

**CH-528**

**1938**

**Popes Creek Power Plant**

**Popes Creek vic.**

**Private**

Erected in 1938, the Popes Creek Power Plant is a Colonial Revival brick structure with a flat roof and arched window bays. Stripped of its interior workings and windows, the building has deteriorated significantly since the power plant was shut down in 1953.

The Popes Creek Power Plant was the first electrical generating plant to serve the Southern Maryland region. Built by Maryland's first electrical cooperative, the building and associated lines were financed through loans from the federal government's Rural Electrification Administration. Although it was in operation for only fifteen years, the Colonial Revival-style Popes Creek Power Plant building stands as a symbol of the early era of electrification in this rural community.

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST  
MD INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES

Inventory No. CH-528

=====

1. Name of Property

=====

historic name Popes Creek Power Plant  
Common/other name Southern Maryland Tri-County Co-op Power Plant

=====

2. Location

=====

street & number Popes Creek Road not for publication         
city or town Popes Creek vicinity X state Maryland code MD  
county Charles code 017 zip code 20664

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3. State/Federal Agency Certification N/A

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4. National Park Service Certification N/A

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5. Classification

=====

Ownership of Property (Check all that apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Is this property listed in the National Register?

Yes  Name of Listing \_\_\_\_\_  
No

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Inventory No. CH-528

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6. Function or Use  
=====

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: INDUSTRY Sub: Power plant  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Vacant Sub: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

=====  
7. Description  
=====

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Colonial Revival  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation solid: parged concrete  
roof flat with parapet  
walls 6-course American bond brick  
other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property.)

See Continuation Sheet No. 7-1

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

- 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 a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Inventory No. CH-528

=====  
Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

INDUSTRY  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance 1938-1953  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Dates 1938  
1953  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation Undefined  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Architect/Builder Unknown  
\_\_\_\_\_

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property.)

See Continuation Sheet No. 8-1

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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

Brown, Jack D., et al. *Charles County, Maryland, A History*. Charles County Bicentennial Committee, 1976.

Charles County Land Records. Charles County Courthouse, La Plata, Maryland.

Klapthor, Margaret Brown. *The History of Charles County, Maryland*. La Plata, MD: Charles County Tercentenary, Inc., 1958.

SMECO, "Bringing Co-op Power to Southern Maryland," Excerpt from booklet on the history of the Southern Maryland Electric Cooperative, prepared by SMECO.

SMECO Homepage: [www.smeco.com/intro.html](http://www.smeco.com/intro.html)

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Inventory No. CH-528

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10. Geographical Data  
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Acreage of Property 0.5 acres

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

The property is designated as Parcel 93 on Map 73, Grid 19 on the Charles County Property Map.

**Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)**

The Popes Creek Power Plant has been associated with Parcel 93, Map 73 since its construction in 1938.

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11. Form Prepared By  
=====

name/title Kathryn Gettings Smith, Architectural Historian  
organization Charles County Planning Dept. date May 14, 1999  
street & number P.O. Box B telephone 301-645-0689  
city or town La Plata state MD zip code 20646  
=====

12. Property Owner  
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name Popes Creek Joint Venture (Jean K. Mona)  
street & number 14405 Farmington Creek Rd telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
city or town Accokeek state MD zip code 20607  
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MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Inventory No. CH-528

Section 7 Page 1

Popes Creek Power Plant  
name of property  
Charles County, Maryland  
county and state

=====

Erected in 1938, the Popes Creek Power Plant is a Colonial Revival brick structure with a flat roof and arched window bays. Stripped of its interior workings and windows, the building has deteriorated significantly since the power plant was shut down in 1953.

This masonry building consists of a 1-story brick structure featuring a rectangular footprint and arched window bays separated by wall buttresses. Standing on a parged concrete foundation, the building's walls are constructed with 6-course American bond brickwork. A raised concrete watertable extends around the building's floor, and a parapet wall with concrete coping obscures the flat roof. Projecting brick buttresses define the corners and the side bays of the building. Each bay holds a large arched window that contains a factory-style metal awning window topped by a fanlight. The windows feature rowlock sills and arched lintels.

The facade is organized around a central entrance, also crowned by a fanlight. Single arched windows flank the central doorway creating a symmetrical arrangement. The main entry door is missing along with the window glass.

Two large loading bays occupy the western end of the building's south wall.

The interior consists of three rectangular rooms connected by large rectangular passage ways and one arched doorway. The floor is poured concrete and the brick walls are exposed. Evidence of the original machinery exists where there are cuts in the floor. The ceiling consists of metal I-beams overlain with wooden joists topped by tongue-and-groove wood planks.

