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News Release

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NPS Rangers at Mississippi River Drawdown

The Corps of Engineers is drawing down the pool between the Upper and Lower St. Anthony Falls dams to conduct an inspection of the Bassett Creek Tunnel. February 20th, on the Stone Arch Bridge, National Park Service (NPS) Rangers from the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area will talk with the interested public about the history of the Saint Anthony Falls area and interpret what may be seen with the river level this low. "Among other things, the foundation of the 1897 dam should be visible across much of the river bed," said John Anfinson, National Park Service historian.

Originally dubbed "De la Barre's Folly", the dam was constructed in 1897 to provide power to the city's growing street car network and the adjoining steam-power plant, now used by the University of Minnesota. A costly proposition, Austrian immigrant William De la Barre, an engineer for the St. Anthony Falls power company, calculated it was possible to generate enough power from the rapids below the falls to justify the investment.

What might you see? Anfinson once received an email from someone who described seeing part of a train engine when the lower pool went out after the lower hydro station collapsed in 1987. "One of the most exciting things people will see is the Stone Arch Bridge as it was intended. Normally the arches are flooded by the Lower Dam so the piers appear shorter," said David Wiggins, Park Ranger. "This 1884 engraving from Scientific American shows the bridge rising up above the dry riverbed." (image provided)

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