The ability to drive anywhere at anytime, to quickly dispose of garbage and recycle useful products, to unwind in a half-hour shower, to drink from a municipal fountain without fear of contracting disease—these pervasive luxuries made possible by public construction are “the major cultural and technological achievement of the last 150 years” according to a multifaceted exhibition in commemoration of the 2002 sesquicentennial of the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE).

Entitled *Me, Myself and Infrastructure: Private Lives and Public Works in America*, the exhibit features technologies taken for granted that structure our everyday lives.

It’s a story more concrete than girders, gutters, and highways. “Infrastructure is everywhere,” says historian-curator Gregory K. Dreicer, a Cornell Ph.D. and formerly a curator at the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C. “There’s infrastructure in your living room, in your cup of morning coffee and on top of your desk.” Dreicer and exhibit designer Hall Smyth hope to honor the ASCE with an appreciation for the quiet and surprising ways civil engineers serve the public as problem solvers. “Whether we know it or not,” says Dreicer, “each of us works with civil engineers to build our health, safety, and happiness.”

Two companion exhibits for smaller venues also commemorate the 1852 birthday of the ASCE. Ask the Infrastructure explores a series of probing questions about the everyday importance of civil construction. Who builds the tunnel, the viaduct, the sidewalk, the water treatment system? How much does it cost? How long will it last? The answers to these questions are the invisible links between public works and private lives.

A second companion exhibit called *I on Infrastructure* examines ways artists and writers perceive the work of the engineer. Topics include the changing standards of beauty, the relationship between nature and artificiality, and gender influences on engineering design. For more information, contact Norida Torriente at 202-326-5129 or ntorriente@asce.org.

*Editor’s Note: Gregory Dreicer is the author of *Me, Myself and Infrastructure*, a book that parallels the ASCE exhibit in word and illustrations. A 2003 PWHS Abel Wolman Award nominee, the book is available through ASCE at www.pubs.asce.org.*
Conferences

- Technology, society, and nature in the history of civilization will be the theme of the International Committee for the History of Technology's 30th symposium in St. Petersburg and Moscow, August 21-26. Information about ICOTEHC symposia and publications can be found at www.icohtec.org.

- The Association for Preservation Technology International will examine the care and repair of America's historic covered bridges at the University of Vermont in Burlington, June 5-7, 2003. Contact the APTI organizers at coveredbridges@uvm.edu.

- The Society for the History of Technology's 2003 annual meeting will be held October 16-19 at the Sheraton Hotel, Atlanta, Georgia. This will be a joint meeting with the Society for the Social Studies of Science. Contact program chair Jennifer Alexander at shot2003@me.umn.edu.

Websightings

- The Forest History Society Archives maintains over 25,000 photos, slides, negatives, plates, and films documenting the history of human interaction with the environment. Samples and a search engine can be found at www.lib.duke.edu/forest/photos.html.

- The U.S. Department of Transportation maintains a history web page with timelines and biographical information at www.isweb.tasc.dot.gov/historian/history/htm.

- Civil War reenactor Jan Romanovich tells the story of the United States Sanitary Commission, a government agency created in 1861 to coordinate Union army relief efforts. The site provides photographs, correspondence, clippings, and agency reports at www.netwalk.com/~jpr/.

- The Harvard Map Collection in the Pusey Library has a new exhibition on history of early American road maps and road construction. For samples and an introductory essay see www.news.harvard.edu/gazette/2002/10.24/32-maps.html.

Public Works History

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Public Works Historical Society
American Public Works Association
2345 Grand Blvd., Suite 500
Kansas City, MO 64108

Telephone: (816) 472-6100
Fax: (816) 472-1610
E-mail: pwhs@apwa.net
Internet: www.apwa.net

Editor: Todd Shallat, History Dept., Boise State University, Boise, ID
Associate Editor: Karin Murdoch, Boise State University, Boise, ID
Staff Liaison: Teresa Hon, Technical Services Coordinator, APWA

Layout & Design: Graeme Hunt, Graphic Designer, APWA

About the Society

- Sara Wermiel's Army Engineers' Contribution to the Development of Iron Construction in the Nineteenth Century, volume 21 in the Society's acclaimed Essays in Public Works History examines early uses of iron in fireproof buildings and skeleton frame lighthouses. Available for $10 (members) or $15 (nonmembers) from APWA at www.apwa.net/bookstore. Also available: An Interview with Myron D. Calkins; Historical Photos on CD-Rom; and One Hundred Years of Public Works Equipment.

