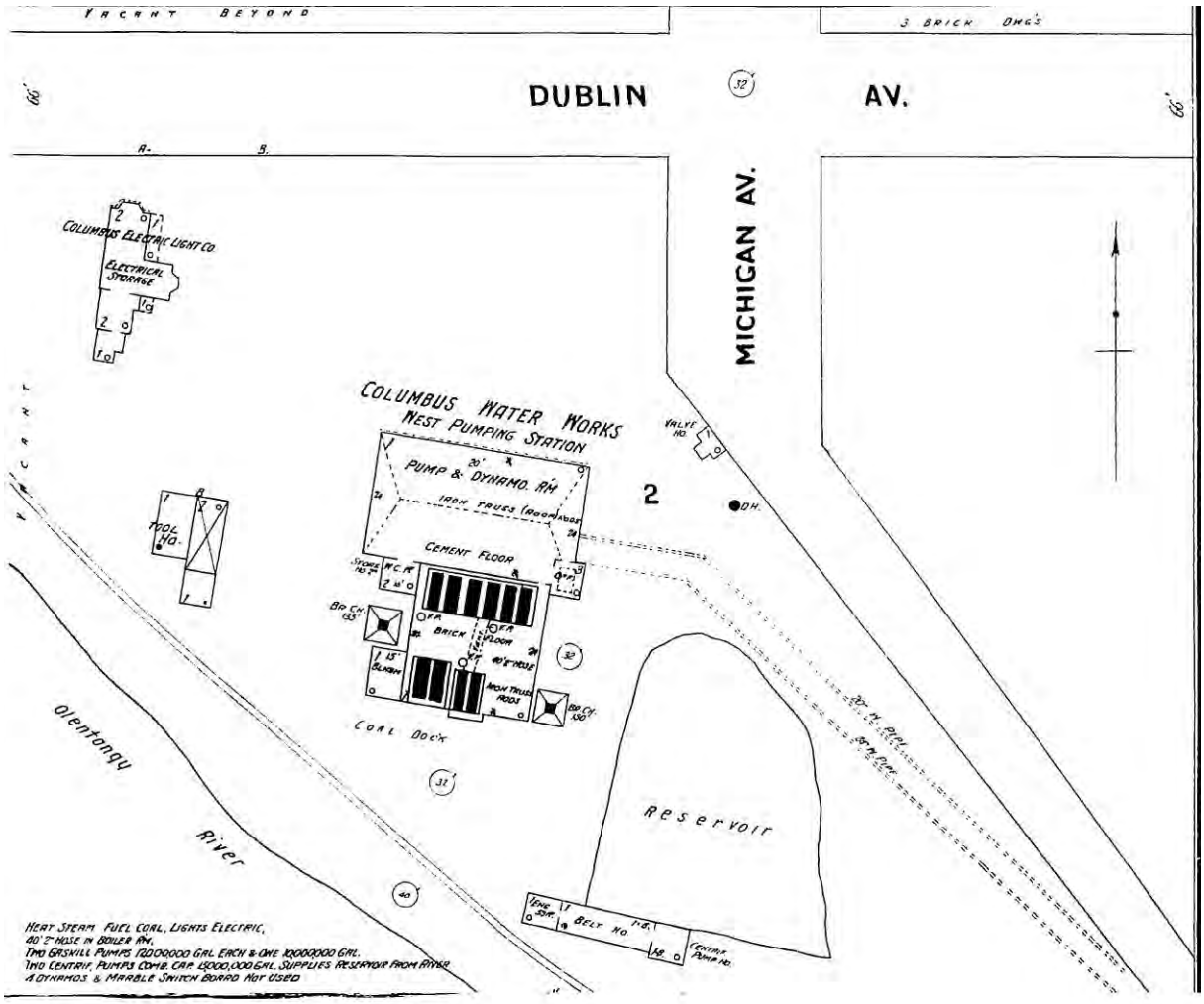

VACANT BEYOND
3 BRICK DWG'S
DUBLIN AV.
MICHIGAN AV.
COLUMBUS ELECTRIC LIGHT CO.
ELECTRICAL STORAGE
COLUMBUS WATER WORKS
WEST PUMPING STATION
PUMP & DYNAMO RM
CEMENT FLOOR
TOOL HO.
VALVE HO.
D.H.
COAL DOCK
Olentangy
River
Reservoir
HEAT STEAM FUEL COAL, LIGHTS ELECTRIC,
40' 2" HOSE IN BOILER RM.
TWO GASKILL PUMPS 7000000 GAL EACH & ONE 12000000 GAL.
TWO CENTRIF. PUMPS COMB. CAP. 15000,000 GAL. SUPPLIES RESERVOIR FROM RIVER
4 DYNAMOS & MARBLE SWITCH BOARD NOT USED

