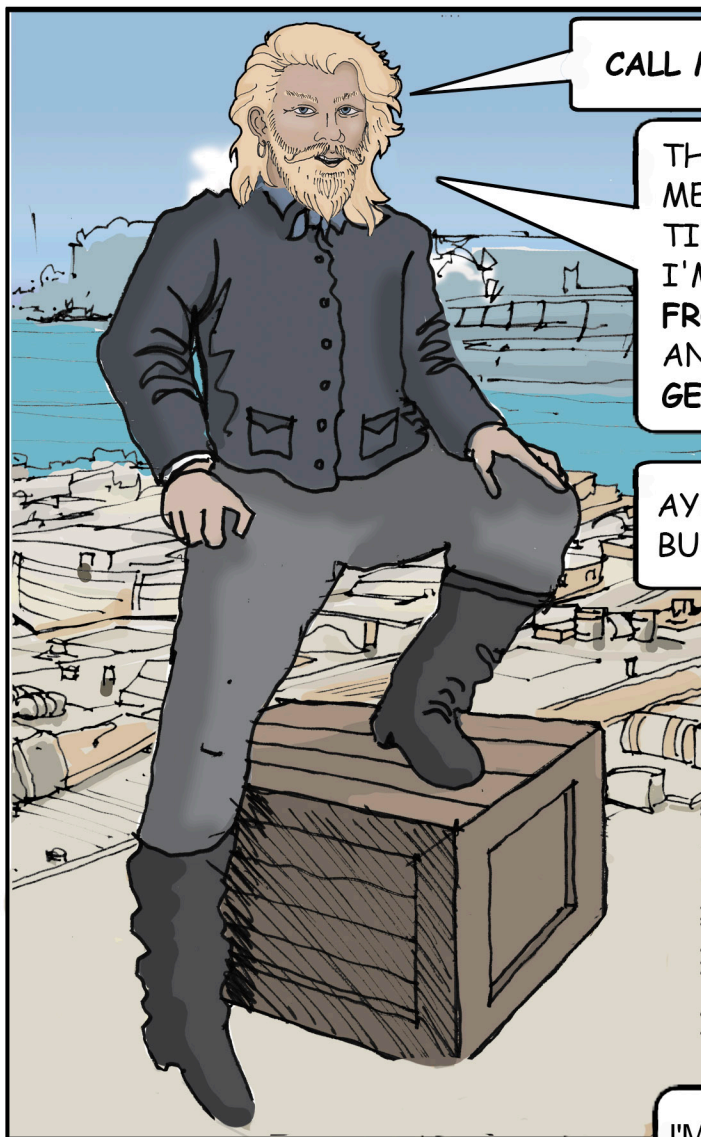


Written by Jeff Z. Klein  
Illustrated by Scott Alexander Wood

Celebrations are already underway for the bicentennial of the Erie Canal---the 19th-century engineering marvel that made possible the settlement of the Upper Midwest, the emergence of New York City as the world's financial capital... and the very existence of Buffalo itself.

But the story of the canal is only half the journey. The other half - the dangerous, far deadlier half-happened on the Great Lakes, aboard sailing ships and steamboats... ships that often sank in storms or exploded in great gouts of flame.

Those forgotten ships, and the harbors they sailed from, gave rise to a whole raucous culture of sailors, dockworkers, thieves... none more colorful than in Buffalo. So sit yourself down and listen close, as over the next few months we sing of the wild, untamed way of life that once flourished in the port city of Buffalo, on the easternmost edge of the vast inland sea...



CALL ME STEELKILT.

THAT'S WHAT HERMAN MELVILLE CALLED ME, IN THE CHAPTER OF *MOBY-DICK* TITLED "THE TOWN-HO'S STORY" -- I'M THE "LAKEMAN AND DESPERADO FROM BUFFALO" WHO LEADS A MUTINY AND MAKES GOOD HIS SWASHBUCKLING GETAWAY.

AYE, A HANDSOME ROGUE HE MADE ME... BUT THAT'S A STORY FOR ANOTHER TIME.