- The forthcoming PWHS Essay in Public Works History will explore mysteries of prehistoric water development at Colorado’s Mesa Verde. Author Ken Wright will feature the publication in an October lecture at the Library of Congress.

- PWHS is now soliciting manuscripts for the 2004 edition of Essays in Public Works History. Potential authors should submit an abstract of no more than 300 words to: Todd Shallat, Editor, History Department, Boise State University, Boise, ID 83725-1925; tshalla@boisestate.edu.

- The Arizona Chapter has recruited Mark Pry to write a chapter history. Pry, who holds a Ph.D. in public history from Arizona State University, is currently writing a contract history concerning Tempe's water system. Publication credits include The Town on the Hassayampa: A History of Wickenburg, Arizona, Immigrant Banker: The Life of Emil Ganz, and Fifty Years Under the 'Sun C': The Story of Rancho de los Caballeros.

- The APWA Rocky Mountain Chapter has compiled a chapter history with interviews and insightful personal stories. Stay tuned to these pages for more information.

An Entity of the American Public Works Association
Forty-seven swastikas span the Colorado River above Yuma, Arizona. A tribute to Man's monumental attempt to remake the western desert, the swastikas line a concrete bridge over one of the U.S. government's first reclamation projects. Lore has it that German prisoners of war decorated the bridge and dam during WWII. In fact the swastikas were approved by the government's own Reclamation Service.

Swastikas with crossbars to the right had long been good-luck symbols in both Old and New World mythology. Swastika (a.k.a. “Laguna”) Dam became the nation’s first rock-fill structure footed in silt deposits. Designed in 1903, just months after Congress passed the landmark 1902 Reclamation Act, the durable dam may have been modeled after a South Asian structure dedicated to Indra, a Hindu god. Indra is believed to control thunder and manipulate watercourses. Traditionally the deity has been represented by the four-armed swastika. Picture courtesy of Walter S. Frank.

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**News and Events**

**Research**

- The Juanelo Turiano Foundation announces the 2004 García Diego International Award for research in the history of technology, especially civil engineering. The submission deadline is June 2004. Address inquiries to the Fundación Juanelo Turiano at fgoicolea@caminos.recol.es.


**Swastikas on the Colorado**

There is no history without memory, and no way to historically appreciate the built environment of Kansas City without considering the memories collected in the newly released *Service in the Heartland: A History of APWA’s Kansas City Metropolitan Chapter*. Written by APWA’s Connie Hartline with contributions from metro chapter’s ten-member history committee, the 110-page hardcover book mixes photographs and original documents with personal recollections.

The history begins in 1963 with regional meetings to standardize building codes. By April 1965 a nucleus of metro area professionals had subdivided away from APWA’s Missouri chapter. Russell Helms, public works director for the City of Independence, became the metro chapter’s first president. Future APWA President Myron Calkins of Kansas City became secretary-treasurer.

Today with its 42 committees and task forces the thriving chapter serves more than 800 members. Their legacy has been an impressive record of teamwork—the cooperation required for the updating of codes, the planning of professional seminars, and the hosting of the triennial Mid-America Conference & Exhibit Show, founded in 1983. The Snow Plow Rodeo is another success of the metro chapter. Begun in 1997, the rodeo with its obstacle course for heavy equipment now attracts participants and spectators from surrounding Midwestern states.

“Just look at what we’ve been able to accomplish,” said past president Warren Welch, reflecting on the chapter’s thirty-eight years.

*Filling potholes in Kansas City, about 1950. Courtesy of the University of Missouri/Missouri State Historical Society’s Western Historical Manuscript Collection.*