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Section Boats on Pennsylvania's Main Line Canal

Terry Woods

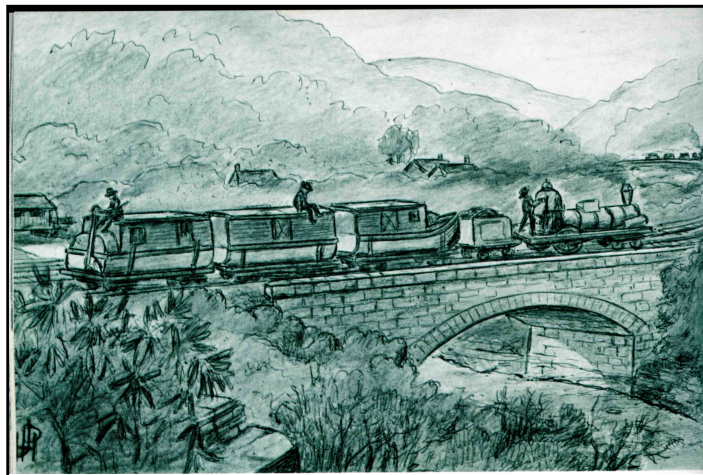
In October 1834, Jessie Christman, a man planning to immigrate west, arrived at the Hollidaysburg Basin at the eastern end of the Allegheny Portage Railroad. He planned to sell his boat, transport his 'holdings' over the mountain, buy another boat at Johnstown and continue on his way. Unfortunately, he couldn't find a buyer. Christman then met with John Dougherty, who was the forwarding agent of the Reliance Transportation Line. The small size of Christman's craft, twenty-nine feet long by seven feet wide, convinced Dougherty that one of the standard rail cars on the Portage Railroad could be adapted to carry Christman's boat. Dougherty modified one of the cars and the entire craft along with Christman, his family, and their worldly goods, were transported over the Allegheny Mountain.

John Dougherty worked for the next five years on perfecting the design for a canal boat that could be transferred from a canal basin to a specifically designed rail carriage and hauled over the Portage Railroad, thus eliminating the need to transfer its cargo twice during the mountain crossing. In designing his unique craft, he designed the boat to be constructed as two or three separate hulls connected by flexible couplings. This plan was a revision of a patent held

by a John Elger of Baltimore. It was a method of converting rail cars to boats. Dougherty was operating two-section craft by 1837. The only possible disadvantage to his design was that his craft were a bit longer and narrower than conventional canal boats. And, they required special "trucks" (chassis and wheel sets) to negotiate the Main Line's many inclined planes.

Pennsylvania's Main Line Transportation

system between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh had two railroads, the Allegheny Portage and the Philadelphia & Columbia. The latter was eighty-two miles long and required an inclined plane at each end. Hollidaysburg and Johnstown were thirty-six miles apart, but it took ten inclined planes and the



Taken from The Amazing Pennsylvania Canals by William H. Shank, pg 38.

intermediate levels to get over the mountain. Dougherty's section boats would eliminate the need for a passenger or a pound of cargo to be taken from the boat. This system was touted as being much more convenient for passengers and more reliable for shippers (the less handling of freight the less chance of damage or loss).

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The objectives of the American Canal Society are to encourage the preservation, restoration, interpretation, and use of the historical navigation canals of the Americas; to save threatened canals; and to provide an exchange of canal information. Manuscripts and other correspondence consistent with these objectives are welcome.

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Dougherty then began a six-year campaign to make sectional boats the standard boats operating on the Main Line as they were the only craft designed to travel the entire distance from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh without transshipment being required. Dougherty also lobbied the State to purchase rail trucks for the inclined plains on the Columbia and Portage railroads.

He attracted additional investors into his Reliance Transportation Line. Despite the influx of additional capital and a novel boat design, though, the company folded in 1839. His former partners acquired the rights to build three-section craft and began the Reliance Portable Boat Line. Dougherty planned to compete with a four-section craft that he had readied by 1840. He didn't oversee the running of these himself but instead, leased them to others. His ultimate goal was to sell his patent to the State of Pennsylvania so that publicly owned section boats would be available to everyone.

Unfortunately, the then current situation on the Main Line was one of near monopoly, run by a few forwarding companies, and assisted (so the word was) by many in State Government. So opposition to the universal conversion to section boats was substantial. The large forwarding companies had millions of dollars invested in traditional boats, warehouses and cargo handling companies near the inclines along the Main Line. They argued that conventional boats could carry forty tons of cargo, while a section boat could only carry about seven tons per section. And that the cost to the Commonwealth of purchasing special trucks (wheel sets and chassis) to trundle section boats over the inclined plains, would only add to the Main Line's indebtedness.

Dougherty persisted in his lobbying and after much more wrangling, some apparent agreement was finally reached. During the winter of 1842-43, the State Legislature passed a bill to spend up to \$40,000 to contract for eighteen four-section boats and add new boat slips to accommodate these boats at Hollidaysburg and Johnstown. But after all this effort and turmoil, the State did not purchase

Dougherty's patent. and it seems that Dougherty was paid only rental fees for the boats used.

And Dougherty later learned that the state's section boats received better rates than his or his leased-out boats. He could not compete on the cost of shipping. Several traditional shipping lines, also feeling the pinch, brought a lawsuit against the Commission in May of 1843. Pennsylvania's Supreme Court ruled in favor of the State.

Dougherty himself now mounted a full attack on the Commission, going to the newspapers with his story of how he was forced to comply with the 1842 legislation or be banned from moving his boats over the State-owned Portage Railroad. The following spring, the State changed its policy so that private section boats could pass over the State's rail line of the Portage on equal terms with the State-owned boats.

There has always been a great deal of controversy on just how popular section boats were along the Main Line. One account states that in 1849, one third of all revenue earned on the Portage came from section boats. Other accounts state that "they never made much of an inroad into the use of standard boats."

All the controversy became a moot point in 1852 when the 'New' Portage Railroad, eliminating the inclined plains, was opened. There appears to be no accurate record of how quickly section boats fell out of favor after that.

The Pennsylvania Railroad purchased the New Portage Railroad two years later and operated it as part of their statewide line until their famous Horseshoe Curve line was opened providing a more direct east-west route.

John Dougherty never received more than a few thousand dollars from the State for the use of his invention. In fact, he never received much income at all from his invention. Many were built by a number of firms, all which infringed upon his patent. He eventually sold off his business as the canal inched toward obscurity. He always remained an inventor though, albeit an unsuccessful one. John died in Pittsburgh in the early 1880s.

