

**Guide to the
Little River Drainage District Records**

1907-1990

1197 linear feet

2005.189



Abstract

Records of the Little River Drainage District Corporation, the agency responsible for constructing and maintaining the system of diversion channel, ditches, levees, and catch-basins that drain the swamp and overflowed lands of southeast Missouri, 1907-present. Records include correspondence, minutes, financial and legal papers, field books, maps, publications, photographs, and artifacts.

The special collection staff is in the process of arranging this collection. While all of the collection is available to the public, some group/series are still unorganized.

Special Collections and Archives
Kent Library
One University Plaza, MS 4600
Southeast Missouri State University
Cape Girardeau, MO 63701

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Descriptive Overview

Provenance: The Little River Drainage District Corporation (LRDD) donated these records to Southeast Missouri State University Special Collections and Archives in 2005. In 2007, the LRDD donated the series of photograph albums. In 2008, the LRDD donated original surveying equipment.

Citation: Little River Drainage District Records, Special Collections and Archives, Southeast Missouri State University.

Restrictions: None

Other Relevant Collections:

Friant Papers, Julien N., 1909-1939;
Houck Papers, Louis and Giboney;
Houck Papers Accretion, Louis;
Kochtitzky Collection, Otto, 1916-1921, 1973;
Little River Drainage District Centennial Celebration Documents, 2007;
Little River Drainage District Contract, 1957;
Little River Drainage District Manuscript, undated;
Little River Drainage District Photographs, 1915-1918.

Other Relevant Publications: (available in Special Collections and Archives/Kent Library)

Kochtitzky, Otto. *Otto Kochtitzky; the story of a busy life*. Cape Girardeau, Mo. : Ramfre Press, [1957]. Call Number: 926.2 K813.
Wells, Larry Wayne, *Otto Kochtitzky and the drainage development of the southeast Missouri lowlands : a thesis*. 1972. Call Number: 378.7789 O-H629 1972-W
The Little River Drainage District of Southeast Missouri : 1907-present. Cape Girardeau, Mo. : The District, [1989?]. Call Number: 627.54 L727
The Little River Drainage District of Southeast Missouri. Cape Girardeau, Mo. : The District, [2007?]. Call Number: In Process

Organizational Sketch

Before the 20th century, the southeast corner of Missouri was covered in swampland and lowlands that were under water during much of the year. These lowlands extended from just below the southern boundary of Cape Girardeau to the Arkansas state line, and as far west as the escarpment of the Ozark plateau. Because of the swampy conditions, less than five per cent of the land was suitable for agriculture prior to the 1900s.¹

After the Civil War, the opening of the American West by railroad created settlement opportunities in lands more easily cultivated than Missouri's swamp and overflowed regions. By 1890, however, the Census revealed that the United States no longer had a frontier.² America's wetlands became the next area of interest for settlement and cultivation, and a National Drainage movement fueled these efforts.

¹ Larry Wayne Wells, *Otto Kochtitzky and the drainage development of the southeast Missouri lowlands* (MA Thesis, Southeast Missouri State College, 1972), 9.

² Gary L. McDowell, "Local Agencies and Land Development by Drainage: the Case of 'Swampeast' Missouri," (Ph.D. Diss., Columbia University, 1965), 18.

Descriptive Overview (cont).

Between 1860 and 1890, in southeast Missouri particularly, three important developments occurred that paved the way for drainage: the state transferred ownership of the swamplands to the counties; entrepreneurs built railroads in and out of the swamps; and large-scale lumbering operations began to clear the thickly-forested land. Once the lumber companies, aided by the railroads, cleared the forested areas of the swamps, they determined that they could sell the land they owned for profit if the land could be used for agricultural purposes. Draining the swamps would enable this to happen.

By the early 20th century, national and regional changes fostered the growth of drainage activities. Most of these early efforts were localized and uncoordinated. In 1905, however, the Little River Drainage District (LRDD) filed for incorporation. The eventual incorporation of this drainage district in 1907 forever altered the landscape of southeast Missouri.

The LRDD was incorporated on November 30, 1907, by the Circuit Court of Butler County. The district, which encompasses the seven counties of Bollinger, Cape Girardeau, Dunklin, New Madrid, Pemiscot, Scott and Stoddard, is headquartered in Cape Girardeau.

A five-person Board of Supervisors, elected by the district's landowners, provides governance for the corporation. The district's daily work is overseen by a Chief Engineer. The first Chief Engineer, Otto Kochtitzky, was responsible for devising the plan for draining the southeast Missouri swamplands. The LRDD adopted Kochtitzky's plan in 1909. The district slightly revised the plan in 1924, ten years into construction.