I'M HERE IN **THESE** PAGES BECAUSE I'M A **BUFFALONIAN**. AND ALTHOUGH HERMAN HAD ME GROWING UP IN THE **EARLY DAYS** OF THE **ERIE CANAL**, I'M GOING TO TELL YOU THE **ENTIRE STORY** OF MY **HOMETOWN** AS A **PORT CITY**, FROM ITS SHADY **ORIGINS**, THROUGH ITS BUSTLING **HEYDAY**, ALL THE WAY TO ITS SAD **END ... SEVERAL LIFETIMES' WORTH** OF **SHIPWRECKS, RESCUES, WHORING, HIGH ADVENTURE, SONGS, CONFLICT AND GLORY.**



AYE, NOW THEN, STAND YE **STEADY** AND DON'T DO A **HAND'S TURN**, FOR -- AS MY OLD FRIEND HERMAN HIMSELF ONCE SAID -- THE **WHOLE** OF THIS **STRANGE AFFAIR** I NOW PROCEED TO PUT ON **LASTING RECORD ...**





# BACK THEN...

WHALES? BUT WE'RE  
BUFFALO LAKEMEN!

AYE, AND EVERY BIT AS  
GOOD AS ANY OCEAN SAILOR

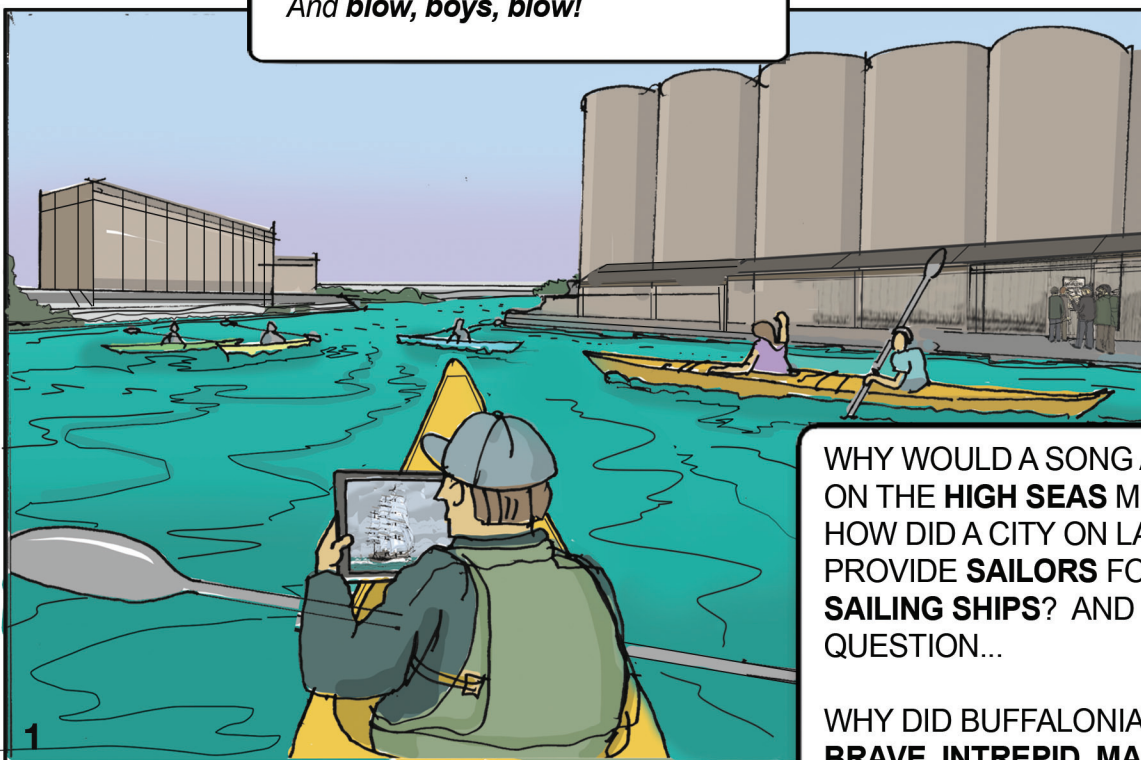


'Tis advertised in **Boston, New York and Buffalo**  
Five hundred brave Americans, **a-whaling** for to go...

