

# CURRENT COMMISSIONERS



Maj. Gen. Richard G. Kaiser  
*President*  
*Corps of Engineers*  
*Mississippi Valley Division*  
*Vicksburg, Miss.*



Honorable Sam E. Angel  
*Senior Civilian Member*  
*Lake Village, Ark.*



Vacant  
*Civilian/Civil Engineer*



Honorable Norma Jean Mattei, Ph.D.  
*Civilian/Civil Engineer*  
*Houma, La.*



RDML Shepard Smith  
*National Oceanic and*  
*Atmospheric Administration*  
*Silver Spring, Md.*



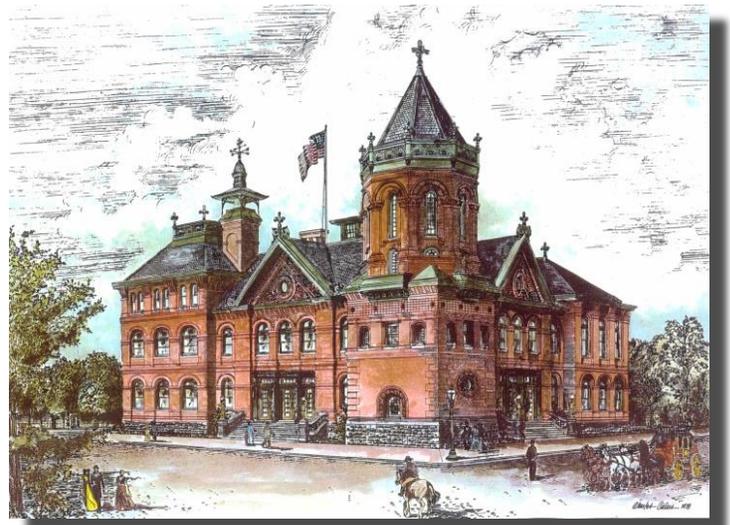
Brig. Gen. R. Mark Toy  
*Corps of Engineers*  
*Great Lakes & Ohio River Division*  
*Cincinnati, Ohio*



Brig. Gen. Paul E. Owen  
*Corps of Engineers*  
*Southwestern Division*  
*Dallas, Texas*



# MISSISSIPPI RIVER COMMISSION HISTORY



The MRC has a proud heritage that dates back to 1879, when Congress established the seven-member commission to remake the Mississippi River into a reliable commercial artery while protecting adjacent farms and towns from its powerful floods.

Today the MRC has largely realized its ambitious assignment through the prosecution of the comprehensive river management program known as the Mississippi River and Tributaries (MR&T) project — a project brought about by the greatest flood in recorded history of the lower Mississippi River.



*Early levee construction*



*Early dike works*



The Great Flood of 1927 drove 700,000 people from their homes, inundated 26,000 square miles, and forced an overhaul of the flood control plan for the lower Mississippi River.

The MR&T project is arguably the most successful civil works project ever undertaken. Since the initiation of the project, the nation has invested a total of \$15 billion, with damages prevented reaching \$823 billion following the 2011 flood.

The 1879 congressional legislation that created the MRC granted the body extensive authority and jurisdiction on the Mississippi River from its headwaters at Lake Itasca, Minnesota, to the Head of Passes near the Gulf of Mexico.

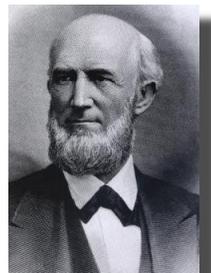
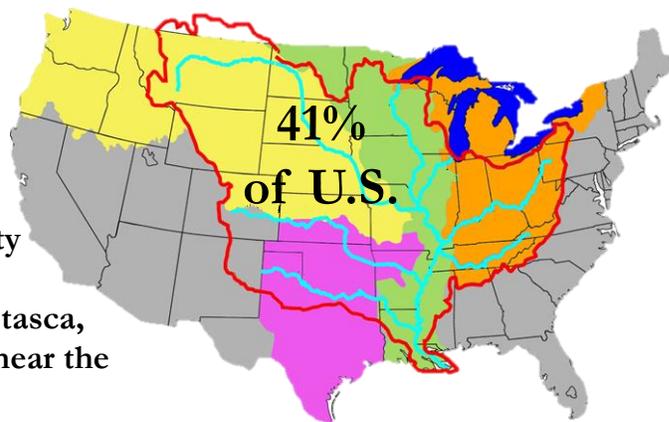
The legally mandated membership of the MRC called for three officers from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, one member from the U.S. Coast

and Geodetic Survey (now the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), and three civilians - each nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate.

This mix of membership reflected a national desire to mend a growing rift between the military and civilian engineering communities epitomized during the early 1870s through the between Brig. Gen. Andrew A. Humphreys, the Chief of Engineers, and James B. Eads, the internationally renowned civilian engineer and original member of the Mississippi River Commission.



*Brig. Gen. Andrew A. Humphreys*



*James B. Eads*

1939 MRC members.



While there were many reasons for creating the MRC, one of the most pressing issues involved the need for federal assistance for the flood-plagued Mississippi Valley. For decades the national legislature had toyed with the concept of federalizing flood-control efforts, but opponents to such a move argued that protecting private property from overflow at federal expense was unconstitutional.

These arguments consistently won the day, therefore, flood control remained a function of the individual states. In response, local interests at the state and county level organized levee districts. These insufficiently financed efforts, however, lacked centralized coordination and mostly proved inadequate because, as noted by James P. Kemper, a longtime student of the Mississippi River, “floodwaters will not respect political boundaries.”

With the establishment of the MRC, the federal government finally appeared as an active agent on the river capable of transcending the regional issues that had hampered the development of a more effective flood-control system.

Shortly after its creation, the MRC began coordinating local efforts, setting standards for levee construction, and allocating funds to the cash-strapped levee districts.

In that process of face-to-face interaction and open dialogue, the MRC evolved into a springboard for Mississippi Valley interests to have a greater voice in shaping federal policy—a vehicle that continues to operate to this day through semi-annual high- and low-water inspection trips each spring and fall.

Since 1882, these inspection trips and public meetings have been conducted aboard vessels named *Mississippi*.



Public meetings, then . . . and now



The current vessel, Motor Vessel MISSISSIPPI V, has been in use since 1993.



In fact, it can be argued that the practice of addressing issues and concerns through the formal public hearing process, so critical in the federal government's civil works mission today, began in the Mississippi Valley with the creation of the MRC.