Work began on the drainage project in 1914, and continued through 1928. Ultimately, the project resulted in the construction of 958 miles of ditches and 304 miles of levees. In all, the extensive network of diversion channel, drainage ditches, levees and catch-basins, drains 1.2 million acres of land.

The LRDD financed the construction work by issuing \$11.1 million in bonds, beginning in 1913. The LRDD planned to pay the bond debt by collecting taxes from its landowners.³ The LRDD could not anticipate two events that would adversely impact the ability of its landowners to pay these taxes – the Mississippi River flood of 1927 and the national economic depression that began in 1929.

As a result of financial setbacks by landowners, by 1929 the LRDD was unable to make payments on construction bonds and still owed over \$8 million on the project. In 1937, the LRDD received a \$2.4 million loan from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC), a New Deal agency that provided assistance to businesses. By April 1952, the LRDD has settled the bond debt and was solvent.

Landowners still bear the burden of maintaining the district's ditches and levees, paying over \$1 million annually in taxes. The LRDD also works closely with the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers to maintain the headwater diversion channel and levee and the lower channels that collect all of the district's water to discharge into Big Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Northern Arkansas.

³ Under Missouri drainage law, public drainage corporations were permitted to collect taxes from property owners based on an assessment of benefits and damages to their land resulting from the drainage project.

Scope and Content Note

Records of the Little River Drainage District Corporation, including correspondence, minutes, financial and legal papers, field books, maps, publications, photographs, and artifacts.

Due to the size of the collection, the archivists decided that the collection was best divided into groups, series, and subseries. The groups reflect the broadest categories of material, and are generally based on their purpose of creation by the district. The series are more specific sets of records based on a common theme within the group; and the subseries are generally topical groupings within the series. Sub-subseries, similar in nature to subseries, are also employed when necessary.

For example:

Group	Series	Subseries	Sub-subseries
Group I: Board of Supervisors Files	Series III: Correspondence	Subseries 6: Chronological	n/a
Group II: Engineer/Secretary Files	Series II: William O'Brien	Subseries 3: Reports	n/a
Group III: Landowners Files	Series II: Land Classification	Subseries 1: Leases	Subseries b: Farm/Pasture Leases

Archivists Note: The Little River Drainage District Records is constantly being processed and this finding aid is updated frequently.

Groups or Series that are Underlined and [Blue](#) have a corresponding finding aid available for viewing.

Rules or Conventions: Finding Aid prepared using DACS.

Group/Series Descriptions

Group I: Board of Supervisors Files

Consists of correspondence with the board, board meeting minutes, and an index (1972-1995) to the minutes. Subjects include financial issues of the district, land acquisition and ownership, legal matters, and reports on construction work such as dredging and levee building, 1919-1995.

Series I: Meeting Minutes

Includes meeting attendance, resolutions, reports on claims, warrants, court cases, and finances, along with other information relating to the LRDD. Majority of the documents are not the originals but instead copies. Dates range from 1919 to 1995. Minutes are sorted chronologically. An index to the minutes from 1972 to 1995 is placed at the end of the series.

Series II: Committees

Includes lists, resolutions, and correspondence from various committees commissioned by the Board of Supervisors. Committees were made up of engineers and other employees of the District.

Series III: Correspondence

Correspondence with the board from landowners, companies, contractors and others. Also contains appended reports, newspaper clippings, and photographs. Correspondence is organized by individual or entity communicating with the board.

Series IV: Other Records

Includes miscellaneous Board records, including resolutions, annual reports, petitions, and other records. Folders are arranged alphabetically by title and dates range from 1909-1987.

Group II: Engineer/Secretary Files

The group is divided into the files of the individual engineers and secretaries of the LRDD and into general correspondence related to these positions. Correspondence pertains to financial issues, construction work, supply requisitions, personnel and legal matters, and other administrative issues. Each series has a finding aid.

Series I: Otto Kochinsky, 1907-1910

Incoming and outgoing correspondence from Otto Kochitzky's time as the first Chief Engineer of the Little River Drainage District.

Series II: William O'Brien, Chief Engineer, 1910-1918

Files of Chief Engineer William O'Brien consisting of business and personal records pertaining to construction work, supply requisitions, personnel and legal matters, and other administrative issues.

Series III: L.L. Hidinger, Chief Engineer, 1918-1932

Files of Chief Engineer L. L. Hidinger consisting of business and personal records pertaining to construction work, supply requisitions, personnel and legal matters, and other administrative issues.

Group/Series Descriptions (cont.)

Series IV: E. S. Blaine, Resident Engineer, 1920-1927

Records of E.S. Blaine, Resident Engineer of the Little River Drainage District Corporation (LRDD), 1920-1927. Consisting of business and personal correspondence, reports, contracts, financial documents, blueprints and photographs of Caney Basin.

