## THE ONEIDA POWER PLANT DISASTER

On December 5, 1984, the Oneida power plant in front of you was the scene of a tragic event. That winter night, four plant workers were swept to their deaths when a penstock ruptured, creating a wall of water that rushed through the powerhouse, parking lot, and maintenance shop. More than 3,000 cubic feet of water per second was released, destroying the east wall of the powerhouse and washing five men, the maintenance shop, and several vehicles into the icy waters of the Bear River. Although one of the five—then 25-year-old Leslie DeLong—managed to swim to safety, workers Kevin M. Danzer, Eugene Groesbeck, Don Phippen and Larry S. Rindlisbaker tragically drowned. Danzer, a journeyman electrician, was 31 at the time. Groesbeck, 32, was foreman of the Oneida hydro station. Phippen, a journeyman mechanic, was 46. And Rindlisbaker, 47, was a crew supervisor.

The crew had just finished routine maintenance on a turbine generator set at the Utah Power & Light Oneida plant. Just before midnight they began to reopen the valve controlling water flow from the penstock to the turbine. The valve malfunctioned, causing a tremendous surge of water (or "water hammer") to develop in the penstock behind it, rupturing the 12-foot-diameter penstock.

An intensive investigation conducted later concluded that a faulty weld on a penstock joint was to blame. For reasons that remain unknown, air was able to enter the valve while it was closed during the turbine generator maintenance. When workers reopened the valve and water began to flow from the penstock to the turbine, the air inside the valve was compressed, causing



powerhouse.

Damaged penstock at the Oneida



The suspension bridge at the Oneida facility was dedicated to the four workers who lost their lives.

Sources: Ellensburg Daily Record, December 6, 1984; Spokesman Review, December In addition, a memorial to the four men was set in stone near the bridge. 6, 1984; Deseret News, March 16, 1985; Spokane Chronicle, December 5, 1984, and March 26, 1985; *Relay* (Utah Power & Light employee publication), December 18, 1984, and June 13, 1985.

This sign was erected by PacifiCorp in memory of those who tragically lost their lives in the pursuit of bringing sustainable electricity to our communities.

the valve to cycle open and closed very quickly. This cycling of the valve created the catastrophic water hammer event. The faulty weld, made more than 35 years before the disaster, was not strong enough to withstand the water hammer and failed, releasing water into the powerhouse.

The Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) ultimately determined the cause was failure to bleed off the built-up air in the valve before opening it, and recognized the role of the bad weld in the tragedy.