Figure 1: Sanborn map, 1901. *Columbus Metropolitan Library*.

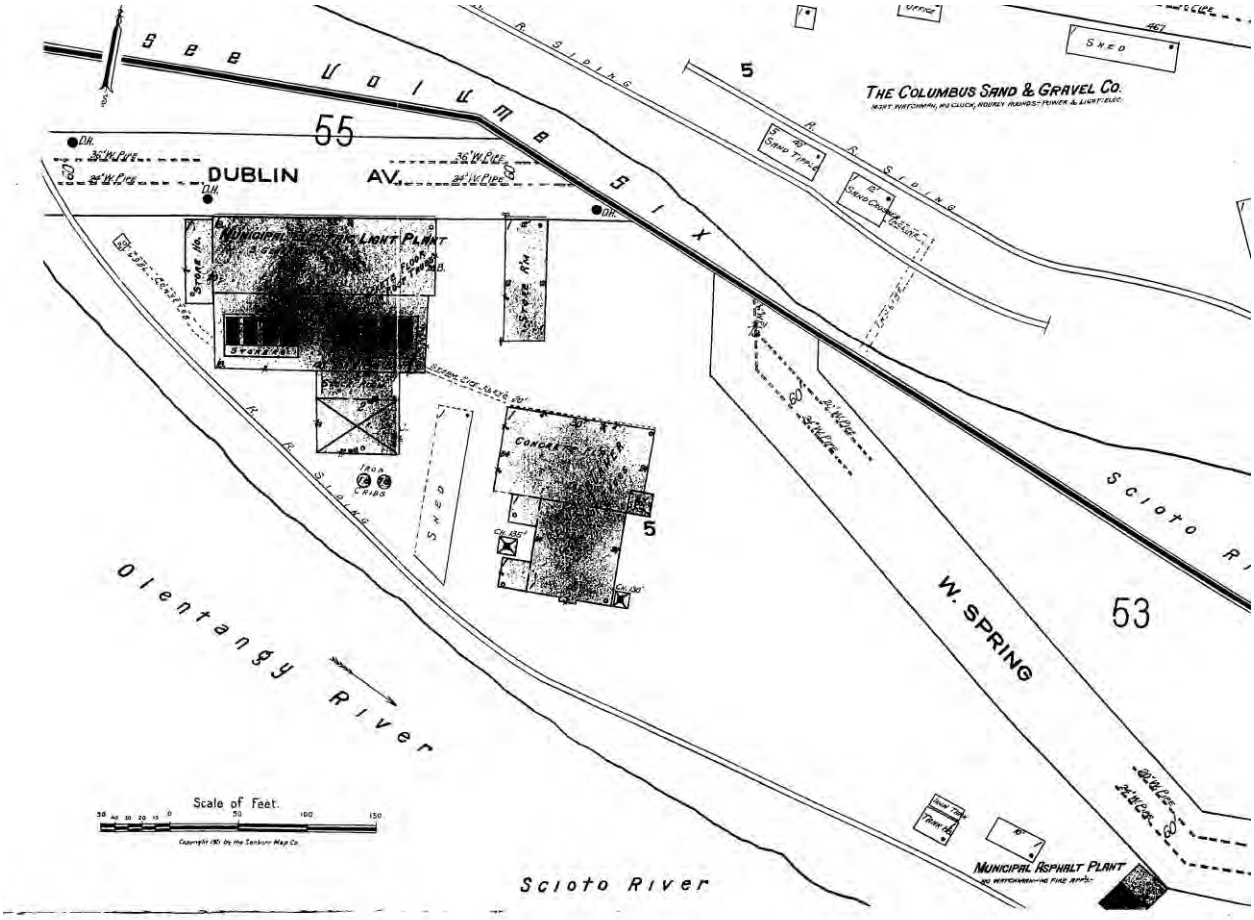