Series V: Earl Schultz, Resident Engineer, 1929-1937, Chief Engineer, 1938-1975 and Secretary, 1957-1975

Correspondence between Earl Shultz, primarily in the role of Secretary-Treasurer of the Little River Drainage District (LRDD), and businesses, individuals, and Little River Drainage District Employees.

Series VI: George S. Hanford, Secretary/Treasurer, 1907-1920

Records of George S. Hanford, the Secretary/Treasurer for the Little River Drainage District (LRDD), 1907-1920. Records consist of correspondence with companies and individuals, correspondence regarding banking and bonds, with LRDD staff and subcontractors, and various blueprints.

Series VII: B.F. Burns, Secretary/Treasurer, 1921-1953

Records of B.F. Burns, Secretary/Treasurer of the Little River Drainage District Corporation (LRDD), 1920-1953. Records consisting of correspondence and remittances. Correspondence with individual companies and persons regarding LRDD business matters, taxes, financial and banking matters, personnel, equipment and supplies.

Series VIII: Burl Underwood, Secretary/Treasurer, 1953-1956

Records of Burl Underwood, Secretary-Treasurer for Little River Drainage District (LRDD) from 1953 until April 1956. Records consist primarily of correspondence with individual companies and persons regarding LRDD business matters, taxes, financial and banking matters, personnel, equipment and supplies.

Series IX: N.C. Frissell, Assistant Chief Engineer, 1915-1919

Reports and correspondence from N.C. Frissell, the assistant chief engineer of the Little River Drainage District. Frissell oversaw field work and reported on conditions and maintenance of ditches throughout the district

Group III: Landowners Files

Includes meeting minutes, leases, contracts, and other documents related to land in the district. Subjects include elections, land ownership and leasing, meetings, and finances.

Series I: Annual Meeting Materials

Documents from annual landowner meetings, which are usually held in October, dating from 1907-1988. Materials include meeting minutes, reports given at the meeting, and documents relating to the election of the Board of Supervisors.

Series II: Land Classification Materials

Documents regarding land within the district including land owned and leased by the LRDD. Materials date from 1929-1957 and include leases and other types of contracts.

Group/Series Descriptions (cont.)

Group IV: Administrative Files

These series consist of materials generated in the course of the LRDD's daily business activities:

Series I: Numeric Files

Records, primarily correspondence, pertaining to administrative matters of the Little River Drainage District Corporation (LRDD). Records include records on engineering, ditches and ditch construction, railroads, and national drainage issues and represent communications between all parties within the LRDD, including the Board of Supervisors, the Chief Engineer, resident engineers, consulting engineers, landowners, and vendors.

Series II: Construction/Maintenance

Series III: Specifications

Series IV: Contracts/Estimates/Bids

Subseries 1: Maintenance-Monthly Contract Estimates

Estimates the Little River Drainage District contractors produced for the Chief Engineer of the Little River Drainage District. The Chief Engineer would use these estimates to review and approve the work, such as the construction of levees and ditches.

Group V: Financial Files

These series consist of materials that deal with the income and expenses of the district.

Series I: Taxes

Records pertaining to taxes paid to and owed to the Little River Drainage District by the property owners within the district. Includes general correspondence, court summons and warrants pertaining to delinquent taxes, tax assessments and remittances, audits, and other official documents.

Subseries 1: County Tax Files

Subseries 2: Delinquent Tax Files

Subseries 3: Tax Suits

Subseries 4: Other Tax Documents

Series II: Warrants

Paper work associated with the vouchers that the Little River Drainage District issued authorizing payment or receipt of money. Warrants are arranged by warrant number, which were mostly issued in chronological order. Dates range from 1908-1990.

Series III: Accounts Receivable

Records of the Accounts Receivable Department, under the control of the District Secretary and Board of Regents. Materials include correspondence, work orders, acquisitions orders, maintenance records and cost finding accounts and date from 1911-1933.

Series IV: Supply Orders

Correspondence between representatives of the Little River Drainage District, usually the Chief Engineer, and various suppliers. Correspondence includes information on items purchased and payment for those items.

Group/Series Descriptions (cont.)

Series V: Payroll

Records of the pay issued to the employees of District

Series VI: Bonds

Records of the financial bonds issued to help pay for initial construction and maintenance of the district.

Series VII: Claims

Worksheets of the operating costs of the Little River Drainage District, such as salaries, equipment costs, taxes, etc, that were prepared for review by the Board of Supervisors. Dates range from 1936-1987.

Group VI: Legal Files

Documents relating to legal issues of the Little River Drainage District (LRDD). Subjects include the establishment of the LRDD, insurance, court cases, legal counsel and other miscellaneous items.

Series I: Establishment of LRDD

Contains documents related to the establishment and organization of the Little River Drainage District as a functioning, legal entity. Primarily includes documents from Missouri circuit courts. Arranged chronologically.