"BLOW YE WINDS." A POPULAR SEA  
CHANTEY OF THE 1850s, STARTED  
WITH THESE WORDS



Singin' **blow ye winds** in the morning  
Blow ye winds, **heigh ho!**  
Clear away your runnin' gear  
And **blow, boys, blow!**



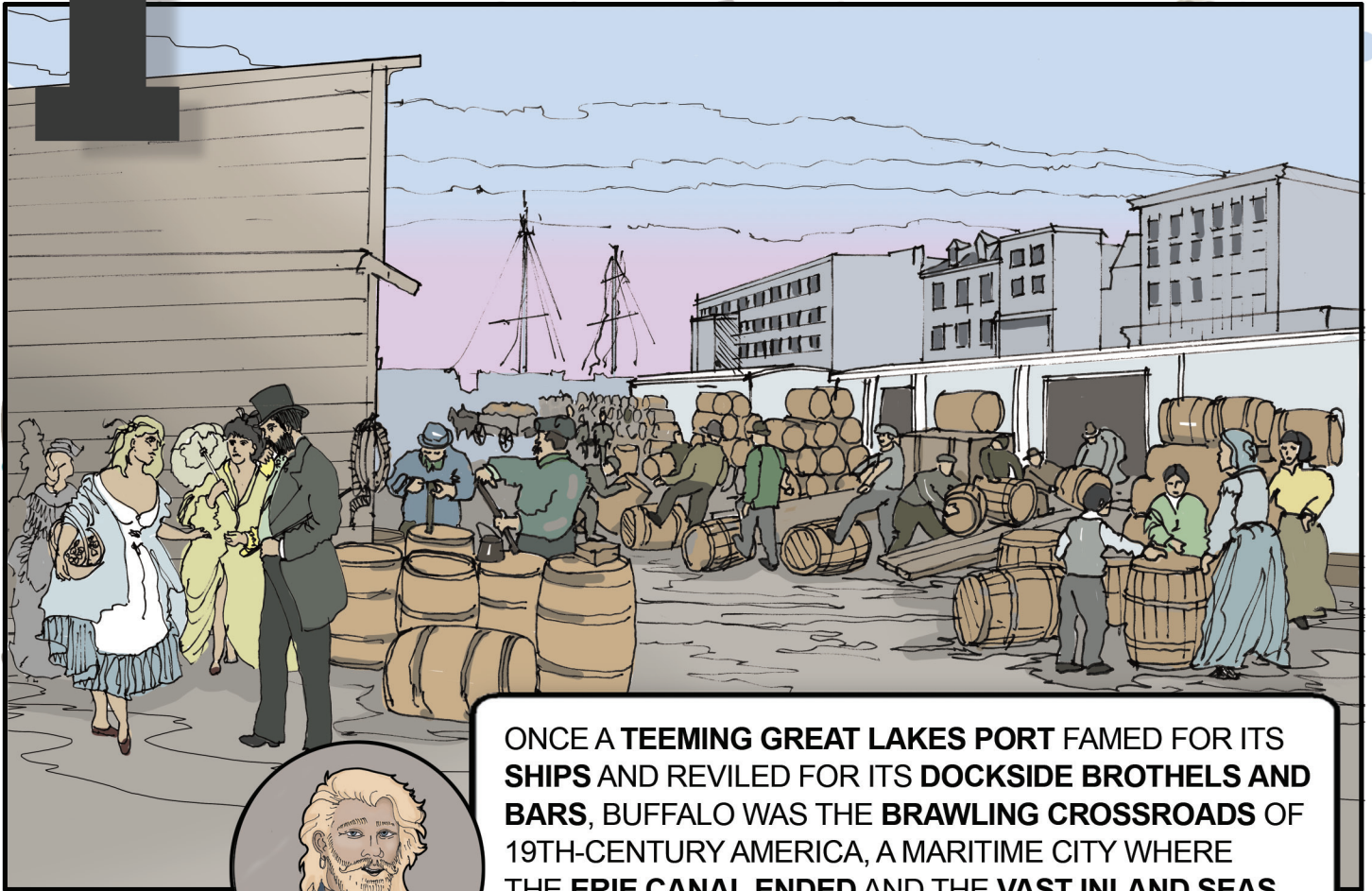
## AND NOW

WHY WOULD A SONG ABOUT **WHALING**  
ON THE **HIGH SEAS** MENTION **BUFFALO**?  
HOW DID A CITY ON LAKE ERIE ONCE  
PROVIDE **SAILORS** FOR OCEANGOING  
**SAILING SHIPS**? AND THE BIGGEST  
QUESTION...

