

BOSTON'S CHARLES RIVER BASIN

INTRODUCTION —

This issue of the *Journal of the Boston Society of Civil Engineers Section, ASCE*, had its origin in a modest plan to reprint the *Report of the Committee on Charles River Dam to the 1903 Massachusetts General Court*, including the report to that Committee of its Chief Engineer, John R. Freeman. The BSCE Section believed that by making this classic report readily available, and widely advertising the fact, it would be performing a great service, not only to *Journal* subscribers but to everyone involved in public affairs.

The report covers the comprehensive investigation of a major proposed public works project and its numerous significant impacts. Construction of a dam across the lower Charles River had been proposed many years before but was blocked by controversy. As a result of the Freeman investigation and report, the Commonwealth proceeded without delay to build the project, which ever since, has provided to Greater Boston its most distinguishing physical feature. The report is timeless in its clear presentation of controversial issues and of the engineering and scientific investigations and analyses applied to resolve them.

The plan to reprint the Charles River Dam report of 1903 did not occur by chance but was a result of the continual efforts of the BSCE Section's John R. Freeman Fund Committee to perpetuate the spirit of its benefactor's exemplary career. A happy series of events subsequently led to the more ambitious collection of papers herein assembled. First, the BSCE Section suggested to ASCE National that the society designate the Charles River Basin a National Historic Civil Engineering Landmark. The designation has been made and enthusiasm engendered by this event prompted the notion of a more elaborate publication than originally conceived. Next, a paper entitled *An Impact Assessment of the New Charles River Dam* by a group of seniors in the Department of Civil Engineering at MIT became available. The Committee then became aware of the large, indexed Freeman Collection in MIT's Archives and there unearthed John R. Freeman's draft of a paper (unpublished) on the Charles River dam investigation which he had delivered at a BSCE meeting in 1903. And, finally, we found in Deborah Cozort (a staff member of the MIT Archives) a needed catalyst and a major contributor to this publishing venture.

Hunter Rouse¹ called John R. Freeman "Probably the engineer who

¹Hunter Rouse, *Hydraulics in the United States 1776-1976*, Journal of BSCE Section, ASCE, Vol. 63, 1976-1977; also published by the Institute of Hydraulic Research, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, 1976.

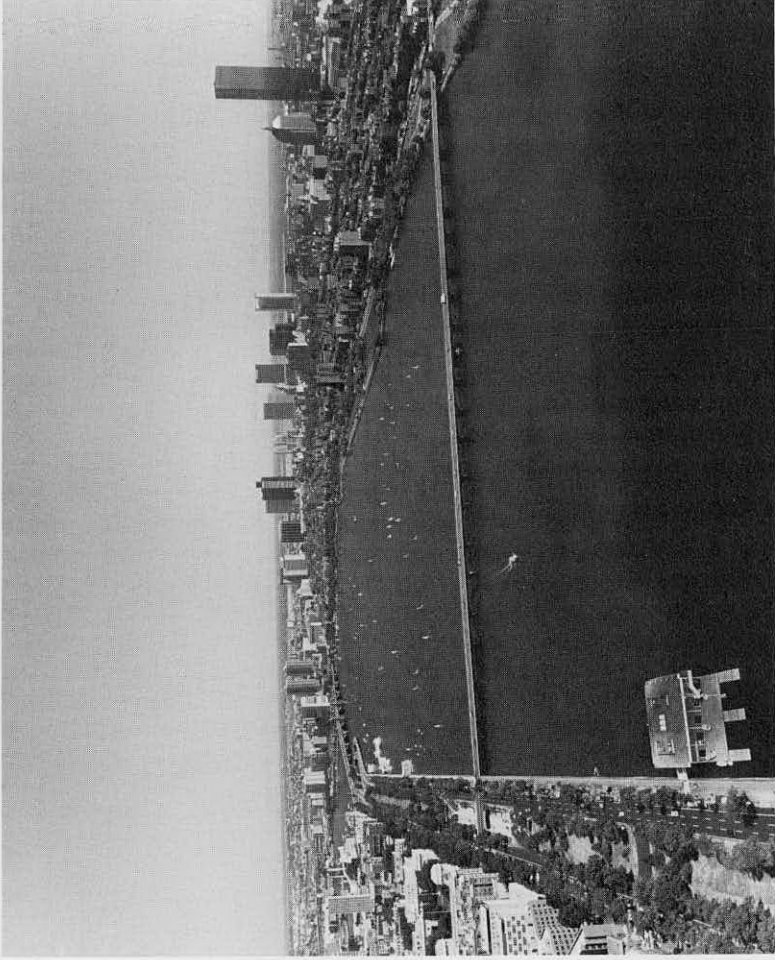
had the most profound and lasting effect on American hydraulics . . .". Almost 80 years after the fact, the current issue of the BSCE Section's *Journal* documents the difficult, but eventually successful, cooperative efforts of a broad cross-section of Boston area citizenry determined to perform a public good and the strong influence of a great civil engineer on these efforts. It should provide ideas and profound and lasting encouragement and inspiration to Americans and democrats everywhere who believe that public problems of all kinds can, and therefore should, be directly confronted and expeditiously solved.

The John R. Freeman Fund Committee

Lee Marc G. Wolman, David R. Campbell,
Harry L. Kinsel, Donald R.F. Harleman,
Lawrence C. Neale

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special assistance and support, cheerfully given by numerous individuals and organizations, have been essential to the accomplishment of this publication. In particular, the photographs made available by Captain Albert A. Swanson, Jack Maley and Julia Gianangelo of the Metropolitan District Commission; the liberal support of Chas. T. Main, Inc. in underwriting the extensive typing of Agnes Mace, the editorial efforts of Lee Wolman, and cover design work by Dick Peterson and Bob Santoro; the valuable suggestions of Al Kajander of Acme Printing Company; and the advice and encouragement of the Journal Editor, Ed Keane of Fay, Spofford and Thorndike, are gratefully acknowledged by the John R. Freeman Fund Committee.



View of Charles River Basin looking east; Cambridge at left, Boston at right,
(MDC photo by Jack Maley, 1979)



John R. Freeman