Canal Society of New York State Winter Symposium

March 6, 2021

The 2020 Winter Symposium had an air of doom about it. Covid was spreading about the land, and although there were fears about gathering in large crowds, no restrictions had been put into place. In spite of that, the Symposium had a near record attendance. Within the week, most of the state and country would be shut down, as were most events and gatherings.

Anyone who has worked at organizing one of these events knows it can be a months long project. With the uncertainty about who and how to gather in the late winter of 2021, the planners decided to proceed with a virtual Symposium. Invitations were mailed and emailed and around ninety-five people signed up for the six-hour event. The cost was a reasonable \$20.00 per access.

I had attended a number of these virtual meetings over the past year and typically the process is fairly simple and straightforward. You just click on the link and you are in. The sign in for this meeting was somehow a bit more complicated and I (and others) had issues with the sign in. I was told later that the CSNYS had decided to use a pay-wall process that added some complications. In the future they might skip this. Aside from this small glitch, the meeting went very well.

The CSNYS decided to use a professional service to coordinate the speakers and be on hand to address any technical difficulties. They also had to purchase the software and IT needed to host such a large number of screens and not have to deal with time limits. The young lady, I believe it was Rachel, could be seen aiding and addressing issues and this really helped the event go smoothly. This service also allowed for A-I driven closed-captioning, and I was told that those who used that service found it to be fairly accurate.

Ruth Naperstack served as the moderator, introducing the speakers and reading off the questions and comments after. With my late sign-in, I missed the introduction of Thomas Grasso, who made some remarks and introduced the first speaker. Thomas has been going through some rather difficult health issues, and it was nice to see him looking stronger.

Bill Hullfish was the first speaker. Last year we carried a review of his book, [The Erie Canal Sings](#), in these pages. Although I had read the book, it was nice to hear directly from Bill. He was able to sing a few lines to illustrate the similarities, differences, and adaptations that occurred from song to song. I could read the

passage about the use of “call and response,” but hearing it sung helped my understanding.

The second speaker was Robert Stopper who spoke about the Three Erie canals in Wayne County. He presented a tour of the canals from west to east using both maps and photos to show each of the sites that one can see today. There are places in Wayne County where the first Erie Canal went around the north end of a hill, the Enlarged went around the south side, and the Barge Canal used the canalized river. This bit of rerouting over the years has left quite a number of sites to see and explore. As a result, Bob’s tour proceeded very quickly as to get them all in. The comments also allowed concerned or interested parties the opportunities to add links and other info to the conversation.

The organizers allowed breaks of about ten minutes between presentations. This was nice to be able to run to the kitchen to grab a fresh coffee and to run to the bath for other reasons.

The third speaker was Jean Mackay of the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor. There are a number of canal heritage corridors, but the Erie is the only one with an active canal. Part of the reason for pointing this out was the air of uncertainty over the future of the NYS Canals. The ECNHC has 500 miles of waterway, 425 miles of trail, and 200 cities, towns, villages. The ECNHC was designated in the year 2000, and the region became a National Historic Landmark in 2016. Jean’s presentation was heavily influenced by the recent news and she made the case for the public infrastructure and benefits that served to counter the narrative that the canal was old and out-of-date.

One of the growing narratives is the key role of the NYS Canals in the cruising of the great loop. The Great Loop is the connection of waterways that allows boaters to cruise through the Great Lakes, Mississippi, Gulf of Mexico, the Atlantic Intercoastal, Hudson, and Erie. There are many variations on this route, but the Erie or Champlain serve as the critical link between the Atlantic and Great Lakes.

Jean also highlighted the benefits of the canal and canalside trails and amenities that generate \$1.3 billion in tourism dollars each year, and another 6.2 billion in economic activity.

For many years, the keynote “before lunch” speaker has been given to the New York State Canals Executive Director. Brian Stratton has held this position since April

2011 and has presented his yearly recap and what is new talk since 2012. Director Stratton noted the good side of the pandemic as people sought out open spaces, parks, and trails. This has helped people in their “rediscovery” of the canals.

For the most part, Mr. Stratton stayed away from the current controversy about the renaming of the canals and shortening of the season and instead noted the creation of regional canal councils that will replace the Recreationway Commission. These councils will divide the state into the Mohawk, Central, Western, and Champlain regions.

He pointed out that the Erie Canal Trail had been opened across the state and that the focus on the trails will shift to the rehabilitation of the older trail sections. Other upcoming projects include the reconstruction of Lock 11 in Amsterdam in 2024, a whitewater park at Cayuga Seneca Lock 1 in 2021-2024, a Madison County canal-side redevelopment pocket neighborhood in 2022, the construction of the Brockport loop around SUNY Brockport in 2024, and the creation of high-end camping sites at Camp Rockway, near Champlain Lock 5.

There will also be what is called the “iconic lighting” of selected structures such as at Lock E-17 in Little Falls, the Fairport lift bridge, the lighthouses on Oneida Lake, and the Mohawk Bridge dam in Amsterdam.

The Director did stress that there would be a full canal season in 2021, although what is called a full season these days is about a month shorter than a full season of a few years ago. He also mentioned the NYS Canal Conference in Schenectady, which will likely be an special event for him as he served as the city mayor for years.

After a short lunch break, Tom Feeney presented on the five Feeney generations who have worked on the canals and waterfronts. In short, Owen Feeney was of Irish descent and immigrated to America in 1860. While in Ireland he had worked for Harland and Wolff of Belfast, the firm that would later build the Titanic. In America he was a stone mason on the D&H Canal. His son, Thomas J, founded the shipyard on the Rondout Creek in Kingston in 1904. In the years between 1917-1931, the firm built fourteen wooden boats a year, mostly scows and barges. They then began to build tugboats. In total they constructed twenty-six tugboats, and in 1941 they made the switch from wood to steel. The Feeney family also worked on the NYS canals, and they are featured in the book, Low Bridges and High Water.

The CSNYS Executive Director Cabryn Gurdo was the next speaker and she presented an overview of the Port Byron Erie Canal Heritage Park and the challenges

of operating during a pandemic. The staff was reduced as was the overall occupancy, and the smaller buildings were kept closed. Paw print stickers were applied to the floor to help guide people through the building, and recorded audio tours were used instead of personal guides. The cleaning was increased from once a week to daily and all items that could be touched by the public were removed.

Nancy Uffindell, a volunteer at the Mt. Hope Cemetery in Rochester, presented a tour of the grounds that highlighted the notable canal people who were buried in the cemetery. She had presented this tour when the World Canals Conference visited Rochester in 2010.

The last presenters were David Kinyon and Dr. Patrick McGreevy. They spoke about Mountain Ridge (Lockport, NY) and the Flight of Five locks. Dr. McGreevy is the author of Stairway to Empire, Lockport, the Erie Canal, and the Shaping of America. He spoke about the geologic features of western New York and how they helped and hindered the construction of the canal. David Kinyon spoke about the reconstruction of the Lockport Five and what the work revealed about the differences between the original and Enlarged locks. David has been at the helm of the reconstruction efforts since early in the 2000s.