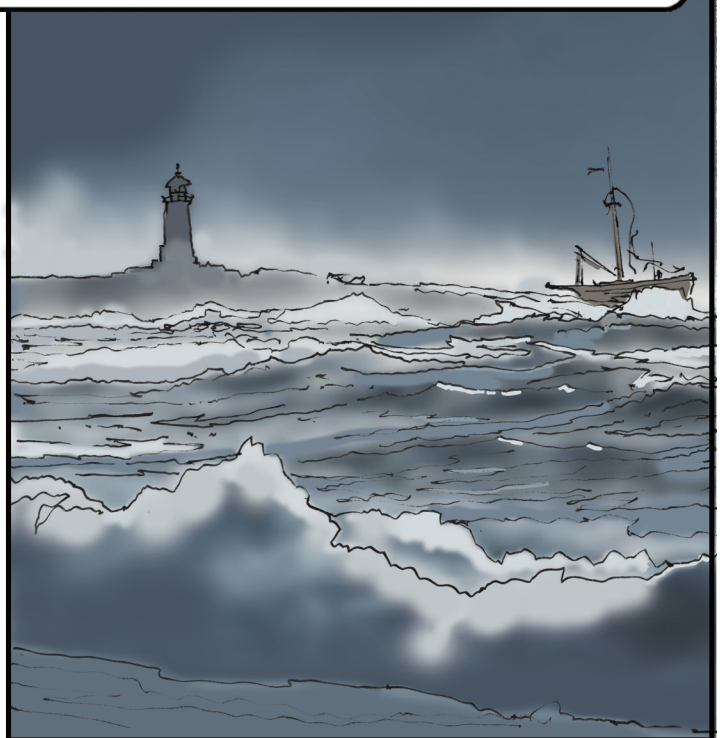
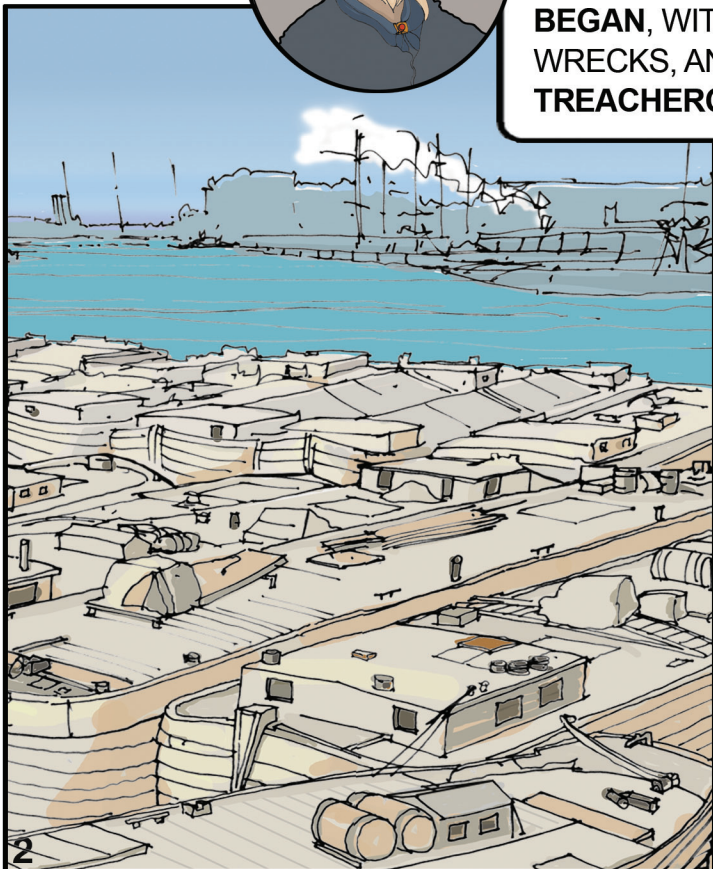
WHY DID BUFFALONIANS **FORGET** THEIR  
**BRAVE, INTREPID MARITIME PAST**?



