1928-1937

The third decade of the Kansas City District

By **Eric Cramer**

World Events

1928
~The St. Francis Dam in California fails, killing 400 people
~Mickey Mouse appears in Steamboat Willie, the first sound cartoon
~U.S. Congress approves the construction of the Boulder Dam, later renamed the Hoover Dam
1929
~Canada and the United States agree on a plan to preserve Niagara Falls
~The Seeing Eye Dog organization is formed
~The Black Tuesday stock market crash on the New York Stock Exchange begins the start of the Great Depression
1930
~The 3M Company markets Scotch Tape
~While studying photographs, Clyde Tombaugh discovers Pluto
~The first night game in organized baseball history takes place in Independence, Kan.
1931
~New Delhi becomes the capital of India
~The Star-Spangled Banner is adopted as the United States National Anthem
~Construction of the Empire State Building is completed in New York City
1932
~Hattie W. Caraway becomes the first woman elected to the United States Senate
~The Revenue Act of 1932 is enacted, creating the first gas tax in the United States at 1cent per gallon sold
~The infant son of Charles Lindbergh is kidnapped
1933
~Construction of the Golden Gate Bridge begins in San Francisco Bay
~Mount Rushmore is dedicated
~The Gestapo is established
~The chocolate chip cookie is invented
1934
~Adolf Hitler becomes the Führer of Germany, becoming head of state as well as Chancellor
~Persia becomes Iran
~The Dionne quintuplets are born in Ontario, Canada, later becoming the first quintuplets to survive infancy
1935
~Alcoholics Anonymous is founded
~President Franklin Roosevelt signs the Social Security Act into law
~Parker Brothers releases the board game Monopoly
~The National Council of Negro Women is founded
1936
~The 1936 Summer Olympics opens in Berlin, Germany, and marks the first live television coverage of a sports event in world history. African American athlete, Jesse Owens, wins the 100 meter dash.
~Nazi Germany reoccupies the Rhineland, making it in violation of the Treaty of Versailles
~The YMCA Youth and Government program is founded
1937
~Coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth takes place at Westminster Abbey
~The first edition of J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Hobbit" is published
~Walt Disney's "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" opens and is the first feature-length animated cartoon

When a naughty child holds a thumb over the stream of water in a garden hose to spray the parental target of choice, the water's velocity increases, but its total volume remains the same.

Throughout the 1920s and '30s, the Kansas City District worked to apply this principal to the river, pinning its flow into one channel and narrowing its channel to increase its velocity, so that channel would remain open instead of clogging with sediment.

In the book "Soundings," by John Ferrell, George Kishmar, hired by the Kansas City District at age 17 in 1927, describes some of this work.

His first job was assisting the weavers who made willow mats used to stabilize the riverbank.

"My work consisted of throwing bundles of willow brush from the barge upon which they were loaded onto the mat barge. There would be five or six willows about an inch in diameter, or two or three about two inches or larger in diameter, about 12 to 15 feet long, tied in a bundle with thin wire," Kishmar is quoted as saying.

He made 14 cents an hour working in a shoe factory after being laid off by the Corps, but returned the next year for a permanent position.

The Kansas City District's primary focus through the early 1930s remained river navigation. Thousands worked along the river in the name of creating a stable navigational channel.

The work consisted of building structures to guide the river and work to stabilize its banks as Kishmar described.

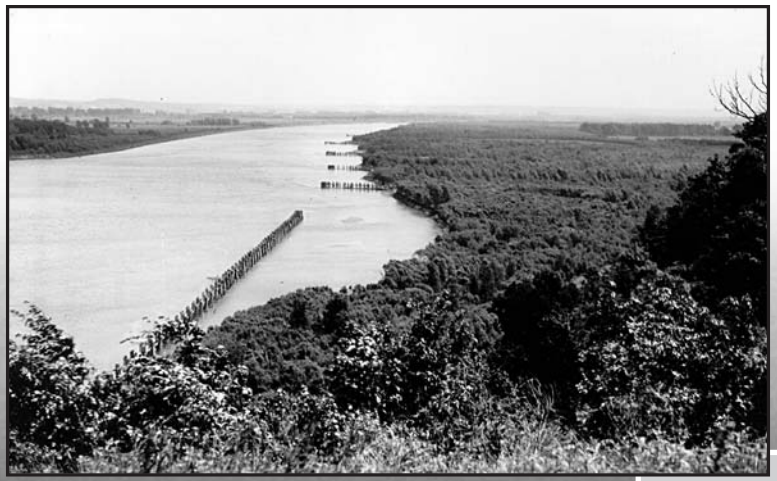
All this work did not mean flood damage control was ignored, but the approach taken by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and by Congress, since the original Flood Control Act of 1917 was a conservative one. It consisted of levee construction, but made no provision for reservoirs to store and release water upstream to control downstream flows.

The Missouri River at Indian Cave Bend in Nebraska in 1935. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers used the Missouri River to create its own navigational channel in many areas. Photo provided

This began to change with the Kansas City District's "308 Report" issued in 1933, which made the first accurate study of the entire basin's hydrology.

The 308 Report recommended a combination of reservoirs and levees to provide additional safety during flooding conditions. It envisioned levees on the Kansas River at Topeka and at several sites on the Missouri. Although the report envisioned levees from St. Joseph to Boonville in Missouri, its provisions were mostly aimed at protecting local real estate, railroads and providing varying levels of local flood damage protection.

This era also saw the first authorization of a dam for flood damage reduction. Outside the boundaries of the current Kansas City District, the Fort Peck Dam in Montana was designed to work along with the river's levee system to ensure a six-foot navigational channel and to contain water in the event of a flood. Although the dam worked as it was designed, it was only the first step in the construction of a comprehensive flood damage control system. It would be built over the following decades along rivers in several states to reduce the damage from flooding, generate electricity and provide additional sources of water to many communities. Authorized under the flood control act of 1936, these dams would become a major mission for the Kansas City District in years to come.



The Missouri River at Indian Cave Bend in Nebraska in 1946. The permeable barriers erected by the Corps slowed the river's current, allowing silt to deposit and building new ground as shown here. Photo provided

Editor's note: Figures used in this article are taken from the book "Soundings – 100 years of the Missouri River Navigation Project" by John Ferrell.

(Next Month: The 1940s, The farmers, the flood and the World War)