The locks are fairly iconic and they are often used in stories and articles about the Erie Canal. The five locks lifted the boats sixty feet and the original locks were the only twinned locks on the system. During the Enlargement, all the Erie Canal locks were twinned. During the construction of the Barge Canal the southern locks were removed and rebuilt as two locks of twenty-five foot lifts, and the remaining flight of five were used as a by-pass weir.

In 2003 a report on the possible rehabilitation of the remaining five said that the project was possible. It took another ten years to source the funds needed to carry out the project, and work began on locks 69 and 70. In 2019 lock 68 was rehabilitated. This left the last two locks which will require the most extensive work at the cost of 14.3 million dollars. It is the goal to make it possible to navigation through the locks once the work is complete. The goal is to have the locks ready in 2025 for the 200th celebration and be able to pass the new Seneca Chief through. The Seneca Chief is being built in Buffalo.

David also spoke about the addition of an art installation to the stairs at the locks. A popular period photo shows a group of twelve lock workers and a young girl sitting on the lock steps. Life-sized bronze sculptors will recreate the photograph, with the idea that tourists can sit

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Muskingum Navigation Rehabilitation

Michael Riley

The Muskingum River Navigation is called the oldest continuously operating canal system in the United States with its hand operated lock gates and valves. Built in a time when hand-dug, artificial canals were the rule, this system predates New York State's canalized rivers by some 60 years. A recent email included the minutes of a meeting regarding the rehabilitation of the 170-year-old locks and dams by the State of Ohio.

The Muskingum River flows south from its headwaters near Coshocton to the confluence with the Ohio River at Marietta. Over the 112-mile route, the river falls 168 feet with 10 locks. There were once 12 locks, but Lock 1 at Marietta was removed after the Ohio River was dammed and the level raised. On the northern end, the lock between Zanesville and Coshocton has been taken out of service, but remains intact.

The system was constructed in the late 1830s and '40s, and it was ready for use in 1841. The locks were 35 by 160 feet with an average lift of 15 feet. Lock 10 at Zanesville is a double lock, and the rest were singles. The river navigation was connected to the Ohio and Erie Canal by a three-mile-long sidecut canal that was located in Dresden. The junction of the sidecut canal was due north of Dresden near Raiders Road.

The system had been maintained by the Corps of Engineers but they ceased operations in 1948. In 1958 control was returned to the State of Ohio who rehabilitated the locks and dams and reopened the navigation to pleasure boats. In the year 2000 the entire system was designated as a National Historic Civil Engineering Landmark.

The old locks are in need of rehabilitation and the log dams are in need of replacement. On January 7, 2021, a number of stakeholders came together to discuss future plans. These included the US Corps of Engineers, The Ohio Department of Natural Resources, the Ohio Historic Preservation Office, Heritage Ohio, the Osage Nation, Gannett Fleming, and Gray and Pape Heritage Management.

Some of the key points were;

-ODNR has maintained the lock and dam system for public use since the 1960s. ODNR plans to keep the system open to the public, and safety is the top priority. Because of the age of the system, it frequently requires maintenance and repair.

-Concrete caps added in 1910 over timber cribs and

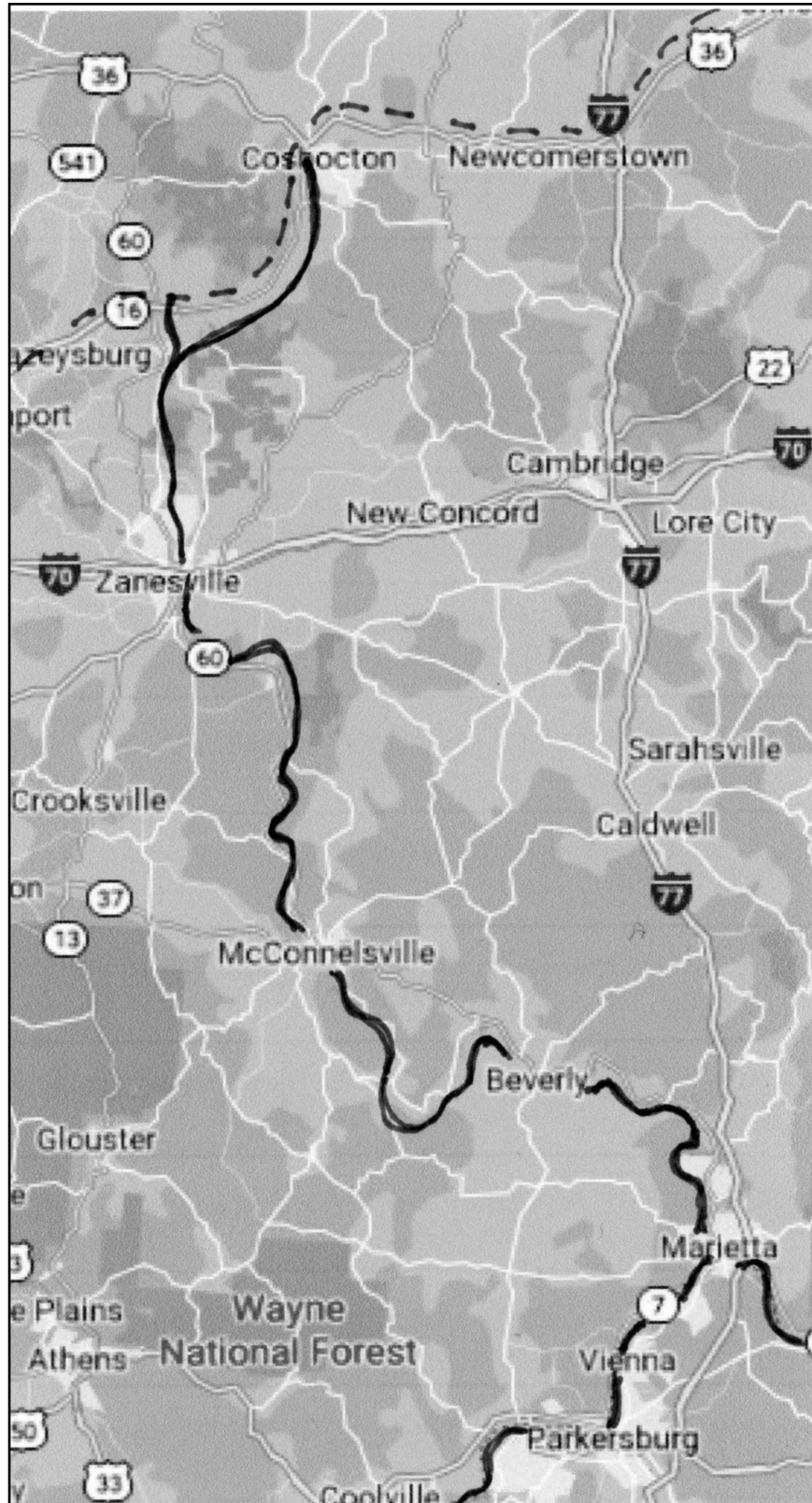
the submerged nature of the run-of-river dams make it difficult to assess the integrity of the underlying structures with a high degree of confidence. Engineering determination was made that the timber crib dams should be removed and replaced.

