

On January 3, 1900, *The Chicago Tribune* brought alive, in great detail, the previous day's activities:

(Transcribed from Tribune)

Water was let in the drainage canal from the Chicago River yesterday [January 2] morning, and last night a thin coating of the murky fluid covered the bottom of the channel as far as Willow Springs. The opening of the greatest ship canal ever constructed in America and the informal completion of one of the engineering feats in the world's history was accomplished without ceremony. The nine Sanitary Trustees with their engineer, Isham Randolph, simply went to the Kedzie avenue [sic] connection of the West Fork of the South Branch of the Chicago River and the canal and saw the thin ridge of earth cut through.

The consummation of the project, on which the people of Chicago have expended upwards of \$33,000,000, was free from the formalities which marked "shovel day," when the work was inaugurated on Sept. 3, 1892. But there was no fear of injunctions on "shovel day." The enemies of the project by which Chicago gives to the State a ship canal were not so persistent on that day as they have grown to be as the canal, in spite of all obstacles, has neared the time when water should fill its banks. . . .

While the turning in of water was simple and business-like, it was attended by much nervousness among the trustees for fear of injunctions. Two belated newspaper reporters who came rushing across the earth piles caused a small panic until it was seen they carried no injunctions with them. It was with a feeling of relief that the water finally was seen pouring down the sluiceway without a legal bill having been called.

The trustees started in the gray light of dawn, and their coming was unannounced except to a few friends and two newspapermen; who at midnight had received a tip that the canal was to be opened.

B.A. Eckhart was the first to reach the narrow watershed at Kedzie avenue and Thirty-fifth street. He jumped out of his carriage, dragging with him a set of new shovels for the trustees. The shovels were of the common kind with no silver handles.

"I had an awful time getting these shovels at this time of day," said Mr. Eckhart, as he deposited them on the bank, just above the place where a dredge was already hard at work throwing up the clay from the cut. . . .

Before long trustees Carter, Braden, Jones, Wenter, Kelly, and Mallette arrived. Seizing the shovels, the trustees jumped down the embankment and began throwing the loose earth out of the cut. Loud shouts of approval greeted their efforts, but a few shovelfuls apiece sufficed to cover the honor of opening the canal. It was plain that the Big Dredge No. 7, when it came to throwing earth, was worth several hundred of the most distinguished trustees ever produced. The trustees crawled back and waited. By this time there were fifty or more people gathered around the cut.

After a while the dredge gained a point where its great arm could reach no further. Large chunks of ice and frozen clay blocked the way. Less than eight feet separated the waters of the lakes from the waters of the Mississippi, but the solid nature of the soil made the obstacle almost as great as if the distance had been as many miles. Some one set up a plea for blasting out the ridge. Soon a dozen brawny arms were driving in the bars which were to make the holes for the blasts. It was exceedingly slow work, for the clay was like a rock in its hardness. Four large charges of dynamite were placed in the ridge. The crowd, which by this time had grown to a hundred or more, beat a retreat and hid behind timbers or sought shelter [behind] a stationary dredge

near by. It was expected that the earth would yawn as by magic under the power of the explosive and the drainage canal would be opened amid salvos of dynamite and the rush of flying clay. President Boldenweck, who had arrived sometime previously in company with Trustee Smyth, claimed it as a prerogative of his office that he and he alone should touch the button. Thereby he cut short a controversy between Trustees Carter and Braden as to which one should have the honor.

The button was officially touched and a sullen roar was the answer. A few fugitive pieces of clay did fly into the air, but as a grand opening it was a failure. When the crowd rushed back to the cut it looked about as it did before. Then the ambitious trustees, armed with their shovels, descended into the cut and began to push away the pieces of clay and ice which held back the lakes. President Boldenweck was particularly active in the futile endeavor. Chief Engineer Randolph watched the rivulets of ice water trickle through the breaches the official shovels had made in the ridge and bethought himself of the dam, or sluice gate, which had been made at such expense and foresight to keep back the waters he was now so anxious to see pouring through. A gang of workmen was ordered to remove the dam before it ever had been used. The trustees gave up their feeble endeavors to keep the blocks out of the cut and fell on that dam with vigor.

For an hour previously some of the spectators had maintained a fire with old timbers and the general riff-raff of canal building. The fire in no small degree had kept the crowd from freezing in the bitter wind from the western prairies.

"Put the dam in the fire," commanded Mr. Jones, and into the fire went the structure which for so many days had been pointed out as evidence of good faith in not opening the canal until the State commission had given its consent.

Then the crew of the dredge renewed their efforts to get within range of the cut. If its great arm could not cut a hole through the narrow ridge of clay and ice the day would end in another defeat of the trustees. The crew tugged and pulled to get their unwieldy craft into the breach. At last the "spuds" went down to the bottom of the river again and the long arm was extended towards the Mississippi. It reached. A great shout went up when the dipper brought up as much earth as a team of horses could have hauled away.

"It is but a question of a few more shovelfuls now," exclaimed Mr. Wenter, as the long arm swept to the westward and dropped its load on the spoil bank. With the regularity of a pendulum the arm of the dredge swung back and forth. Each time it carried a load of clay from the fast-disappearing watershed. The ice from the river rolled in and blocked the channel which had been cut through by the dredge.

"Push the ice gorge away with the arm," shouted the foreman to the man who controlled that mechanism. The arm dropped behind the ice gorge, and then with resistless motion swept the whole of it into the Mississippi Valley.

"... It is open! It is open!" went up from scores of throats as the water at last, after two hours of constant endeavor, had been made to start down the toboggan slide into the canal. The fall from the surface of the collateral branch, as it is called, of the West Fork of the South Branch of the Chicago River, to the bottom of the drainage canal was $24\frac{1}{2}$ feet. The cut through the bank of the canal was about twelve feet wide and was planked up for some ten feet. The cut ran nearly straight almost to the bottom, and then shot eastward until, where it emptied into the canal, it was nearly at right angles to the channel. This was to avoid washing away the banks on the other side by the

rush of water.

"It is the Niagara of Chicago," Mr. Eckhart said, as he stood watching the waters of the West Branch, together with the ice and clay bowlders [*sic*], sweep down the chute and drive far into the wide canal, whose surface already was beginning to take on a rich mahogany brown as the river water covered the boy's skating pond.

The consummation of the great event was celebrated by the trustees by gathering on the timbers at the end of the chute and having their pictures taken in a group. Engineer Randolph stood at the end of the structure and waved his hat triumphantly. The flooding waters sent heavy spray over the feet of the men on the pier, and threatened to carry the group, the pier, and all the rest into the canal beneath. Like school boys on a vacation, the drainage officials waved their arms and shouted. It was soon over, however, and the crowd returned to the dredge, whose clicklike motion was steadily widening the cut through the watershed. As each dipperful was taken out the flow of water was increased and the spray at the foot of the chute went higher and higher."