

ISSUE ONE : FALL 2015
OPEN RIVERS : RETHINKING THE MISSISSIPPI



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<http://openrivers.umn.edu>
An interdisciplinary online journal rethinking the Mississippi
from multiple perspectives within and beyond the academy

FROM WASHINGTON BY 33 261 LOOKING UP STREAM

The cover image is of spring flooding at the Bohemian Flats in 1897. Image Courtesy of the Hennepin County Library.

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CONTENTS

Introduction

Introduction to Issue One By Patrick Nunnally, Editor	4
--	---

Features

Knowing the Mississippi By Sandra B. Zellmer, Angela Miller, Thomas Ruys Smith, T.S. McMillin, Wes Modes	7
Knowing the Mississippi By Mona M. Smith, Mark Muller, Mark Gorman, Patrick Hamilton, Richard M. Mizelle, Jr.	17
Knowing the Mississippi By Iyekiyaipiwiŋ Darlene St. Clair, Jennifer Browning, John O. Anfinson, Mark Davis	23
Knowing the Mississippi By Sharon Day, Bernard Williams, Christopher Morris, Conevery Bolton Valencius, Craig Colten	29

In Review

“Remembering the Bohemian Flats”: An Exhibit and a Practice of Public Memory By Laurie Moberg	39
--	----

Primary Sources

A Home Worth Fighting For: The Evictions at the Bohemian Flats By Rachel Hines	43
---	----

Perspectives

The New Madrid Levee: A New Take on an Enduring Conflict By Olivia Dorothy, Patrick Nunnally	47
---	----

Teaching And Practice

Teaching About Rivers By Patrick Nunnally	51
--	----

Geographies

Mussels: A River Life Atlas Collection By Joanne Richardson	55
--	----

Primary Sources

An Enchanted Landscape: Remembering Historic Swede Hollow By Stefanie Kowalczyk	59
--	----

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION TO ISSUE ONE

By Patrick Nunnally, Editor

Welcome to the Inaugural issue of *Open Rivers: Rethinking the Mississippi!*

What is there to say about the Mississippi River that has not been said already? Google Scholar shows “about 922,000” hits for the query “Mississippi River” and the Library of Congress shows 9,537 items for the same query. Do we really have anything to add?

Obviously, we think so. Over the past decade or so, we have noticed as many “gaps” in the conversations about the Mississippi as there are fruitful connections. We want to address these gaps by connecting engineers with historians, engaging artists with policy folks, and making a space for community people and scholars to learn from and with each other. Few, if any at all, people are speaking with Native Americans, those people



University of Minnesota on the Mississippi River looking towards St. Anthony Falls.

Image from the Metropolitan Design Center Image Bank.

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whose experience of the Mississippi has extended back millennia. Indigenous voices will be heard here, as well as voices of other groups not commonly thought of as having a “river story.”

The inquiries that have resulted in this journal began in 2013, when the University of Minnesota was invited to apply for a Sawyer Seminar grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. That seminar, “Making the Mississippi: Formulating New Water Narratives for the 21st Century,” was the direct inspiration for what we have developed here. The year-long exploration supported by the Mellon grant taught us that yes, indeed, the “old narratives” of the Mississippi did not adequately address new circumstances or future contingencies. We needed to look farther afield and read/learn more deeply. We are grateful to the Mellon Foundation for its support of this project.

After looking through dozens of blogs, periodicals and journals of all sorts, we decided that we would have to start our own publication if we wanted to gather and connect the richness that’s taking place in various discussions about the Mississippi. “*Open Rivers: Rethinking the Mississippi*” is that publication. For us, “rethinking” the Mississippi means examining the Mississippi, our “home river,” in new ways and also learning from what people are doing on other rivers and on other bodies of water, whether surface water or groundwater. All water on the planet connects; our work will draw from innovation and insight wherever we find it.

What can you look for in this issue? As we deliberated on assembling the project as a whole, we found ourselves returning to a couple of central questions: What does it mean to “know” the Mississippi River? How do the various people we’re interested in working with come to know the Mississippi?

So we decided to ask. The centerpiece of this issue is a set of responses to these two central

questions from a dozen or so scholars, policy people, agency staff, and others who have rich experience with the Mississippi. We found these short pieces extremely thought-provoking and are considering making them a regular feature.

The rest of this issue inaugurates the range of approaches we plan to take regularly.

Primary Sources takes us on a trip to local archives, exploring the distinctive perspectives offered from rich historical materials.

The Perspectives column provides insight onto pressing current events and issues on the Mississippi and beyond it.

In our Teaching and Practice section, we’ll draw on work completed by students or work that might be useful for readers to include in their teaching. This includes work from community as a way to create deeper, stronger connections between the formal and informal places we learn.

We also include a more inclusive take on the traditional review section. Our In Review column is a space for reviewing both traditional and nontraditional media, from books to exhibits to websites.

Many of our questions and thoughts about the Mississippi begin with the question “where”? Our Geographies feature draws from River Life’s River Atlas and other sources to illustrate how historical and current concerns on a particular topic map across the Mississippi and other bodies of water.

Finally, we offer a brief annotated link to items that have caught our eye in the past 4-6 weeks, called The Pulse.

Our intent here is simple, yet complicated. We want people, regardless of what brings them to our site, to learn something that they can use in

their river work, whether they work in resource management, in policy, in “informal education,” on a campus, or in some other field. If you leave our site thinking “That had not occurred to me. I’ll have to think about that some more,” then we will have been successful. Of course, if you are so interested or enthusiastic about what you

read that you make contact with the author, start an investigation of your own, or write to us for more information, that would be outstanding! That’s what we’re about: conversations and collaborations that increase the sustainability and inclusiveness of our relationships with rivers.

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About the Author

Patrick Nunnally coordinates the River Life Program in the Institute for Advanced Study at the University of Minnesota. He serves as editor for *Open Rivers* and one of the lead scholars for the University’s John E. Sawyer Seminar, “Making the Mississippi: Formulating New Water Narratives for the 21st Century and Beyond,” funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.