

## Finding Aid to the Northern States Power Company, Fargo District Photograph Collection

### Northern States Power Company (Minnesota). Fargo District

Northern States Power Company Fargo District Photograph Collection, 1913-1980s

323 photographic prints

3 framed photographic prints

Collection number: Photo 2063

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[History](#)

[Scope and Content](#)

[Folder List](#)

### OVERVIEW

**Links:** Finding aid to the [Northern States Power Company Records](#)  
View collection in [Digital Horizons](#)

**Access:** The collection is open under the rules and regulations of the Institute.

**Provenance:** Donated by Northern States Power Company, Fargo District 1998 (Acc. 2520).

**Property rights:** The Institute for Regional Studies owns the property rights to this collection.

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**Citation:** Institute for Regional Studies, NDSU, Fargo (item number)

### HISTORY

The Fargo Electric Light and Power Company was granted its franchise on November 7, 1881. They built their first electric generating plant in 1882, located around the location of 8<sup>th</sup> Street North and N.P. Avenue. One of the company's main purposes was street lighting. A 160-foot tall light tower was erected at the intersection of N.P. Avenue and Broadway. A second tower was erected at Broadway and 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue. These towers were destroyed by a tornado in 1897 and never rebuilt. A gas plant was erected at the intersection of N.P. Avenue and 12<sup>th</sup> Street, and the first gas was delivered to the gas mains in 1885.

On May 1, 1888 a new company, the Fargo Incandescent Light Company, was granted a franchise. In 1889 the Fargo Electric Light and Power Company merged with this new entity to become the Fargo Gas and Electric Company. A new electric plant was built adjacent to the gas plant, and the old equipment was moved to this site.

In 1898 the Hughes Electric Company was given a franchise. They built their new plant along the Northern Pacific tracks, across from the depot. This new company was incorporated by Alexander Hughes and his son Edmond Hughes. The Hughes family was important in the manufacture of the first electric ranges, which later became Hotpoint, Inc.

The Hughes Electric Company changed its name to the Fargo Edison Company in 1900. The company installed steam heating mains in the downtown area, as well as providing a 24-hour electric service. Their business grew rapidly and competition between the Fargo Edison Company and the Fargo Gas and Electric Company became bitter. Each tried to steal the other's customers and even each other's poles. In 1903 the two companies merged to become the Union Light Heat and Power Company. In 1904 the old Fargo Gas and Electric plant was dismantled and a new gas plant was built on the site.

The Union Light Heat and Power Company was acquired in 1910 by the Consumer Power Company, which became Northern States Power in 1916. The Union Light Heat and Power Company continued to operate under its own name until 1937 when it took the name of its owner Northern States Power.

In 1911 the Fargo and Moorhead Railway Company was acquired by the Union Light Heat and Power Company. Since its founding in 1902, the street cars current had been supplied by the power company. The tracks would eventually extend all the way to Dilworth, Minnesota. It was abandoned in 1937. The Union Company organized the Northern Transit Company in 1926, a bus company that was later sold in 1937.

A complete rebuilding of the downtown steam plant was completed in 1916. The gas plant required a rebuilding again in 1925, when the method of producing gas changed to water-carburetion. In 1960 natural gas came to Fargo and the gas plant was shut down. The downtown steam plant was dismantled in 1971 after it had become obsolete with power being supplied by sources outside of the city.

## **SCOPE AND CONTENT**

The Northern States Power photographic collection, tells the history of electric power and natural gas production in the city of Fargo from the 1910s to the early 1980s. The photographs featured in this collection document how the two plants changed through time and technology.

The collection has been organized into six series: Gas plant, Steam plant, Subject files, Gas plant lawsuit, Personnel, and Events. Some of the images were removed from a display at the Fargo

NSP office. These images were adhered to a panel with glue and tape. Due to this fact, some of the images are sleeved with an acid free paper backing. If there was writing on the back of these images it was also photocopied on to acid free paper backing. Retired employees of NSP, Bob Pile, Joe Peterson, Randy Bakken, and Dewey Cornell met with Institute staff to identify individuals in the photographs and other scenes. Later, at a breakfast for retired NSP employees, more photographs were identified.

The [Gas Plant Series](#) contains three folders. The first file contains photographs of the exterior of the gas plant, taken from different angles, of construction done in 1925, and of the laying of a driveway. There is only one interior of the plant. The second folder contains an album of 48 prints documenting the 1925 additions to the gas plant. The album is titled "Glover West Vertical Retorts, by West Gas Improvement Co., Inc., 1925." The final folder contains eleven photographs, taken in 1937, of the coal piles by the gas plant and the equipment used to move it.

The [Steam Plant Series](#) contains five folders. The first folder has two aerials of the steam plant (coal-fired electricity and steam generating plant) and the downtown area surrounding it. The next folder contains sixteen exterior images of the steam plant mostly from 1916 to ca. 1930. The third folder contains twelve exterior images of the steam plant from ca. 1930 to ca. 1960. These images show how dramatically the downtown steam plant changed through the years. Another folder shows interior views of the steam plant, with its main generating floor, stokers, and turbines. Especially interesting is a photograph of the Siemens-Halske generator installed in 1898. The final folder is of switchboards found in the plant.