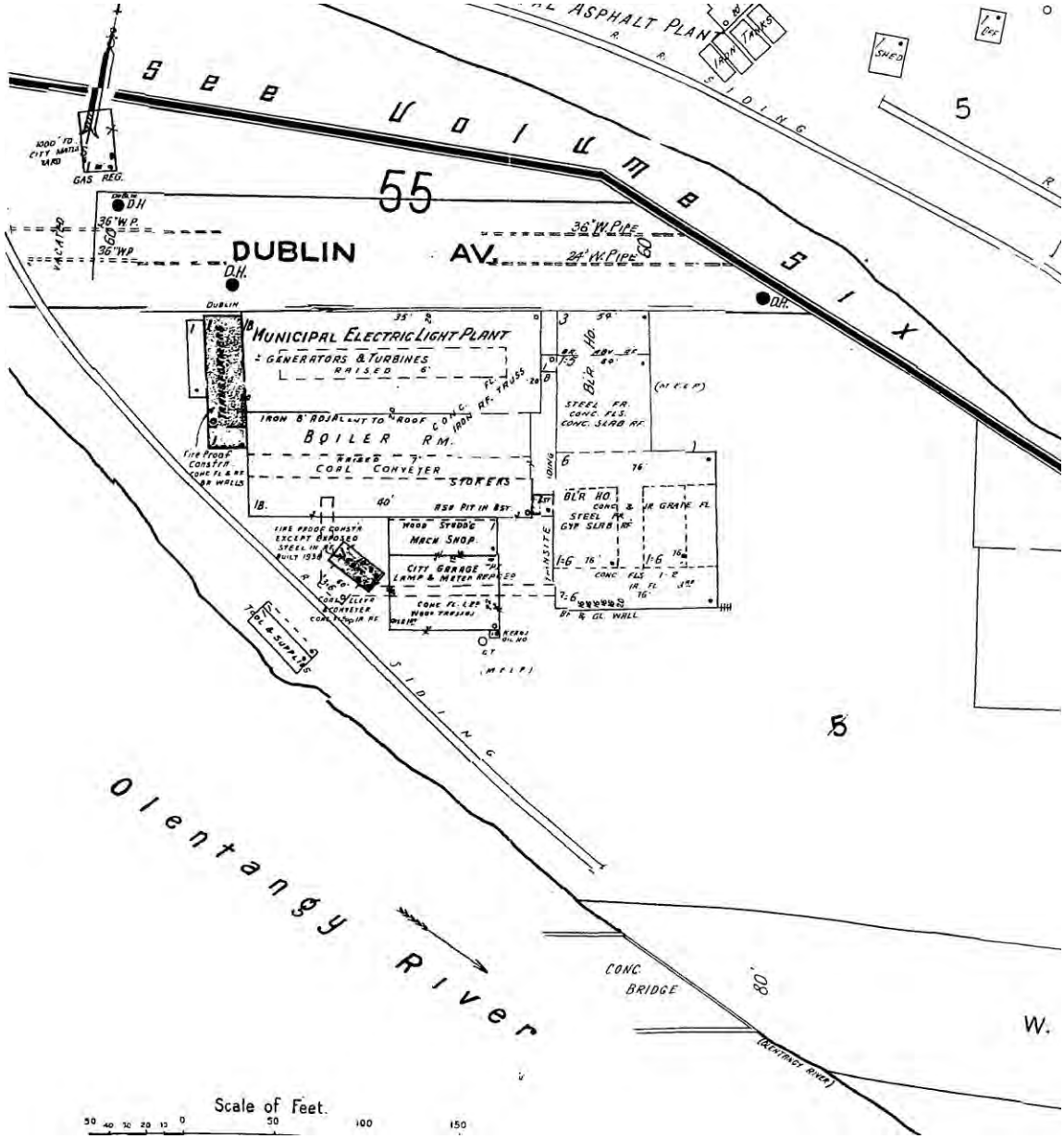


Figure 2: Sanborn map, 1921. *Columbus Metropolitan Library*.


