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WATER-SUPPLY PAPER 586

SURFACE WATER SUPPLY OF THE
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PART VI. MISSOURI RIVER BASIN

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EXPLANATION OF DATA

The data presented in this report cover the year beginning October 1, 1923, and ending September 30, 1924. At the beginning of January in most parts of the United States much of the precipitation in the preceding three months is stored in the form of snow or ice, or in ponds, lakes, and swamps, or as ground water, and this stored water passes off in the streams during the spring break-up. At the end of September, on the other hand, the only stored water available for run-off is possibly a small quantity in the ground; therefore the run-off for the year beginning October 1 is practically all derived from precipitation within the year.

The base data collected at gaging stations consist of records of stage, measurements of discharge, and general information used to

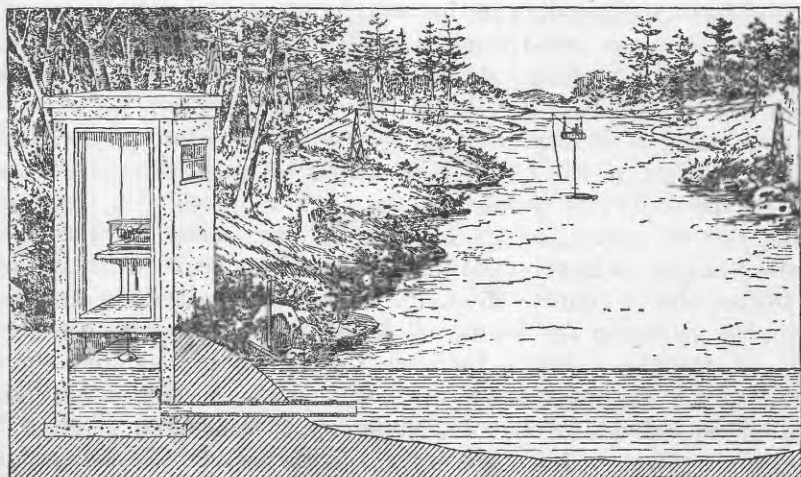


FIGURE 1.—Typical gaging station

supplement the gage heights and discharge measurements in determining the daily flow. The records of stage are obtained either from direct readings on a staff or chain gage or from a water-stage recorder that gives a continuous record of the fluctuations. Measurements of discharge are made with a current meter. The general methods are outlined in standard textbooks on the measurement of river discharge. A typical gaging station, equipped with water-stage recorder and measuring cable and car, is shown in Figure 1.

From the discharge measurements rating tables are prepared that give the discharge for any stage. The application of the daily gage height to these rating tables gives the daily discharge from which the monthly and yearly mean discharges are determined.

The data presented for each gaging station in the area covered by this report comprise a description of the station, a table giving results

of discharge measurements, a table showing the daily discharge of the stream, and a table of monthly and yearly discharge and run-off.

If the base data are insufficient to determine the daily discharge, tables giving daily gage height and results of discharge measurements are published.

The description of the station gives, in addition to statements regarding location and equipment, information in regard to any conditions that may affect the permanence of the stage-discharge relation, covering such subjects as the occurrence of ice, the use of the stream for log driving, shifting of control, and the cause and effect of backwater; it gives also information as to diversions that decrease the flow at the gage, artificial regulation, maximum and minimum recorded stages, and the accuracy of the records.

The table of daily discharge gives, in general, the discharge in second-feet corresponding to the mean of the gage heights read each day. At stations on streams subject to sudden or rapid diurnal fluctuation the discharge obtained from the rating table and mean daily gage height may not be the true mean discharge for the day. If such stations are equipped with water-stage recorders the mean daily discharge may be obtained by averaging quantities of discharge for regular intervals during the day or by means of a discharge integrator, an instrument operating on the principle of the planimeter and containing as an essential element the rating curve of the station.

In the table of monthly discharge the column headed "Maximum" gives the mean flow for the day when the mean gage height was highest. As the gage height is the mean for the day it does not indicate correctly the stage when the water surface was at crest height, and the corresponding discharge was consequently larger than given in the maximum column. Likewise, in the column headed "Minimum," the quantity given is the mean flow for the day when the mean gage height was lowest. The column headed "Mean" is the average flow in cubic feet per second during the month. On this average flow computations recorded in the remaining columns, which are defined on page 2, are based.

ACCURACY OF FIELD DATA AND COMPUTED RESULTS

The accuracy of stream-flow data depends primarily (1) on the permanence of the stage-discharge relation and (2) on the accuracy of observation of stage, measurement of flow, and interpretation of records.

A paragraph in the description of the station gives information regarding the (1) permanence of the stage-discharge relation, (2) precision with which the discharge rating curve is defined, (3) refinement of gage readings, (4) frequency of gage readings, and (5) methods of