The [Subject File Series](#) contains ten folders. The first folder in this series contains four NSP related buildings. One building is the old pump house for condensing water located along the Red River by Island Park. There are two exteriors of Fargo NSP office buildings, one at 401 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue North and the other at 2302 Great Northern Drive. There is one office interior at the old 612 N.P. Avenue location. The second folder contains a photograph of the exterior of the Grand Forks, N.D. gas plant. Another folder contains nine Fargo street scenes. Of particular interest is a before and after image of the intersection of Broadway and N.P. Avenue when the pole lines were moved to the alleys. Other images are of the replacing of steam lines, the 8<sup>th</sup> Street railroad crossing by the downtown steam plant, removing of snow from Broadway, and the Northern Pacific rail yard. There is also nine high-altitude images of the Fargo-Moorhead area taken in 1954 and 1958. The next folder contains five images of streetcars, one of them plowing snow and another doing road construction. There is also one image of a bus belonging to the Northern Transit Company. Another folder contains a drum boiler replacement at the steam plant, May 3, 1936. The next folder contains eleven images of pole lines. Several are from around Dilworth, Minn. some pre-1916 images around the downtown plant, and one of a flooded pole yard in 1916. The eighth folder contains eight images of a pole line project in Wolverton, Minn. in 1938. The next folder holds eighteen photographs of a gas main blow off, and the laying of gas mains in 1957. And the final folder in this series, contains seven photographs of a street light project in 1964. This set of images highlight the change to mercury vapor lighting.

The [Gas Plant Lawsuit Series](#) contains a set of images taken by Fargo photographer Archie L. Dewey on July 24-25, 1913 for Union Light Heat and Gas Co. in their defense in Fargo's first anti-pollution suit. This set of photographs were important in helping the company to be acquitted of the charges, by showing that other businesses and industries emitted just as much soot and smoke, while the homes around the gas plant remained unaffected. There were ninety images in this series, but #6, #24, #68, #69, #71, and #74 are unaccounted for. The first folder contains an identification list found with the photographs. A copy of the list is also in the first folder of the collection.

The [Personnel Series](#) contains six folders. At the beginning of the series, there is a set of individual portraits of some NSP employees: Lloyd Constant, Mel Folwick, Byron Hanson, Ila Mae Iverson, J.C. Lund, Wally D. Peterson, John Sather, and L.C. Topping. There is a folder containing several photographs of Jim Clark, the gas plant supervisor from 1935 to 1950. Of particular interest, is an image of Jim Clark in the St. Paul Gas Light Co. band. In the Executive Grouping folder there can be found a portrait of the executives attending the 1949 Midwest Gas Association Meeting. The photograph was taken by Feiler Studio in Des Moines, Iowa. There is also a portrait of the NSP board of directors, taken at the corporate headquarters in Minneapolis, Minn. In the Office Employee Groupings folder there are several images taken of the office staff in the 1930s and 1940s at the 612 N.P. Avenue office. Two 1975 images are of special interest, due to the fact that they were both taken during Fargo's centennial celebration and all the men are sporting beards. Individuals on each picture were identified by retirees of NSP. The Work Crew Grouping folder has a very interesting set of pictures from November 1928, during an "Accident Prevention Week." There are also group photographs of linemen, street car crews, power plant, and gas plant workers, taken from the 1930s to the 1960s. The Crews at Work folder has NSP workers doing a wide variety of jobs, such as laying gas mains, laying streetcar tracks, and erecting pole lines.

The [Events Series](#) contains special events involving NSP through the years. There is a photograph of a ribbon cutting ceremony taken at the opening of the 401 3<sup>rd</sup> Street office building, a savings bond promotion, a company meeting in the 1930s, a "440 total years of service" group, and a show room floor promotion. Three images taken at the One Hundred Thousandth Gas Heating installation are contained in the next folder. The people in these photographs have been identified by retirees of NSP. The final folder in the series contains three parade images from the 1930s to the 1950s.

The [Framed Prints Series](#) includes three photographs taken of Northern States Power facilities in Fargo. The two panorama images both look north on Broadway in Fargo, showing the steam plant that was located a block west of Broadway on N.P. Avenue. The other framed item is an aerial of the coal gasification plant located between 13<sup>th</sup> (now University Drive) and 11<sup>th</sup> Streets, north of N.P. Avenue. (These three framed prints are located a part of the Institute's framed objects, located in off-site storage)



- 2/25 Jim Clark, gas plant supt., 1935-1950 (5)
- 2/26 Executive groupings (3)
- 2/27 Office employees groupings (9)
- 2/28 Work crew groupings (12)
- 2/29 Crews at work (35)

### **Events Series**

- 2/30 Ribbon cutting, dinners, parties, savings bonds promotion (13)
- 2/31 One hundred thousandth gas heating installation, 1963 (3)
- 2/32 Parade (3)

### **Framed Prints Series**

View looking north on Broadway from Northern Pacific railroad tracks, with NSP steam plant on left, ca. 1910s; ca.10 x 44 inches

View looking north on Broadway from Main Avenue, with NSP steam plant on left. Dewey Studio, Fargo, 1939; 12 x 44 inches

Aerial of coal gasification plant, Fargo, N.D. at N.P. Avenue and 13<sup>th</sup> Street to 11<sup>th</sup> Street, 1910s; 23 x 33 inches