-The river has changed a lot since the dams were built. More water is coming down the river because of more rain, and there are many reservoirs upstream. The river rages more than in the past, and the structures have taken a beating. Making them safe for recreation is important. ODNR needs to retain the historic value while responding to climate change and river changes.

-The lock walls were subject to global stability analysis, and with one exception they are [marginally] stable. Accordingly, most recommendations for lock walls are minimal and include replacing or repairing mechanical components, miter gates, and valves and patching walls. Therefore, no deep excavations are anticipated. One exception to this is the Beverly landside lock wall. Settlement at this location required some excavation to identify a historic mill race, which is documented in a Phase I cultural report that is being finalized for submittal. The repair here may require some excavation on the back side of the wall. None of the other locks should require deep ground disturbance.

-ODNR would like to do more, but as is the case with many state agencies, ODNR has continued to see cuts to the budgets for maintenance and staffing. ODNR is not in a position to hire more staff, so mitigation must be possible using existing staff. They can't commit to creating a museum or give tours of the system at this time. ODNR is open to developing self-guided tours, updates to the web site – getting more of the existing information out to the public. ODNR acknowledges that dam removal is very popular. Low-head dams are a safety issue, and they are ecologically unfriendly. But ODNR made a conscious decision to put a lot of money back into the Muskingum system because of its historic and recreational value.

It is exciting to see that the State of Ohio has made the commitment to preserving and restoring this river navigation. Currently there are two sightseeing river boat tours on the Muskingum and both of these have been added to the canal boat rides map on the ACS website. We have also added all the lock locations to the canal sites map.



The solid line highlights the route of the Muskingum River. At the top of the map, the dashed line shows the route of the Ohio and Erie Canal; while at the bottom of the map the Ohio River is seen at Marietta. The short three-mile-long sidecut canal is also noted toward the top of the map.

Canals on Mars?

Ronald Reid

The fourth planet in our solar system, Mars, orbits the Sun at the distance of 142 million miles, taking 687 of our days to make a Martian year. This mysterious “Red Planet” in the sky was named by the ancients for the god of war, and is the Latin basis for the Roman “month of war,” or March.

But how and when did the idea of “canals” on Mars ever get started? Well, as a boater of our 19th century towpath canals, and an amateur astronomer since 1959, I’ve tried to find out in March 2021.

Like many of us, the night sky holds a special amazement and awe, and as a twelve-year old boy I asked my parents for a small telescope at Christmas in 1959. Thus began my lifelong hobby of star gazing, planet watching, the occasional comet passing, and the “shooting stars.” [I have collected a few meteorites in a container]

But the view of Mars through a small backyard telescope is disappointing, appearing like a small orange marble across the street, with no detail. It takes an enormously powerful telescope to observe planetary details, and in 1966 I decided to visit the huge observatory in Arizona. While visiting the Grand Canyon, I spent a day at the famous Lowell Observatory, where in 1896 Percival Lowell had also announced sighting “canals” on Mars. On top of Mars Hill Mesa in Flagstaff, the huge 24” diameter telescope became synonymous with Martian “canals” in the public perception. The surface of Mars often changes colors, with dust storms common, and the “canals” were in the equatorial zone from 60 degrees North to 60 degrees South latitude. The planet has two permanent polar caps, with the seasons twice as long as our own. It was a hot June day when I visited, so we observed sunspots, and looked at Lowell’s color pencil sketches of “canals” on display.

Both Schiaparelli and Lowell used the word “canal” to denote the line, which was confusing, since the Italian was erroneously translated as “canals.” Giovanni Schiaparelli (1835 – 1910) had earlier made observations of a close approach with the large telescope at Berea Observatory in Milan, Italy.

But at the turn of the 20th century some astronomers felt the lines might be broad irrigation canals, dug and operated by Martians, to bring water to areas that visibly “greened.”

In 1896 H. G. Wells wrote his famous sci-fi fiction novel The War of the Worlds. Three years earlier a soap advertisement advertised “Mars is peopled, and they want KIRK’S SOAP.” In 1900 a “shaft of light” was seen projecting from Mars at Lowell Observatory, and the electrical genius and true inventor of radio, Nicola Tesla (1856 – 1943), made his startling claim that in Colorado he had received a mysterious space signal, “possibly from Mars!” The Suez Canal in Egypt had opened in 1869, and the French had in 1880 tried to construct the Panama Canal. Well, the idea grabbed media attention worldwide. “A Signal From Mars: March and Two Step,” a sheet music score appeared in music stores, and soon you could hear it played on parlor pianos up the street.

However, by 1916 improved telescopes indicated that canals were only optical illusions, and that Mars was a desolate, dead planet indeed. But the idea lingered on.

Orson Welles and his Mercury Theatre broadcast on Halloween 1938 did “The War of the Worlds,” scaring some listeners into believing Martians had just invaded Earth in New Jersey. “Marvin the Martian” began appearing as a cartoon in 1948, always good for laughs.

Growing up in the 1950s was a fascinating time to see many “B movies” on science fiction themes, such as “Red Planet Mars,” a cheesy 1952 flick starring Peter Graves. On television there was the interesting SCIENCE FICTION THEATER, which in 1955 played “Project 44” on a Saturday morning, about Mars, and in 1957 saw real space rockets. 1964 saw the sci-fi movie “Robinson Crusoe on Mars,” but the idea of canals was firmly disproved in the 1965 Mariner probe flyby.

But the perennial subject always pops up, like the 1998 tabloid headline “Elvis Statue Found on Mars.”

The writer joined the Astronomy Club of Akron in 1980, which now has a small observatory at Portage Lakes State Park in Summit County, Ohio. Has had several great public “star parties,” which have included Mars, the Moon, galaxies, and meteor showers.

As I write this, NASA’s Perseverance probe has just launched robotic probe Rover to sample Martian rocks and soil. Mars often is a subject discussed on the radio program Coast-to-Coast AM, heard from 1 to 5 AM daily. And the Red Planet is still visible in the evening sky. So grab your telescope. . . .