Series II: Insurance

Contains documents related to the retirement plans and property insurance purchased by the Little River Drainage District and private parties.

Series III: Court Cases

Contains documents relate to lawsuits taken up by or against the Little River Drainage District. Most documents pertain to objections made by various parties to the incorporation of their land into the Little River Drainage District. Primarily contains documents from Missouri courts such as judgments, petitions, etc. Also contains correspondence, from the Little River Drainage District attorneys. All suits are against the Little River Drainage District unless otherwise noted. Arranged chronologically.

Series IV: Legal Counsel

Contains documents related to legal representation provided for the Little River Drainage District. The vast majority of the series pertains to the law firm of Oliver and Oliver. Arranged chronologically.

Series V: General

Contains documents relating to legal matters outside the scope of other series. Contains documents which originated from the LRDD and private parties. Mostly consists of legally binding agreements made between the LRDD and private companies and individuals. Arranged chronologically.

Group VII: Surveying Materials

Notebooks kept by the engineers working in the field to record survey data pertaining to ditch construction (e.g., location, elevation data, computation of cross-sections). Also recorded meteorological and environmental conditions.

Group/Series Descriptions (cont.)

Group VIII: Meteorological and Climatologic Data

Records covering many aspects of the weather that faced the crews working on the Little River Drainage District. The major subjects include daily weather, river, and crop reports, precipitation totals, water flow and discharge measurements, river stage logs, facts about local rivers from the United States Geological Survey, and Flood control plans for the Mississippi River Basin. Along with studies and long range planning done by the U.S.G.S. about water conservation in Missouri

Group IX: Public Works Projects

Materials relating to the work done in conjunction with federally-funded public works projects during the Great Depression, 1935-1942. Both series have finding aids.

Series I: Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)

CCC camp files and Public Works Administration (PWA) grant application, including official paperwork, correspondence, newspaper articles, and other related material. Series is divided into subseries for general camp files and for the three southeast Missouri camps at: Hayti (Camp SCS-MO-37), Delta (Camp D-3-MO), and New Madrid (Camp-D-4-MO). Files include correspondence, reports, contracts, plans and specifications, maps and blueprints.

Series II: Works Progress Administration Papers (WPA)

Records of the Little River Drainage District Company's work in conjunction with the Works Progress Administration program. Includes proposals, financial paper work, and reports on work completed.

Group X: Visual Materials

Series I: Artifacts

Series II: Photographs

Images of the land, workers, and construction projects done within the Little River Drainage District. Some images are available for viewing through our digital collections; others are only available on site.

Series III: Maps

Series IV: Blueprints

Group XI: Clippings

Newspaper clippings on various topics collected by the LRDD. Includes a wide range of clippings about the CCC, floods, agriculture, the Great Depression, the New Deal and other topics. The majority of clippings pertain to the Mississippi River flood of 1927 and its impact, and agricultural topics.

Group XII: Publications

Contains publications created by the LRDD, the U. S. government, non-governmental entities, and vendors that sold machinery and supplies germane to drainage and engineering work.

Series I: LRDD

Contains books, booklets, and other published documents produced by the LRDD.

Group/Series Descriptions (cont.)

Group XII: Publications

Series II: Government

Contains books, booklets, and other documents created by or for the federal, state, and local government on various subjects relating to the LRDD.

Series III: Non-governmental entities

Contains books and booklets produced by nongovernment entities on various subjects relating to the LRDD.

Series IV: Vendor catalogs and pamphlets

Contains brochures, booklets, and letters advertising products such as books, dredging equipment, office supply, tractors, and other subjects related to work at the LRDD. Series is arranged alphabetically by company.

Group XIII: Other Districts

Materials collected by the LRDD concerning other drainage districts, corporations, and entities that the Little River Drainage District cooperated with.

Series I: Mississippi Valley Flood Control Branch Correspondence

Materials sent by the Associated General Contractors of America (AGCA) Mississippi Valley Flood Control Branch and the Mississippi Valley Flood Control Association (MVFCA) to the Little River Drainage District. These two entities work with the federal and local governments and agencies to control flooding along the Mississippi River and its tributaries. Includes bids, news bulletins, and reports, and correspondence.

Series II: Mississippi River Commission

Incoming and outgoing correspondence between the Mississippi River Commission (MRC) and the engineers of the Little River Drainage District (LRDD).

Series III: Elk Chute District

Series IV: Overlapping Districts

Appendix 1: Little River Drainage District Ledgers, 1910-1993

The executive, administrative, financial and legal ledgers of the Little River Drainage District Corporation, 1910-1993.

Appendix 2: Filing System Guide

Created by Chief Engineer William O'Brien, the Little River Drainage District used this system between 1910-1960.