

BIRMINGHAM ECCENTRIC

The story beneath our feet

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CORRESPONDENT

For 50 years, Marion Beck has lived in her 90-year-old house on the quiet corner of Purdy and George streets in Birmingham, never suspecting the underground, historic surprise at her corner. Like everyone else, she turned on her faucets and flushed her toilets and never thought about where the water came from or went.

About 100 years ago, immigrant workers built at her residential corner a major, unique brick sewer intersection that serves much of Birmingham. On Tuesday morning, workers from DiPonio Contracting from Shelby Township excavated the intersection to install new sewer and water lines

and revealed history.

Foreman Steve Hamilton said the work was so well-built that if they had not had to upgrade the sewer interchange, it could have lasted hundreds of more years. City of Birmingham Engineer Vic Strek, DiPonio Site Supervisor Jesse Kyle and others said that the design and work was unique. Even Birmingham's former City Manager Bob Kenning came by for a look.

Bob Pousho from the Oakland County Water Resource Commission was observing and said the new mainline sewer connection would be handling seven different sewer lines and would be one of the key Birmingham sewer

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Robin Olsen directs the excavator operator to remove the top of the brick sewer interceptor between an active gas line on the left and a water line on the right.



Even a sewer can be historical. This study design dates back decades.



PHOTOS BY CARROLL DEWEESE

Homeowner Marion Beck takes a photo of the uncovering of the historical brick interceptor sewer.

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connectors for the future.

One of the workers, Robin Olsen, commented on how careful they had to be in the excavation. They had to dig

around existing live gas and water lines and keep the sewer working. The 4-inch water line will later be replaced with a much bigger line as part of the project, but until they replace it they must keep it in operation.

The project is part of the larger George, Ann and Manchester paving project.

The work involves more than paving. It involves upgrading water, sewer and paving in the affected areas. Work is expected to last into late fall.

Other challenges await the workers. They have to contend not only with gas, water and sewer lines, but underground fiber and cable, duct bank, irrigation and other obstacles to complete their work. Yet nothing they face will probably be as interesting as a 100-year-old major sewer connector that was "built for the ages" and hidden from those that had lived by it and walked over it for years.