Canal Tidbits and News

There is power when the public speaks up and takes action. As we reported in the last issue of American Canals, the New York State government had proposed a change in the management structure of the state's canals, moving toward a canal and rivers trust type scheme, vis-a-vis the UK Rivers and Canals Trust. The sharp folks at the Preservation League of NYS saw the proposed amendment to the state budget and raised the alarm. It wasn't so much that they or anyone was against the idea. It was that the proposal had not been presented to the public for comment. As you might expect, the stakeholders along the canals were justifiably concerned and shared this with their legislators, and after a bit of time, the amendment was dropped. This doesn't mean that the idea has gone away, but maybe everyone who has a justifiable concern can now weigh in.

Although the ACS is more about historic canals, it is nice to see a new wave of funding going into the working locks and dams along the rivers controlled by the USACE. We have been following the announcements of any project funding on the Facebook page.

The rewatering project of the Illinois and Michigan Canal in Ottawa has been concluded. The pumps were turned on as of April 2, 2021.

The Inland Waterways Association UK has a silver propeller prize that boaters can earn by cruising to little used sites along the 2000 miles of canals. The goal is to boost use of the canals as to prove their worth to those that monitor such things. I have watched as the canal vloggers Minimal List have sought out and earned these badges, and I got to wondering if there would be a value to having such a program in North America. Except ours would need to be land based as most of our historic canals are not navigable. Maybe visiting a site in each state/province that had a canal? Or taking a boat ride in each state that offers one? It is kind of a fun thing to think about.

Speaking of visitation, make it a goal to get out and take one of the many boat rides that are available on the canals, rivers, and lakes. You can find a fairly good map of what is available on our boat rides map on the ACS website. Every business has suffered from the closings of 2020 and need our help in 2021 if we want them to be around in 2022. It is nice to see that the St. Helena ride in Canal Fulton will be available, but if it isn't used, it likely won't be around too long.

The Menasha Lock, which is part of the Fox River

Navigation in Wisconsin, has been closed since 2015 as the authorities seek out a way to stop the round gobies from swimming between Lake Winnebago and Little Lake Butte des Morts. The Fox River Navigation System Authority is planning on using an electric barrier but it will be at least 2023 before they are confident that it works.

The movement of invasive species is one of the concerns voiced by those who wish to close our navigable waterways. One of the reasons that the marine railroad at Big Chute has been kept in operation is to serve as the break between the water-bodies and minimize the chance that invasive fish and other critters might move upstream. This concern has been raised in the plans to "improve" the New York State Canals.

Planning continues for the World Canals Conference on August 30-September 1, and the New York State Canal Conference on September 26 – 28. It is going to be a busy month. The early bird registration for the WCC continues through May 15. They have also promised a full refund if you cancel before July 1 or if the organizers need to cancel.

I was prompted by the WCC to join the Inland Waterways international for the first time. Members do receive a discount on the registration and the membership was less than what I would pay at full rate, so I joined. If you have never seen their journal, World Wide Waterways, it is quite the publication. We will look forward to more sharing between the organizations.

After I wrote the article about the Muskingum Navigation rehabilitation, I was informed that Andy Hite and Mark Renwick will be representing the Canal Society of Ohio as members of the project's consulting parties. This is indeed good news.



Will o-the-Wisp Came and Went on the Chenango Canal

Richard Palmer

In 1863 an unsuccessful effort was made by two Binghamton businessmen to establish steam packet boat service on the Chenango Canal between there and Hamilton. It was run in competition with horse-drawn packet boats that had operated on this canal since the 1840s.

The steamer, built in Binghamton, was called the Will o' the Wisp, an appropriate name for a vessel that occasionally appeared and then vanished. No published histories of the Chenango Canal mention it. If it wasn't for the newspapers of the day, its story would be lost.

In February, 1863, Daniel S. Dickinson, a prominent Binghamton attorney, presented to the New York State Canal Board a petition to allow Binghamton businessmen Abram Bevier and Nelson Orcutt to operate a steam packet boat on the Chenango Canal. (1)

Apparently the Canal Board granted permission, for soon William Ogden of Binghamton started construction of a fairly large boat that could accommodate 100 passengers and 25 tons of freight. The 12 horsepower engine and paddle wheels were constructed by Shapley, Dunk & Co. of Binghamton. This firm had a foundry on Hawley Street commonly known as the Valley Iron Works. They manufactured steam engines and boilers as well as machinery and tools. (2)

The plan was for a run from Binghamton to Hamilton in 11 hours. This would be record time considering the average trip of a horse-drawn packet boat was 12 hours to Norwich, a distance of 46 miles. Hamilton was another 21 miles north of Norwich. There were 17 locks between Binghamton and Norwich, and 13 locks between Norwich and Hamilton. This would calculate to 3.62 miles per hour for the horse-drawn packet boat and 6.09 miles per hour for the steam packet. However, it appears it never ran that fast.

By late May the Will-o-the Wisp had been launched and was lying at the dock at Shapley & Dunk's machine shop waiting for the engines to be installed. A local newspaper editor commented: "A steamboat line on the Chenango canal will be a novelty and a great convenience." (3)

Finally the steamer made a surprise appearance at Oxford. On Wednesday, June 24, 1863, the Oxford Times reported:

"The steam packet, owned by Captain Orcutt, so long promised that had well nigh passed out of mind, or came to be regarded as more of a matter of fancy than fact, actually made its appearance last Wednesday evening, after having announced its approach with all the pomp of larger craft, by blowing its whistle.

"There was quite a gathering in the vicinity of the canal bridge to welcome the distinguished stranger, whose name Will o' the Wisp, is to say the least quite romantic for a voyager upon the raging canal. The boat is very neat and pretty, and we sincerely trust will prove a success to those who have the enterprise in charge. The arrival of the first steam boat certainly marks an era in the history of our quiet village. It commenced its regular trips on Monday."

After a brief stop in Oxford it sailed off on its trial run another 10 miles to Norwich where it was greeted by a large crowd. At this point Orcutt altered his plans and decided not to push on to Hamilton at this time. Being confident of the boat's success, Orcutt announced he would run on alternate days to the horse packet boat between Norwich and Binghamton. Thus daily packet service between the two communities was to be provided. (4)

However, this sort of service doesn't appear to have taken effect until early August, 1863. It was now intended to run from Binghamton to Norwich Monday, Wednesday and Friday and return Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. The steamer was also made available for excursion parties to a popular nearby picnic area known as Mead's Pond, about two and a half miles north of Norwich along the towpath of the canal. (5)

The Chenango Telegraph of Norwich of July 1, 1863 reported:

"The Sherburne people are getting anxious to see the new steam canal packet that is to run from Binghamton to Hamilton. They have about given up seeing the "light that can't be caught," (Will o' the Wisp,) and think it has. Can one give us any light on the subject?"