See Volume Six
55
DUBLIN AV.
MUNICIPAL ELECTRIC LIGHT PLANT
GENERATORS & TURBINES
BOILER RM.
COAL CONVEYER
STOKERS
MACH SHOP
CITY GARAGE
ASPHALT PLANT
SHED
GAS REG.
Olentangy River
CONC. BRIDGE
Scale of Feet.

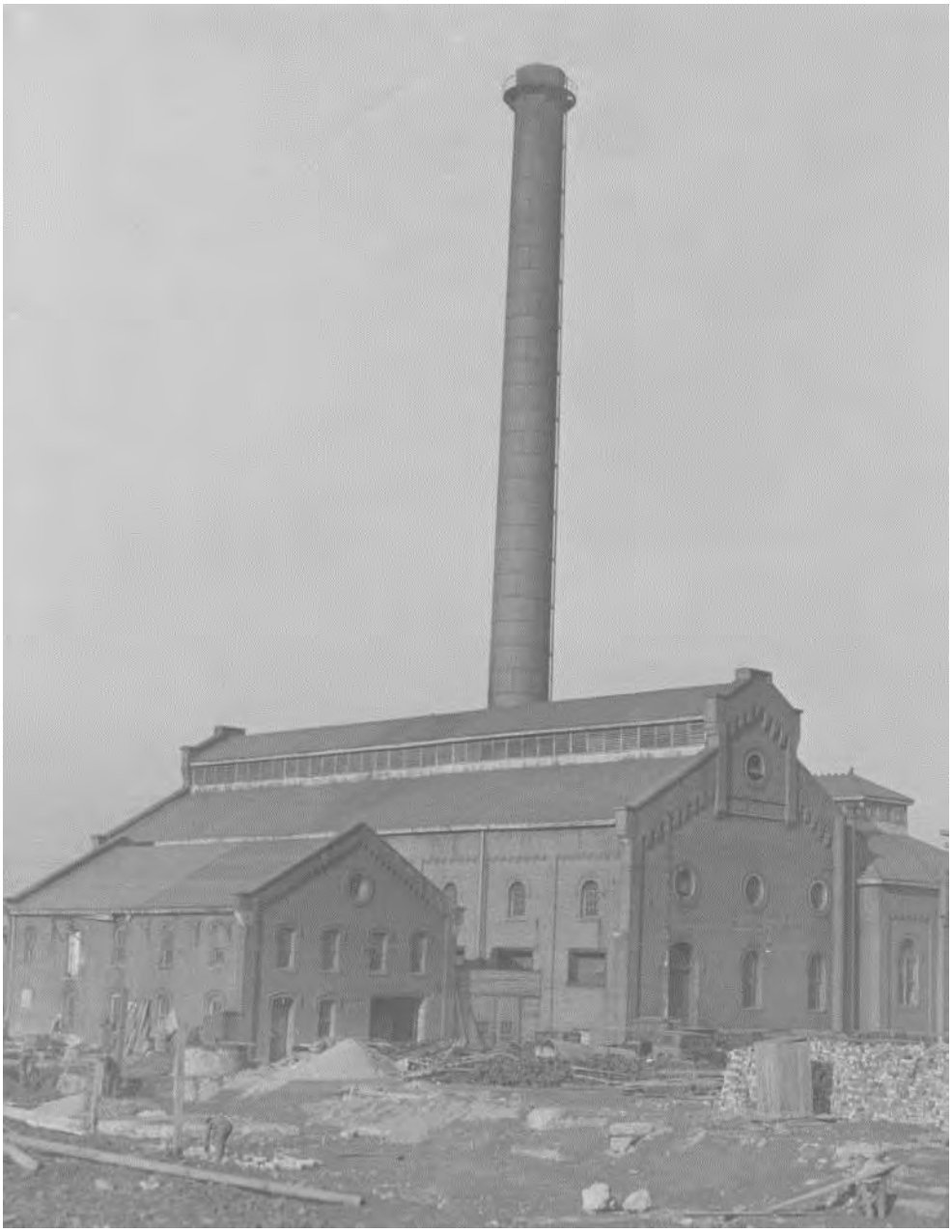
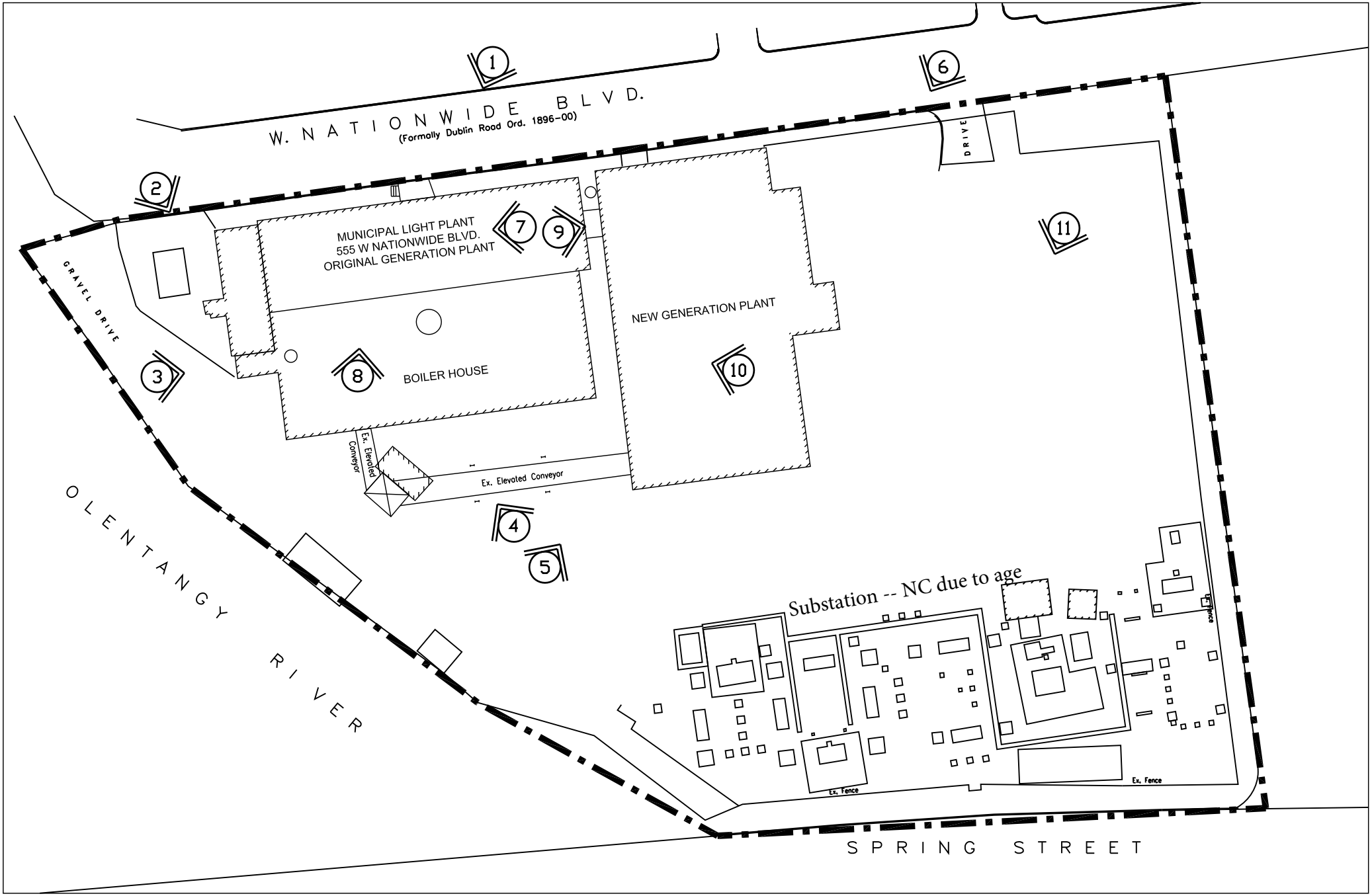


