



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

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For immediate release October 22, 2013

MWRD offers historical information via new database

When the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) was established in 1889 by the Illinois General Assembly, its creation was in response to a community health crisis: the source of the area's water, Lake Michigan, was routinely fouled by untreated sewage and waste flowing to it from the Chicago River. The new agency's first task was monumental: reverse the flow of the Chicago River away from the lake.

Fast forward 124 years and horse and buggies have been replaced with cars and buses, gas lamps were replaced with electric or solar lights, and our drinking water is reliably clean and sanitized. Thanks to technology, those interested in the debate and proceedings of those early formative years, as well as all the years in between, can visit the MWRD website and read the minutes with the click of a button and the help of a new searchable database.

"We wanted to make the proceedings of the District more accessible and transparent to the public so we have made the records of District Board meetings going back to 1890 searchable online on our website," said Commissioner Kari Steele, chairman of the Information Technology committee. "For anyone who is interested in Chicago history or the history of how our infrastructure came to be, the proceedings are a fascinating read."

Searchable historical Board meeting records can be found at <http://mwr.org/legistar> under the Proceeding tab.



Pictured above is the Jackson Boulevard bridge, looking south down the South Branch of the Chicago River on May 26, 1916. The bascule style bridge was built in 1915, and the original contract with Strobel Steel Company can be found in the Board proceedings database. The excerpt at right is from February 5, 1914, describing the construction specifications for the bridge's operating houses.

OPERATING HOUSES, MACHINERY ENCLOSURES, ETC.

Description.

Sec. 202. There will be two operating houses, one on each side of the river at the south side of the bridge and one on the west side of the river at the north side of the bridge. The lower part of each house from the substructure up to the window sills in the operating room is to be of ornamental reinforced concrete construction, and the upper part is to be of steel and wood framing covered on the outside with sheet copper, which is to be returned on the inside as shown on the plans.

Each set of machinery is to be enclosed with ornamental reinforced concrete walls, and with wooden partitions between the machinery and the main trusses of the leaves.

Across the front of each abutment there is to be a wall of concrete, to be carried up to elevation +7.5 C. C. D. on the east abutment and up to elevation +9.42 C. C. D. on the west abutment.

All concrete work shall conform with the specifications for concrete work hereinafter set forth in sections one hundred seventy-five (175) to two hundred one (201) inclusive.

The operating houses must be fully completed on or before April 1st, 1915, or temporary provisions made so that the bridge may be continuously operated and used for traffic after that date as hereinafter specified in article thirty (30) hereof.

Established in 1889, the MWRD (www.mwr.org) is an award-winning, special purpose government agency responsible for wastewater treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois. **Our water environment, Take it personally.**