Chicago Women in Architecture
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[From CWA’s President]

For years I had heard about Bubbly Creek, a stretch of the Chicago River so polluted by organic waste from the Union Stockyards that even a century later the contamination purportedly still causes bubbles of methane and hydrogen sulfide to rise to the surface. Curious to see if the notorious creek would live up to its name, I decided one Saturday last month to investigate. After first spending some time online researching historic and current maps, I learned that Bubbly Creek is technically the South Fork of the South Branch of the Chicago River, extending from the turning basin at 2700 South Ashland Avenue down through Bridgeport through the Central Manufacturing District, and finally to the present day headwaters, now a Metropolitan Water Reclamation District pumping station at Racine and 38th Street.

It’s not surprising, really, that the story of Bubbly Creek attracted my attention. Since graduate school I have been drawn in by the study of cultural landscapes, and in particular, the writings of J.B. Jackson and those he influenced. When one chooses to look critically at everyday spaces constructed by everyday Americans, seeking to decipher insights into culture, history and social patterns, the city becomes an endlessly fascinating place to explore. Decoding our surroundings allows us to better understand the processes and people who shaped our urban context (the past), which in turn allows us to better understand our contemporary condition (the present).

As a parallel interest, it seems that an increasing number of projects in our studio now involve water: water bodies (lakes, rivers, channels, slips, canals, swales), access (river walks, bike paths, open space), treatment (stormwater filtration, collection, recycling), energy use (geothermal, district cooling), context (ecosystems, biohabitats, transportation means, urban amenities) and conservation.

So, musing on landscapes, history, culture, and what water means in an urban environment, what did my search for Bubbly Creek yield? It is generally difficult to access the water’s edge, which is still most often bordered by large private retail or industrial parcels, or major arterial roads that provide a glimpse of the creek but no place to pull over and linger. There are, however, two interesting exceptions:

[1] Canal Origins Park: One of the City’s newest parks, this 1.8 acre open space marks the starting point of the historic Illinois and Michigan canal, showcases current environmental remediation and restoration efforts to stabilize the banks of Bubbly Creek, and allows rare public access to the water’s edge.

[2] Bridgeport Village: With 115 homes already constructed and prices ranging from the mid $650,000s to over $1 million, this new residential development features a meandering promenade along the east bank of Bubbly Creek. It’s amazing that what was once considered a liability is now an amenity.

There is little left of the old Stockyards, save the dramatic gateway arch, the Stockyards National Bank, and street names such as Packers and Exchange Avenues. The area does provide an interesting snapshot of industrial park history however. The Central Manufacturing District, through which Bubbly Creek runs, is one of the earliest planned industrial parks, built in 1905 to capitalize on the influence of the adjacent stockyards. The new Stockyards Industrial Park was formed in 1971, when the last of the livestoek processing plants closed.

And no, I didn’t smell anything terribly foul nor did I see any of the legendary bubbles. I will plan to revisit on a hot summer day, however, to see if conditions change.

We are lucky to live and work in a City that offers such limitless possibilities for exploration, inspiration, understanding and connection. With the weather thawing, I encourage you to choose a neighborhood, a district, a landmark, a street, an architect, or a theme, grab a sketchbook and camera, and venture out on an [urban] reconnaissance mission. Be sure to mark your calendars as well for the 10th annual Great Chicago Places and Spaces festival in May. Over 200 free tours will be offered this year, including one sponsored by CWA showcasing our members’ work.

I look forward to seeing you at our spring events and I wish you a wonderful summer of exploration and discovery.

Best,
Beth Erickson

[Calendar of Events]

Confirm dates, times and locations with the sponsoring organization. RSVP to all events by emailing RSVP@cwar.org

May 2008

[13] CWA Spring Lecture Series: Lise Anne Couture @ The Museum of Contemporary Art, Theatre, 220 East Chicago Avenue, 6pm.


[20] CWA Monthly Meeting @ burlthaup: 165 West Chicago Avenue. Join us for cocktails and networking 6:00-6:30pm, Meeting 6:30-7:30pm. All members are welcome! RSVP
In just 6 years, Proteus Group has grown from a small shop to one of the most experienced and successful healthcare architectural firms in Chicago and the Midwest. The firm expanded from 50 employees in 2005 to more than 200 employees as of February 2011. It operates out of a 36,000-square-foot headquarters in Chicago and has offices in five other locations.

Proteus Group was recognized by the National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO) in 2009 for its commitment to women's inclusion in business. It was one of only six firms in the nation to achieve both MBE/WBE (Minority Business Enterprise/Women's Business Enterprise) recognition from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) and Certified Women's Business Enterprise (CWBE) status from the National Women's Business Council (NWBC). The firm has also earned numerous industry awards, including the 2010 Top 20 Firm by Roofing Magazine and the 2009 Top Green Firm by Roofing Magazine.

Proteus Group is committed to sustainability, and has been recognized for its efforts in this area. It was named a 2009 Top 20 Firm by Roofing Magazine and a 2009 Top Green Firm by Roofing Magazine. The firm has also been recognized for its contributions to the community, including its work with the National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO) and the National Women's Business Council (NWBC).

Proteus Group is proud to be a leader in the industry in embracing these efforts. In order to meet the MBE/WBE requirements of the hospital, Proteus Group assists with training the MBE/WBE team members with regards to planning and design of healthcare projects, cutting-edge BIM software technology, and regulatory/code requirements. This affords the minority firm the opportunity to work with others and has the potential to be awarded to smaller non-healthcare firms.

Our MBE/WBE approach is proving very successful for all parties and the effect on the work is a benefit to everyone that is involved. Proteus Group assists with data management and all MBE/WBE requirements. This collaborative environment of knowledge sharing and input is wonderful. Proteus Group assists with planning and design of healthcare projects, cutting-edge technology, and regulatory/code requirements. This affords the minority firm the opportunity to work with others and has the potential to be awarded to smaller non-healthcare firms.

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