Figure 4: Original generation plant, boiler house, 1936. *Columbus Metropolitan Library*.

Figure 5: New generation plant, 1946. *Columbus Metropolitan Library.*

Figure 6: New generation plant, substation construction, 1974. *Columbus Metropolitan Library*.



NATIONAL REGISTER PHOTOGRAPH KEY
MUNICIPAL LIGHT PLANT
COLUMBUS, FRANKLIN COUNTY, OHIO

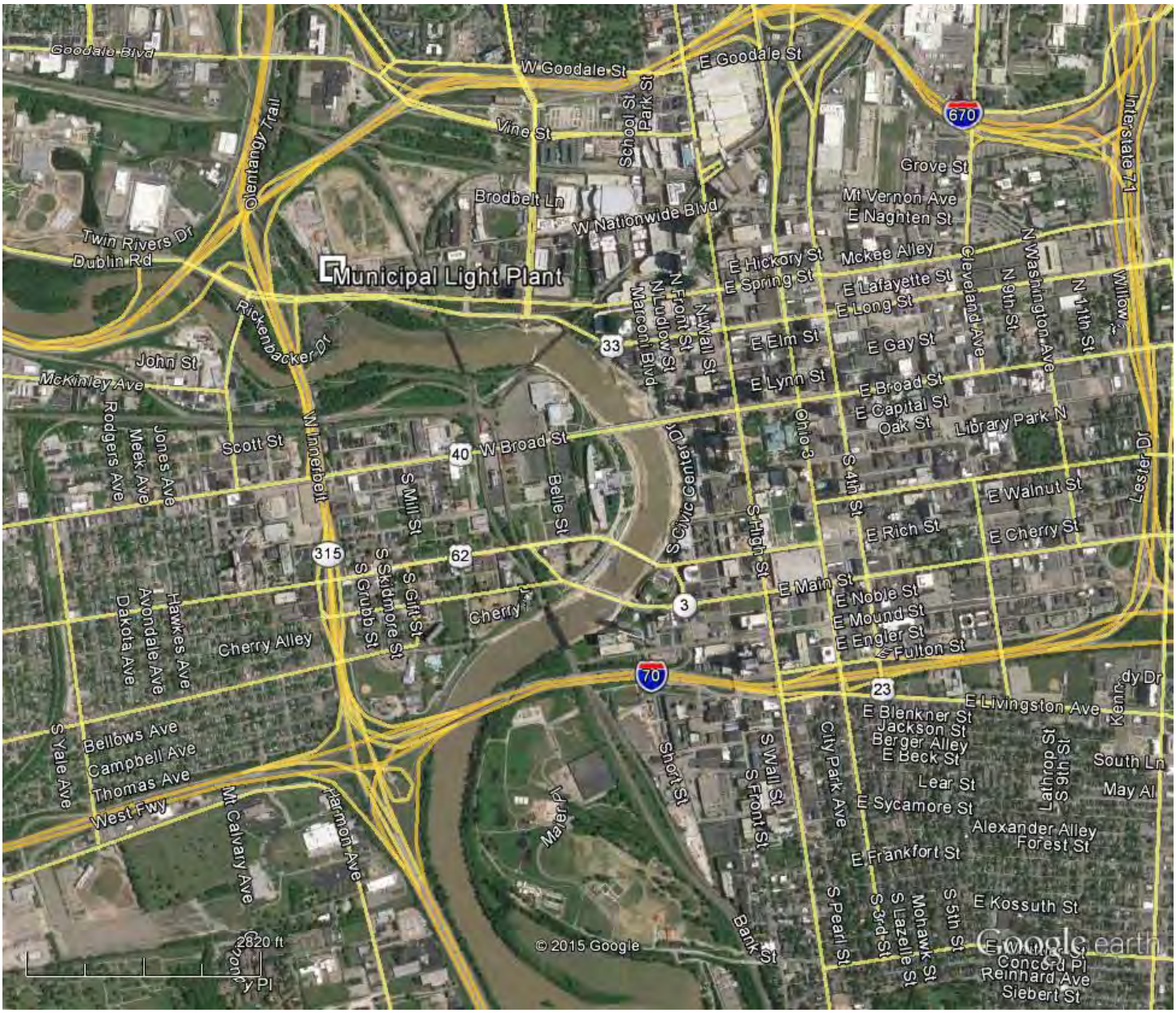
N

NOMINATION BOUNDARY

Google earth

feet 600
meters 200

Municipal Light Plant
Franklin County, Ohio
UTM Zone: 17
Easting: 324625
Northing: 4426044



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Municipal Light Plant, Franklin County, Ohio
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