A visitor to Norwich that summer remarked "They have a steam packet making excursions to localities on the route for the accommodation of pleasure parties." Nothing more was heard about the steamer again until the shrill of the whistle announced its arrival in the village of

Hamilton at 7 a.m. on Wednesday, September 14, 1863. This was partially due to a rash of breaks on the canal that summer due to problems on the canal that consumed 30 days of the navigation season to repair - such as the floor collapsing on the aqueduct at Greene. All indications were that the canal was poorly built. (7)

Upon its arrival in Hamilton the editor of the Hamilton Republican was invited aboard to ride a few miles. He noted:

“The boat is neatly finished, with a cabin on each end, which are of sufficient capacity to accommodate 100 or more persons. Captain Orcutt, who is large and good natured, and every inch a gentleman, has not succeeded in gaining the speed of his boat he hoped to, but now he averages four or five miles an hour, including lockages, which is infinitely more pleasant and comfortable than being jammed into a close, jolting stage.

“The Will o’ the Wisp may be expected back here on Thursday afternoon, and will remain here Friday for the purpose of giving our citizens an excursion, and if sufficient inducements are held out, Capt. Orcutt intends to make regular trips from Binghamton here until the close of navigation. We hope our citizens will interest themselves in this matter and secure the benefits of the visit of the packet.” (7)

The Binghamton Press of Oct. 8, 1932 stating in part:

“A company was formed headed by the eminent ‘Soapy’ Orcutt, a citizen who dreamed dreams. After months of hard work, enough capital was raised. The steamboat was built, launched and duly christened Will-o’-the-Wisp, a prophetic name, as it proved.

“‘Soapy’ announced the date of the trial trip – noon of a certain Saturday – and prophesied that the fast craft, if all went well, would arrive at its destination, Port Crane, before dark!

“The packet dock, and all-the-neighborhood, was crowded with gaping folk when “Soapy” pulled the whistle cord and the Will-o’-Wisp, with flags flying, tooted a shrill farewell as she backed with stately dignity out of the placid canal. Among the throng of passengers was a present officer of the Binghamton Savings Bank – a stowaway in the hold.

“All went well on the voyage until, at a point about a mile and a half from the village, a large stick of floating wood was picked up by the churning paddle wheels. This did the Will-o’-the-Wisp no good and, much to the disappointment of the passengers she had to return to the packet dock for repairs.

“After a long delay the repairs were completed, and then the Will-o’-the-Wisp ran into another snag. The canal

superintendent ruled that steamboats would not be permitted to use the canal because they washed the banks away. The project was abandoned, the company dissolved, and ‘Soapy’ Orcutt and his brethren mourned the end of a bright dream.” Reminiscing about his boyhood days in Norwich, an anonymous person wrote:

“One year a steam packet made its appearance on the canal. It ran but a single year and I always understood that its wake so washed the banks that the authorities refused to let it continue.” Unfortunately no record has been found as to the fate of this boat. (8)

1. Binghamton Republican, February 24, 1863
2. Broome Republican, August 4, 1858
3. Chenango Telegraph, Norwich, May 27, 1863
4. Oneida Weekly Herald, June 30, 1863.
5. Chenango Telegraph, August 6, 1863.
6. Chenango Telegraph, August 1 and August 12, 1863
7. Hamilton Republican, Thursday, September 17, 1863

[Note: Orcutt’s nickname “Soapy” was derived from the fact that on November 27, 1866 he filed a patent (No. 60,041) on a formula for making soap. [Vol. 11, P. 1484 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Patents. 1867].

8. Chenango Telegraph, June 4, 1915.

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Canal Comments

Long before a collapsing canal feeder dam in western Pennsylvania, caused the infamous "Johnstown Flood," a collapsing (perhaps helped to collapse) canal feeder dam in northeastern Ohio also caused a famous (albeit local) flood. Today's column recalls the Washington's Birthday Flood in Massillon, Ohio.

THE FLOOD OF 1848

Under the leadership of its president, James Duncan, the Massillon Rolling Mill Company purchased 1,100 acres of meadowland along Sippo Creek east of Massillon in Stark County Ohio in 1836.

Duncan had long had a plan/desire to initiate a mammoth scheme to provide feed water to the Ohio Canal, power to a fledgling Massillon industry, and drinking water to the village. Duncan's first plan was to build a dam across the Tuscarawas River near the center of town. That plan was turned down by the State Board of Public Works who preferred a cheaper, low-head dam some distance up the river from Massillon. This would not easily satisfy the other two aims of Duncan's scheme. Then, in 1841, the Massillon Rolling Mill Company proposed the Sippo Lake Reservoir project to the State Board of Public Works. It was turned down.

The twin nationwide economic panics of 1837 and 1842 severely damaged the financial condition of the Massillon Rolling Mill Company. The Massillon investors were forced to take in three eastern financiers early in 1844. As somewhat of a last gasp, the Massillon Rolling Mill Company again offered its reservoir plan to the State Board of Public Works with the hint that the Company might not exist long enough to make any additional offers. A contract to construct the Sippo Lake Reservoir was signed by both parties on March 11, 1844.

The State agreed to pay the Massillon Rolling

Mill company \$5,000 to construct the dam and reservoir. The agreement also had the State agreeing to purchase a minimum of 500 cubic feet of water per minute from the reservoir at all times of the year.

Marshall Wellman of Massillon oversaw the draining of the swamps in the area and construction of the dam throughout the seasons of 1844 and 1845. Local men, Jacob Carper, Harmon Shriver, and William Tinkler, were in charge of chopping down trees on the site and hauling the wood away. In the spring of 1846, the reservoir began filling.

When finished the dam stretched 300 feet across the valley of Sippo Creek, just east of the present Jackson Avenue crossing (Circled on map). The dam itself was constructed of woven planks forming a thirty-foot width at the bottom and a six-foot width at the top. The watered reservoir behind it was one mile wide, nearly two miles long, and fifteen to twenty feet deep.

Several small islands were created in the reservoir on which many enjoyed picnics. In his 1847 diary, Arvine Wales was invited by Charly Skinner to picnic at the reservoir with George Miller and James Bayliss. Wales writes, "The water stinks horribly. . . We rowed all over the reservoir and concluded that a large Oak which spread its arms protectingly over a green spot on the largest island was the most fitting place for a picnic dinner."

Though the entire life of this reservoir was less than two years, nearby residents complained of the smell and appearance and claimed mosquitoes bred in the stagnant waters were spreading disease. At town-hall style meetings in Bahney's Tavern in Genoa, local residents discussed remedies. Their complaints received no answer from the Rolling Mill Company. Several residents petitioned the State to remove the dam, but felt their complaints were being ignored.

