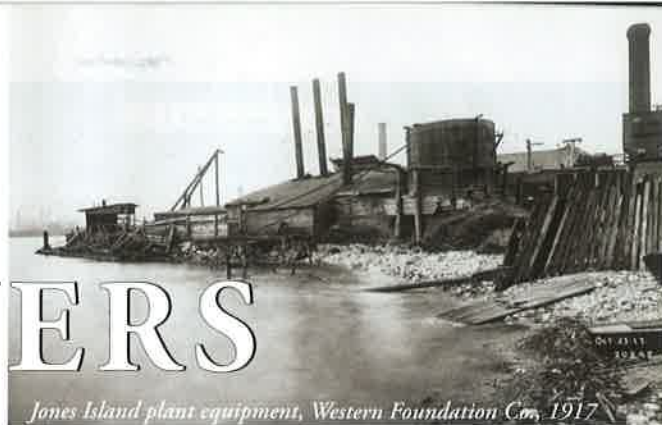




Fox Point files

by Douglas H. Frazer

SEWERS



Jones Island plant equipment, Western Foundation Co., 1917

The village of Fox Point incorporated in 1926. The impetus was services, or lack of same, provided by the Town of Milwaukee. The Town levied taxes but provided no water, sewerage or garbage service.

By then, sewage treatment had already taken a regional focus.

In the City of Milwaukee, and later in the surrounding communities, the first sewers were built in the 1880's to carry wastewater to the Milwaukee, Menomonee, and Kinnickinnic rivers as well as Lake Michigan resulting in nearly all sewage reaching the surface water

So Milwaukee flushed the rivers as a stopgap measure. Starting in 1888, a flushing tunnel pumped huge volumes of lake water into the stagnant Milwaukee River below the North Avenue dam. (The flushing station, now owned by the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District, is the reconverted Alterra coffee house at 1701 N. Lincoln Memorial Drive and is set up inside as a mini-museum alongside the cafe operations.) In 1907, Milwaukee built a second flushing tunnel on the Kinnickinnic River. Conditions, however, continued to worsen. The water supply was becoming more endangered and by many accounts the smell could be awful.

The Milwaukee Journal (Sewer Issue is an Old One, May 1, 1952) summarized what happened next. In 1913, Milwaukee received legislative authority to create a City Sewerage Commission with the power to construct a sewage disposal system. Subsequently, Milwaukee built its own sewerage system including a sewerage disposal plant on Jones Island.

However, a critical problem remained: the suburbs still dumped millions of gallons of raw sewage into the streams and it flowed into the lake. So, in 1921, the legislature created the Metropolitan Sewerage Commission with authority to construct intercepting sewers in the watersheds of the Milwaukee, Menomonee and Kinnickinnic rivers in the suburban part of the county. The drainage basin of these three streams was designated as the Metropolitan Sewerage Area. The sewage disposal plant and the City of Milwaukee sewerage lines continued under the jurisdiction of the City Sewerage Commission.

The metropolitan sewerage area contained 96,800 acres of land or about 69% of the county area. Only the southern portion of the county, about half of the town of Greenfield, all of the towns of Franklin and Oak Creek, a small part of the town of Lake, and the city of South Milwaukee – each in the Root River drainage basin – were outside the metropolitan sewerage area.

Thus, two commissions governed the metropolitan sewerage area each with an array of separate and joint legal responsibilities. The City Commission built and operated all sewer facilities in the City of Milwaukee, while the Metropolitan Commission constructed the intercepting lines outside the city and then turned them over to the City Commission to operate and maintain. Local sewer lines in the suburban areas and in the City of Milwaukee were and still are built by the local units of government.

Both commissions had separate taxing powers. Money for capital projects and the operation and maintenance of the sewerage disposal system came from two sources: State law provided that the two Commissions should certify their budgets to the County of Milwaukee, which was required to levy property taxes within the served communities in an amount sufficient to satisfy the Commission's budgets, and the sale of Milorganite, a fertilizer manufactured from waste passing through the disposal plant (produced continuously since 1925).

It was from this framework that the Village of Fox Point began to address its sewage disposal needs. The village began building its own sewer lines. Builders or property owners put in private laterals (pipes connecting a residence to the Village line). The Metropolitan Commission put in intercepting lines that, in turn, emptied into the City Commissions' interceptor sewers.

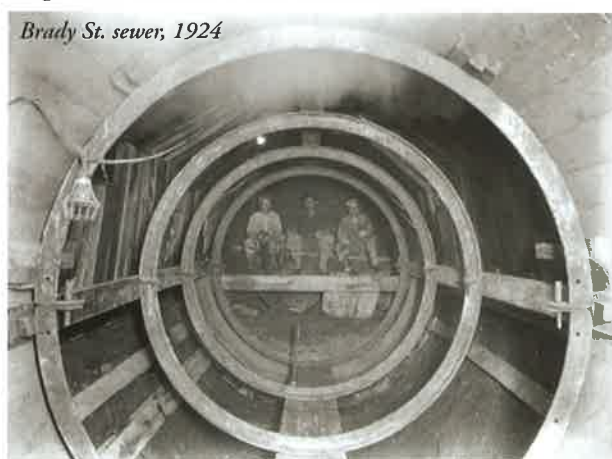
This arrangement continued until the legislature created a Metropolitan Sewerage District in 1969. The District owned all of the sewers and treatment plants built by either commission and was governed by the commissioners of the two commissions sitting as the Metropolitan Sewerage District. Finally, in 1981, the legislature enacted legislation creating a single body, the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District with its own power to tax and charge user fees for the operation of the system.

Fox Point had its own unique set of challenges. The postwar building boom put a strain on village services. The village was required to build new roads and extend water and sanitary sewer lines. And then there was the special problem concerning the disposal of sewage from the properties on Beach drive – 100 feet below the bluff. We will pick up the story there in Part II of this series.

Douglas H. Frazer is a trustee on the Fox Point Village Board. The views expressed are his own and not necessarily those of the Village, the Village Board, other Village Board members, or Best Version Media, LLC.



Water St. and Grand Ave., 1916



Brady St. sewer, 1924