One rear door remains in place, consisting of a panel-and-light metal door. A 1-story brick shed addition was made to the rear of the building. Now in a ruinous state, the addition appeared to have contained a shower and changing room for the power plant workers.

Serious water damage along the building's north wall has caused the foundation to settle and cracks to form in the north and east walls.

There are no associated outbuildings on the site.

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Inventory No. CH-528

Section 8 Page 1

Popes Creek Power Plant  
name of property  
Charles County, Maryland  
county and state

=====

Erected in 1938, the Popes Creek Power Plant was the first electrical generating plant to serve the Southern Maryland region. Built by Maryland's first electrical cooperative, the building and associated lines were financed through loans from the federal government's Rural Electrification Administration. Although it was in operation for only fifteen years, the Colonial Revival-style Popes Creek Power Plant building stands as a symbol of the early era of electrification in this rural community.

The Southern Maryland Tri-County Cooperative Association was formed following the failure of two separate community applications to the Rural Electrification Administration for loans to erect power lines in their counties.<sup>1</sup> The Rural Electrification Administration (REA) was established by President Franklin Roosevelt in 1935 in order to provide assistance to rural communities across the United States in their efforts to extend electrical power to their residents. Prior to 1937, ongoing efforts in St. Mary's, Charles, and Prince George's counties had failed to secure funding from the REA for their electrification projects. In 1937, the various organizations combined to form Maryland's first electric cooperative, the Southern Maryland Tri-County Cooperative Association. Incorporated February 5, 1937, the cooperative was run by a seven member board of directors, and had as its goals to sign up potential electric subscribers and convince the REA to loan them the funds to build the necessary electric lines.<sup>2</sup>

Southern Maryland was already served by several private power companies, including the Maryland Light & Power Company, and the Eastern Shore Public Service Company. However, these companies provided electricity at a high cost to their customers and refused to build lines to most of the rural sections of the counties due to the associated costs.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> SMECO, "Bringing Co-op Power to Southern Maryland," Excerpt from booklet on the history of the Southern Maryland Electric Cooperative, prepared by SMECO, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> SMECO, "Bringing Co-op Power to Southern Maryland," Excerpt from booklet on the history of the Southern Maryland Electric Cooperative, prepared by SMECO, p. 4-5.

<sup>3</sup> SMECO, "Bringing Co-op Power to Southern Maryland," Excerpt from booklet on the history of the Southern Maryland Electric Cooperative, prepared by SMECO, p. 5.

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Inventory No. CH-528

Section 8 Page 2

Popes Creek Power Plant  
name of property  
Charles County, Maryland  
county and state

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At first, the REA refused the Tri-County Cooperative's application for a loan. Their reasoning was based on the belief that the scattered population would never generate enough revenue to allow the cooperative to repay the government loan. However, by April 15, 1937, the cooperative had secured enough subscribers that it could guarantee three members per mile of electric line, with each member paying a minimum bill of \$3.50 per month. Based on this, the REA agreed to make the cooperative a loan of \$165,000 for the construction of 175 miles of line that would serve six hundred customers in Charles, Prince George's and St. Mary's Counties.<sup>4</sup>

Despite their success in obtaining the REA loan, the cooperative was stymied by its inability to negotiate a reasonable rate for buying electrical power from the private electric companies. The Eastern Shore Public Service Company refused to sell its power to the cooperative for less than what its individual customers paid. Therefore, the only alternative was to erect their own generating plant.<sup>5</sup>

The land on which the power plant was erected was purchased by the Southern Maryland Tri-County Co-Operative in two quarter-acre portions from the Philadelphia, Baltimore & Washington Railroad Company in March and August of 1938. The railroad company had acquired the Popes Creek property in 1870 when plans were being made to build a rail line from Bowie through Charles County. The end of the line was at Popes Creek on the east bank of the Potomac River. The site's transportation connections, both from the water and by railroad, made it a logical site for Southern Maryland's first power plant.

In January 1938, REA authorized a second loan of \$50,000 to the Tri-County Cooperative for the construction of a generating plant. The Lewis Electrical Company was contracted to build the plant at a cost of approximately \$46,000. Completed in the summer of 1938, the plant went into operation on July 23, 1938. The plant initially had three 100-kilowatt Ball-Muncie diesel generators that

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<sup>4</sup> SMECO, "Bringing Co-op Power to Southern Maryland," Excerpt from booklet on the history of the Southern Maryland Electric Cooperative, prepared by SMECO, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> SMECO, "Bringing Co-op Power to Southern Maryland," Excerpt from booklet on the history of the Southern Maryland Electric Cooperative, prepared by SMECO, p. 6.