In fact, the State Board of Public Works was not at all convinced that the Sippo Lake Reservoir was

meeting its proposed requirements as far as a canal feeder was concerned. And in January 1847, even before Wales had his picnic and the Tavern Town Hall meetings were held, the State Legislature authorized the Board of Public Works to negate their contract for the Sippo Lake Reservoir and canal feeder. By January 1848, the Board of Public Works was still “answering questions from the state Legislature” on whether the Sippo Lake Reservoir should be retained as the feeder to this section of the Ohio Canal.

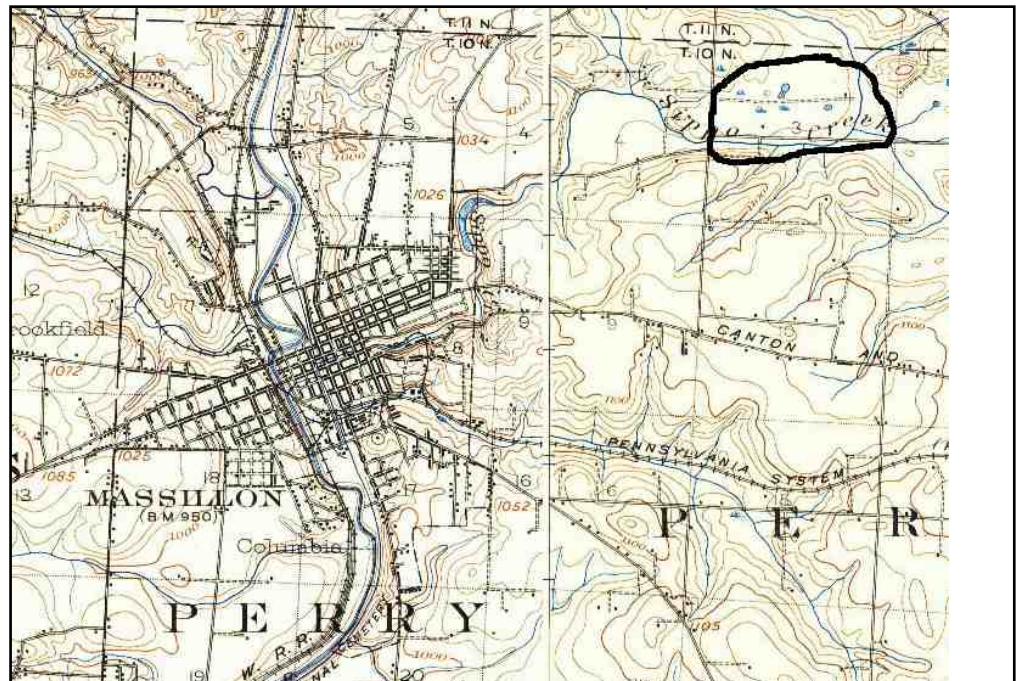
At approximately 3:00 am on February 23, 1848 the matter was taken out of their hands when “Unknown Persons” axed the pilings and woven plank at the base of the dam and opened a gap, which quickly grew, collapsing the entire structure. A ten-foot-high wall of water (some estimated it at fifteen feet), traveling at 100 miles an hour, tore down the Sippo Valley toward downtown Massillon, some ninety feet lower than the reservoir. The rushing wall of water came careening down Tremont Avenue, slamming into James Lusk Reynolds’ warehouse, near the southeast corner of South Erie Avenue and Tremont. The water was then diverted to the southwest wall of the Stone Block (erected in 1843 by the Massillon Rolling Mill Company on the northeast corner) which caused that wall to collapse.

Earlier that night, the Tremont House, also a Massillon Rolling Mill venture, was having its Grand Opening Celebration on President Washington’s birthday. By 3:00am the next morning, there were still about twenty revelers dancing in the ball room when the flood waters surrounded the structure. Charles Skinner rode up

to the door and shouted, “Hallo! The reservoir’s broke! Flee for your lives!” Guests ran to Tremont Avenue on the building’s north side and quickly found themselves waist deep!

The solid gravel street was swept away, and a nine-foot chasm was cut into the road near the intersection of South Erie Street and Tremont Avenue. Water rushed into the basements of every warehouse between South Erie and the canal, tumbling walls and crushing doors.

Kent Jarvis’ home sat along the canal. Early on February 23, after alerting the partygoers at the



Tremont House, Charles Skinner rode past the Jarvis home and yelled warnings about the reservoir. Jarvis later wrote to his brother, “Of course we set about getting out the most valuable things from our house. It was dark, cold, raining, and aside from the disaster a very cheerless morning. And while engaged in removing our things, we could hear the unearthly roar of the flood, the cries of the people, the falling of buildings, but had no tidings where the flood raged most, who were in danger, what buildings were

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Historical Newspaper Archives

The Wilmington Dispatch
September 16, 1916

Great System for Time of Strife, Would Be Inland Waterways Declares American Admiral

Philadelphia, Sept 15 – Construction of a great system of inland waterways and coastal canals for commercial use in time of peace and to meet an imperative need in war was advocated by Admiral Benson, chief of naval operations, in a speech here last night before the Atlantic Deeper Waterways Association. The value to the United States of such a system, the Admiral declared, was sufficient from both an economic and military point of view to justify a bond issue to help pay the cost of construction.

Admiral Benson reminded the convention of the recently threatened railroad strike, pointing out how it would have effected progress and preparedness of the nation's first line of defense.

"The industrial advantages of the plentiful and continuous inland water transportation," he said, "have been given much attention, but, in my opinion, the military value of such a system of waterways is not realized by the public. The threatened railroad strike, however, emphasized to the Navy Department how greatly an adequate system of transportation by inland waterways would add to the national preparedness.

"The vital points from which transportation must be secured were found to be the Great Lakes, Schenectady, Pittsburgh and vicinity, New Haven and vicinity, Easton and vicinity and the coal fields of West Virginia.

"The Massachusetts district was found to be, with one or two minor exceptions, easily reached by water. The Erie Canal solved the problem of all the great manufacturers on the Great Lakes, Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Buffalo, and Milwaukee. The Lehigh Canal, although not kept up as it should be, give us relief from Easton. The Delaware River provided an outlet from Philadelphia, Wilmington, and that section. The Hudson extended the Erie Canal's facilities to New York and also provided an outlet for the electrical material from Schenectady and vicinity.