# 1 A HARD PLACE TO LIVE

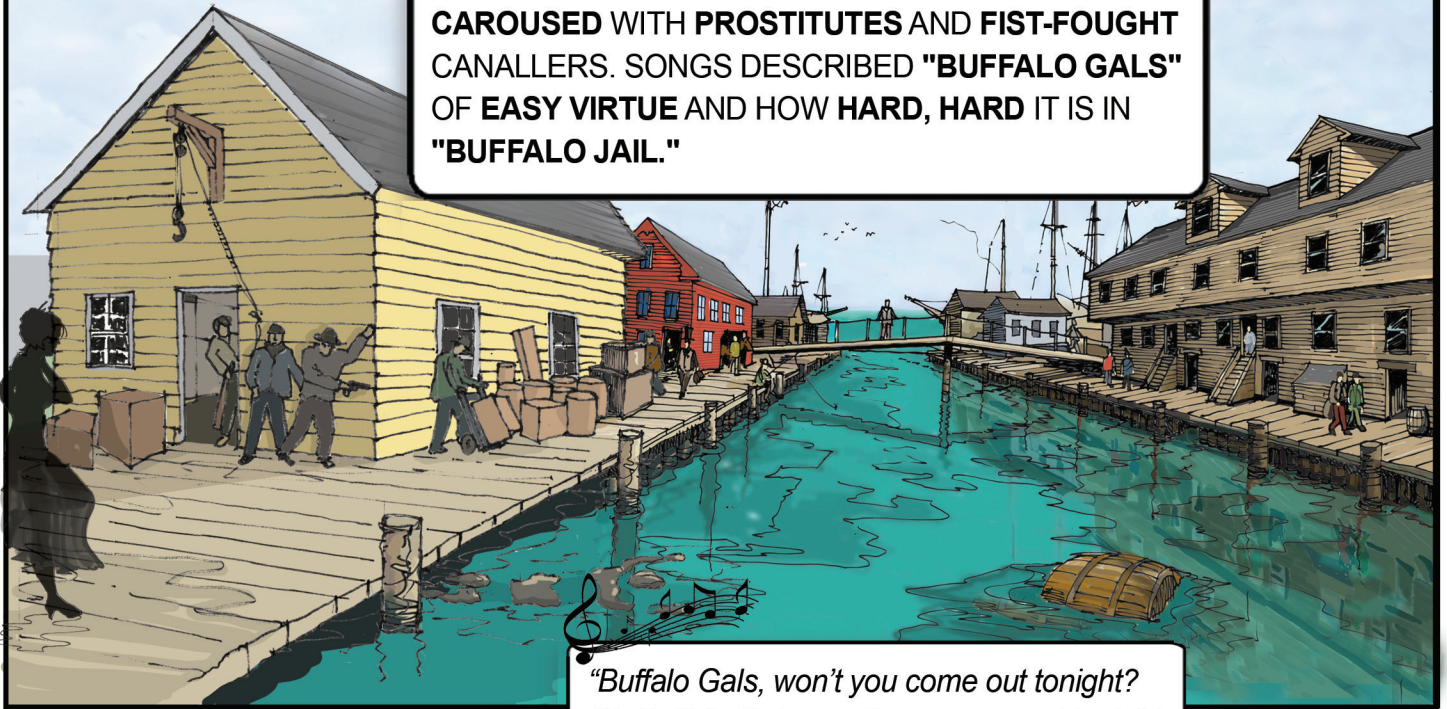


ONCE A **TEEMING GREAT LAKES PORT** FAMED FOR ITS **SHIPS** AND REVEILED FOR ITS **DOCKSIDE BROTHELS AND BARS**, BUFFALO WAS THE **BRAWLING CROSSROADS** OF 19TH-CENTURY AMERICA, A MARITIME CITY WHERE THE **ERIE CANAL ENDED** AND THE **VAST INLAND SEAS BEGAN**, WITH A RICH LEGACY OF GALES, MUSIC, YARNS, WRECKS, AND **LIVES SAVED AND LOST** ON THE LAKES' **TREACHEROUS, STORM-TOSSED WATERS**.