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Inventory No. CH-528

Section 8 Page 3

Popes Creek Power Plant  
name of property  
Charles County, Maryland  
county and state

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served an initial four hundred customers. Two 250-kilowatt  
Fairbanks-Morse generators were later added.<sup>6</sup>

The plant operated for fifteen years, until 1953, at which time the cooperative began purchasing all of its power from the Potomac Electric Power Company, an investor-owned utility. The Co-op, which changed its name to Southern Maryland Electric Cooperative (SMECO) in 1942, had begun buying PEPCO-generated power in 1945, after purchasing all of the Eastern Shore Public Service Company's former lines in Calvert County. The cooperative continued to purchase all of its power until 1989, when a 77-megawatt combustion turbine generating facility was completed at PEPCO's Chalk Point Generating Station.

The Popes Creek Generating Plant marks the beginning of a major utility in southern Maryland, one that continues to serve the community as a cooperative, member-owned company, operated on a non-profit basis. The building itself is the only power plant ever built by SMECO in Charles County, and stands as a monument to the determination of local residents in an age when electricity was scarce in rural communities.

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<sup>6</sup> SMECO, "Bringing Co-op Power to Southern Maryland," Excerpt from booklet on the history of the Southern Maryland Electric Cooperative, prepared by SMECO, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> SMECO Homepage, [www.smeco.com/intro.html](http://www.smeco.com/intro.html).

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Inventory No. CH-528

Popes Creek Power Plant  
name of property  
Charles County, Maryland  
county and state

=====

**HISTORIC CONTEXT:**

**Geographic Organization:** Western Shore

**Chronological/Development Period (s):**

Modern Period, 1930-present

**Prehistoric/Historic Period Theme (s):**

INDUSTRY

**RESOURCE TYPE(S)**

**Category:** Building

**Historic Environment:** Rural

**Historic Function (s):** INDUSTRY/Power plant

**Known Design Source:** Unknown

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Inventory No. CH-528

Popes Creek Power Plant  
name of property  
Charles County, Maryland  
county and state

=====  
**Chain of Title:**

October 17, 1870: Thomas D. Stone, et al. to  
Philadelphia, Baltimore & Washington  
Railroad  
Charles County Land Records  
Liber GAH 2 Folio 555

August 16, 1938: Philadelphia, Baltimore & Washington  
Railroad Co. to Southern Maryland  
Tri-County Co-Operative  
\$100  
Charles County Land Records  
Liber WMA 69 Folio 163

March 1, 1938: Philadelphia, Baltimore & Washington  
Railroad Co. to Southern Maryland  
Tri-County Co-operative  
\$100  
Charles County Land Records  
Liber WMA 68 Folio 363

October 31, 1959: Southern Maryland Electric  
Cooperative, Inc. et al to Barth  
Realty, Inc.  
.249 acres plus .249 acres  
Railroad of the Philadelphia,  
Baltimore & Washington Railroad Co.  
known as Popes Creek Branch,  
Baltimore Division  
Immediately eastward of Popes Creek  
Passenger Station  
Charles County Land Records  
Liber PCM 145 Folio 327

September 21, 1967: Barth Realty, Inc. to Lee Levin  
\$10  
West side of Popes Creek Rd, 4<sup>th</sup>  
Election District  
.48 Acres  
Charles County Land Records  
Liber PCM 191 Folio 276

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES  
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Popes Creek Power Plant  
name of property  
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county and state

=====

April 10, 1968: Lee Levin, widow to Brison N. Hungerford  
Survey- D.H. Steffens (August 18, 1967)  
4<sup>th</sup> Election District, .48 Acres  
Charles County Land Records  
Liber 194 Folio 490

January 2, 1974: Brison N. Hungerford to Popes Creek Joint Venture  
.48 acres  
Charles County Land Records  
Liber 322, Folio 160

July 16, 1976: Popes Creek Joint Venture to Joseph F. & Carol Ann Mona  
4<sup>th</sup> Election District  
Charles County Land Records  
Liber 450 Folio 88

February 19, 1980: Joseph F. Mona & Carol Ann Mona (wife) to Joseph F. Mona  
\$10.  
Liber 703, Folio 296

March 1, 1983: Joseph F. Mona to John W. Hill  
\$20,000  
Charles County Land Records  
Liber 888 Folio 6

November 16, 1984: John W Hill to Popes Creek Joint Venture (Jean K. Mona)  
\$19,500  
.48 Acre, Adjacent to Pennsylvania Railroad tract  
Survey- by D.H. Steffens, August 18, 1967  
Charles County Land Records  
Liber 1040 Folio 131