When it came to Pittsburgh, however, trouble arose. It was first thought that satisfactory deliveries could be made from the Ohio River to Portsmouth, thence by the

Ohio and Erie Canal to Cleveland, or via the Ohio to the Muskingum and thence via the Ohio and Erie Canal to Dresden. These canals were represented as being in active operation and preparations were made to use these routes if necessary. Both these routes had been allowed to become useless because of the failure of the State of Ohio to provide appropriations for their upkeep. Similar conditions have rendered useless the other waterways.

"Had these canals been up, they would have enabled the Department to ship heavy plates and the necessary materials for construction and repair work on battleships from Pittsburgh via canal directly to New York. The failure to keep them up necessitated the working out of an elaborate trolley route to Buffalo, which, at its best, would have provided for only a small fraction of the 2500 tons which were needed within six weeks at the York yard alone, and this in time of peace with no war demands to be considered.

"The canal from Easton to Bristol was found to be too small. The Lehigh Canal, being under the control of the railroads, was also in poor shape for transportation, and the Morris Canal, so far as information could be secured, was practically out of business. With these routes open and kept efficient, the all important armor plate district of Bethlehem would be free of the necessity of using railroad transportation.

"In considering the coal districts, upon which a large portion of our merchant vessels depend, the situation was found to be hopeless. Without railroads, coal would lie idle at the mines and ships would lie idle at their moorings and a very brief cessation of railroad traffic. A water system from these mines would appear to be a most imperative military necessity.

"Some of the canals which we would like to us in time of emergency are leased to railroads by long-time contracts and the railroads have not kept them up or encouraged their use. It would seem a wise military precaution, also, that railroads leasing canal should be required to keep them in operating condition under penalty of forfeiture of lease.

"Our principal navy yards, private shipbuilding plants, arms and munition factories, powder magazines, etc., are located along or near the Atlantic coast. A system of adequate internal waterways connecting all these activities would be of value beyond estimate.

"As a concrete example of what it would mean to the safety of the nation, I will indicate briefly the value of a sufficiently deep and wide canal between the Delaware and

Chesapeake Bays. Should our Navy, in time of war, meet a superior hostile fleet along our middle or southern Atlantic Coast, Chesapeake Bay would naturally be the refuge for any injured ships. At such a time the combined use of the docks at Norfolk and Philadelphia might be vital. An adequate canal between the two bays would accomplish this big step toward preparedness.

“The same applies with equal force to a canal between deep water in the Delaware River and New York Harbor and Long Island Sound. This would add two more exits to guard by a blockader, thus causing a still further division of his force, and divisions of force, as you will readily understand, are contrary to a principle of combat on which success very largely depends- concentration.

“A system of canals connecting the various ports along our Atlantic coast would facilitate and safeguard the passage of submarines, destroyers, torpedo boats, fast motorboats, etc., up and down our coast, wherever and whenever that might be needed.

“Information from abroad clearly shows the immense economic and military importance of the canal systems, particularly of Germany, in time of war. Quick transportation of war materials and men, and the enormous and undreamed of demand for supplies have been two outstanding features of the present war.

“The military needs alone have almost exhausted every transportation resource abroad, and, in addition, there is the civilian population which must be fed, clothed, and provided for in many ways, and in this transportation form as essential part.”

Symposium
Continued from page 5

next to the statues and become part of a new generation of photos. (The original photo can be seen below.)

A business meeting followed the Symposium.

Some thoughts

All in all, this was a very successful Zoom-style Symposium. And it might have set a new standard for future events. (A large genealogy conference discovered the same thing this past winter when they had nearly one million people attend virtually.) Should our groups think about making such gatherings both in-person and virtual? This would accomplish two things. It would allow those who are homebound, can't afford, or don't wish to travel to attend. It also extends an opportunity to invite those in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community to be a part of the conference without the high cost of hiring an interpreter. I asked a friend about his experience with the closed-captioning and he gave it high marks. There is a slight delay, but nothing too horrible. He noted that if the questions are left to the end, it made it easier to interact and react to the added comments. Certainly there will be some added technical issues to chase down to record a live in-person conference, but hopefully the facilities with conference space are addressing this.



yielding to this mighty torrent.” His daughter, Ann, was one of the remaining revelers at the Tremont House. The washed-out road led many to believe the hotel would fall. Jarvis continued, “It was soon found that a horse could ride across to one corner of the hotel,” where the remaining patrons were pulled from the building.

Several warehouses were destroyed, the canal banks caved. Joseph Watson had opened the first drug store in town, also selling paints, oils, dyes, crockery, and glassware. Watson’s warehouse was located on the south side of Main Street between Erie and Mill. One of Watson’s hogsheads of sugar was later found three miles north in Bridgeport.

In his diary, Arvine Wales wrote that “the town presents a sickening spectacle of destruction and desolation.” A February, 1848 Ohio Repository (Canton) article gives an account of the devastation, “We witnessed the scene of destruction on Saturday last and it is truly appalling. Never before have we believed that any quantity of water could have produced such destruction.”

Downtown streets became impassable the next day, littered with lumber, warehouse contents, mud, and canal boats. When the flood hit downtown, it broke the canal banks, flushed the canal, and carried canal boats into trees. Barrels of pork, clover-seed, flour, and other warehouse items were swept away out of their storage areas, many carried more than eight miles away. Barrels would be found years later near Zoar in the river bed. Total damage was estimated at \$30,000 - \$40,000 (\$40,000 would be worth \$1,320,000 today). Fortunately, no lives were lost in the floods.

Arvine Fox, who had helped drain the swamps and clear the trees on the reservoir property near his home, found a piece of a dam support beam with ax marks lodged in an Elm Tree below the destroyed dam. While Martin Clark, Thomas Noble, Amasa Baley Sr. and several others were arrested, no trial was held and no culprits were definitely determined. Two more dams and reservoirs were built in the Massillon area on Sippo Creek, one in the 1850s and one in the 1880s, each at different locations, but none caused another flood.

Canalendar

Note- The Canalendar is hopeful for a better 2021 and beyond. The best advice is to check a group's website or social media for updates.

August 30-Sept 2, 2021: World Canals Conference 2021, C&O Canal, Hagerstown, MD. www.wcc2021.com

September 26-28, 2021: Canal Society of New York State, New York State Canal Conference, Schenectady, NY at the Mohawk Harbor Resort and Casino. <https://www.nyscanalconference.org/>

October 1-3, 2021: Pennsylvania Canal Society, Fall Trip, joint tour with the Ohio Canal Society, Pittsburgh Riverboat Tour, PaCanals.info@gmail.com

April 15-17, 2022: Pennsylvania Canal Society, Spring Trip, Upper Grand Division of the Lehigh Navigation, PaCanals.info@gmail.com

May 30 - June 3, 2022: World Canals Conference 2022, Leipzig, Germany. This is a reschedule of the 2020 event.