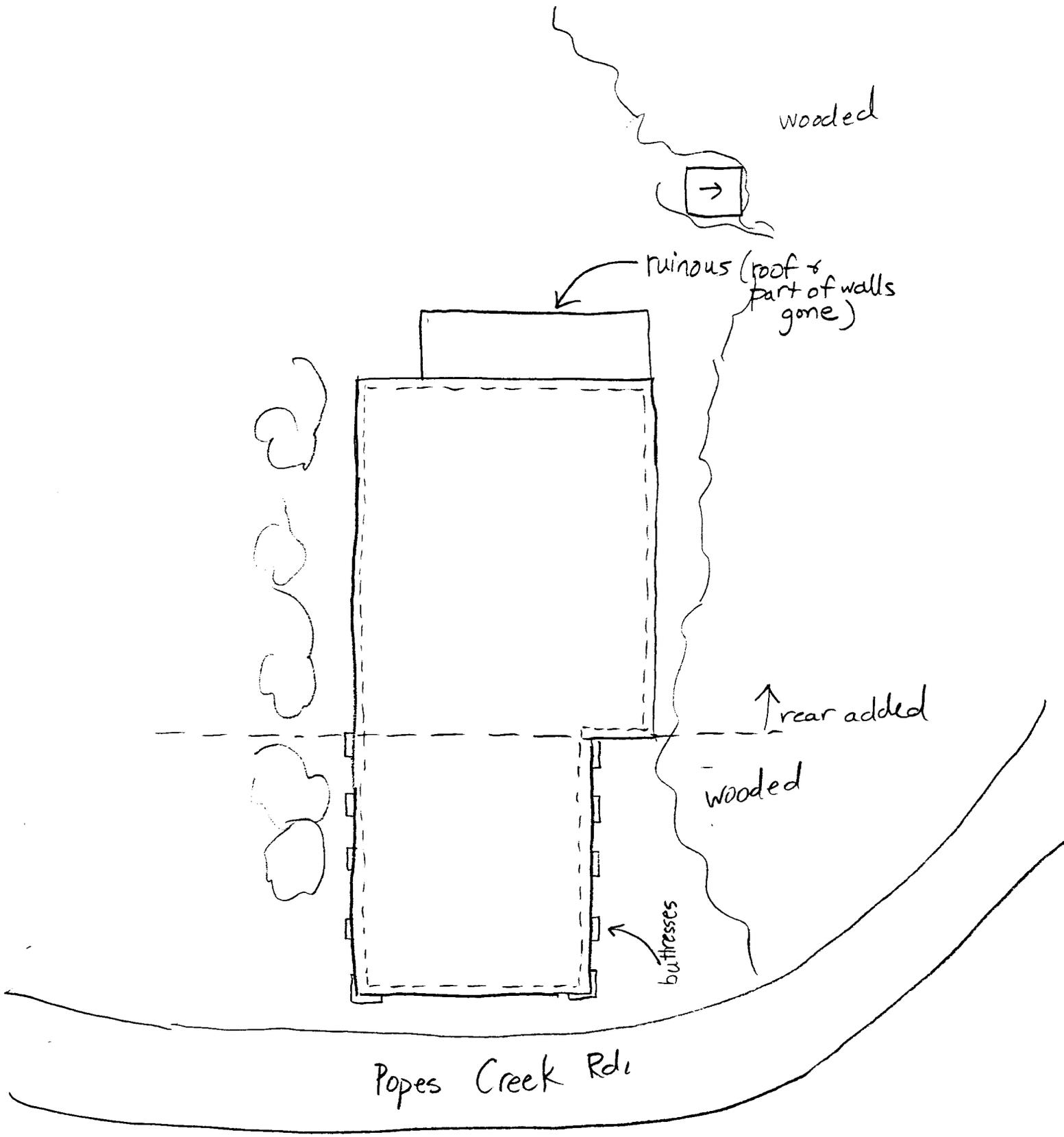
RESOURCE  
SKETCH MAP

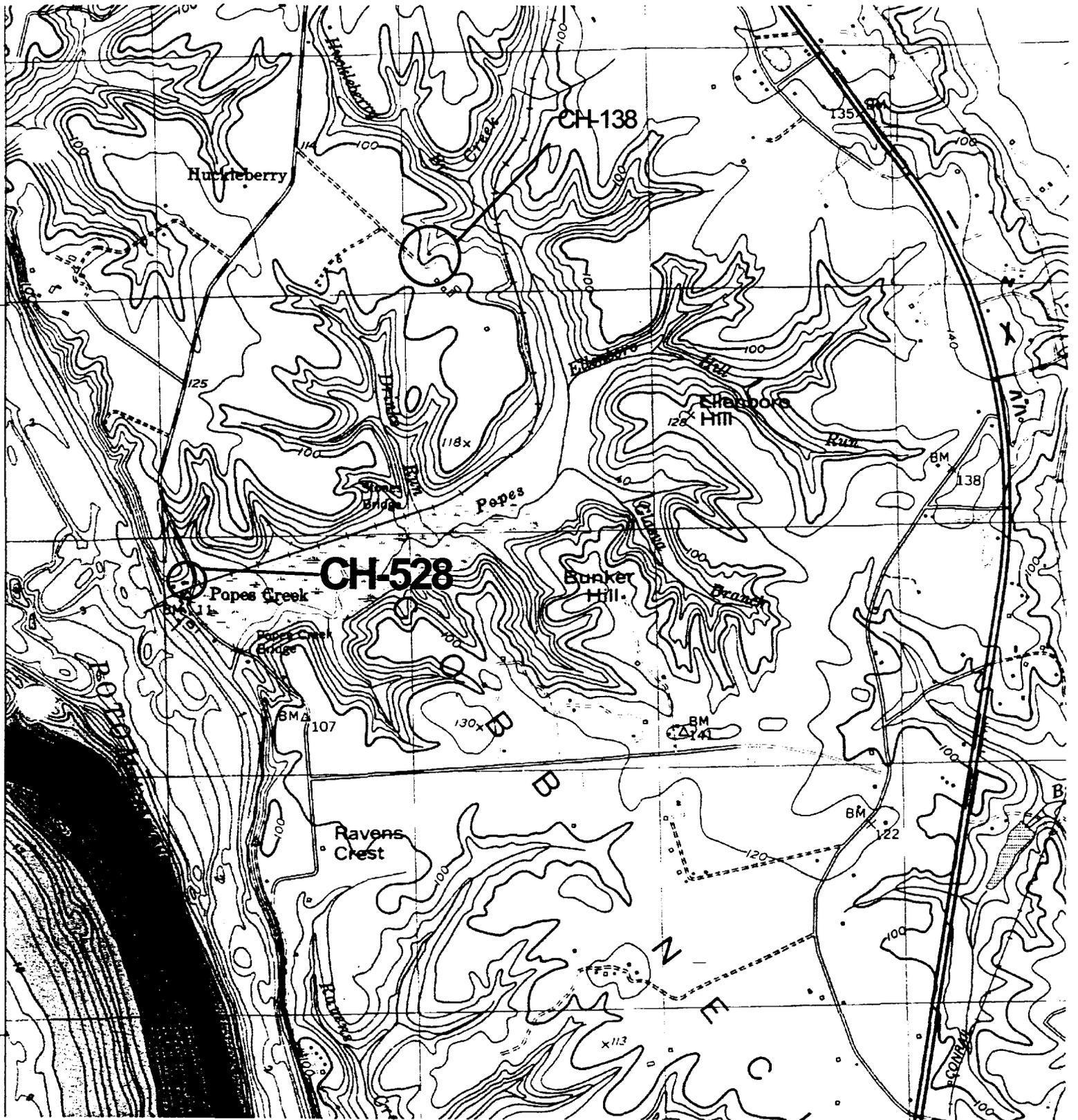
4/99



POPES CREEK POWER PLANT  
CHARLES COUNTY, MD  
POPES CREEK VIC.

CH-528





Popes Creek Power Plant  
Charles County, MD

CH-528

POPES CREEK, MD QUAD



CH-528

POPES CREEK POWER PLANT

CHARLES COUNTY, MD

K.G. SMITH

4/99

MARYLAND SHPO

FACADE - LOOKING WEST

10F5



CH-528

POPES CREEK POWER PLANT

CHARLES COUNTY, MD

K.G. SMITH

4/99

MARYLAND SHPO

SOUTH ELEVATION

2 OF 5



CH-528

POPES CREEK POWER PLANT

CHARLES COUNTY, MD

K.G. SMITH

4/99

MARYLAND SHPO

SOUTHWEST CORNER

3 OF 5



CH-528

POPES CREEK POWER PLANT

CHARLES COUNTY, MD

K.G. SMITH

4/99

MARYLAND SHPO

INTERIOR - LOOKING WEST FROM MAIN DOOR

4 OF 5



CH-528

POPES CREEK POWER PLANT  
CHARLES COUNTY, MD

KG. SMITH

4/99

MARYLAND SHPO  
DETAIL - REAR DOOR

5 OF 5