IT WAS A HARBOR TOWN SO **BIG** AND **NOTORIOUS** THAT IT BECAME A **BYWORD** FOR THE **RAUCOUS** NAUTICAL LIFE OF ITS ITINERANT SAILORS. IN **DANK SUBTERRANEAN DIVES**, LAKE MARINERS SANG **SEA CHANTEYS** FOR THEIR LIQUOR, **CAROUSED** WITH **PROSTITUTES** AND **FIST-FOUGHT** CANALLERS. SONGS DESCRIBED "**BUFFALO GALS**" OF **EASY VIRTUE** AND HOW **HARD, HARD** IT IS IN "**BUFFALO JAIL.**"



"Buffalo Gals, won't you come out tonight?  
Oh Buffalo Gals, won't you come out tonight,  
and dance by the light of the moon"







BUT BUFFALO DIDN'T START OUT THAT WAY. **FLAT, FRIGID AND WIND-SWEPT** NEAR THE LAKE, IT WAS A PLACE WHOSE ONLY INDIGENOUS INHABITANTS LIVED IN A SETTLEMENT A FEW MILES **INLAND** ON **BUFFALO CREEK**. IN 1780, THE SMALL VILLAGE (**DAS-SHO-WA**, OR **PLACE OF THE BASSWOODS**) GREW WHEN THE BRITISH MADE IT A KIND OF **REFUGEE CAMP** FOR THEIR SENECA ALLIES, WHOSE FINGER LAKES HOMELAND WAS **OVERRUN** BY THE CONTINENTAL ARMY.

*"THE **WEATHER** WAS EXTREMELY **COLD**. MANY OF OUR PEOPLE BARELY ESCAPED WITH THEIR **LIVES**, AND SOME ACTUALLY **DIED** OF HUNGER AND FREEZING"*

Mary Jemison, Seneca, on the winter of 1779-80 on the Niagara Frontier





WHITES FINALLY SETTLED, CLOSER TO THE LAKE, AROUND 1800. THEY CALLED THEIR VILLAGE **BUFFALO**. BURNED BY THE BRITISH DURING THE **WAR OF 1812**. IT MIGHT HAVE STAYED A VILLAGE...

THAT WILL TEACH THOSE YANKS!

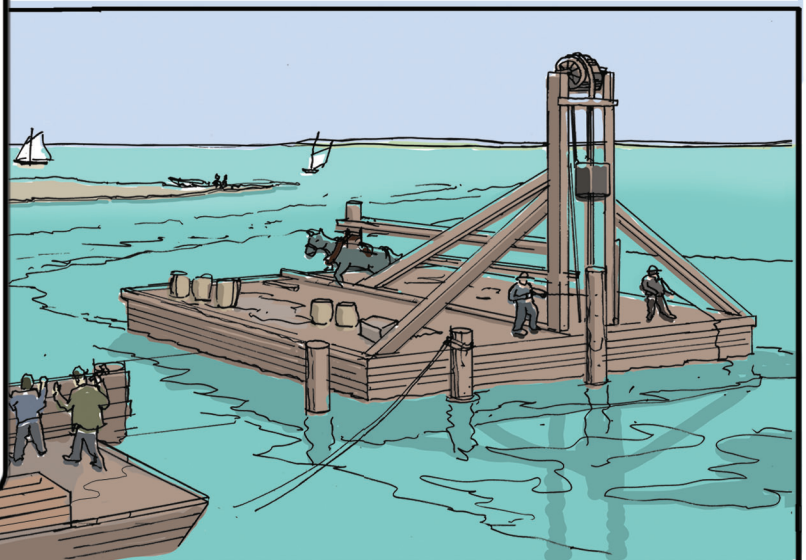
SERVES 'EM RIGHT FOR BURNING EVERY HOME IN NIAGARA ON THE COLDEST NIGHT OF THE YEAR.

... WERE IT NOT FOR THE BUILDING OF THE **ERIE CANAL**.

GENTLEMEN! THEY SAY HARBORS CANNOT BE MADE ON LAKES OR AT THE MOUTHS OF RIVERS. BUT A HARBOR WE ARE RESOLVED TO HAVE.

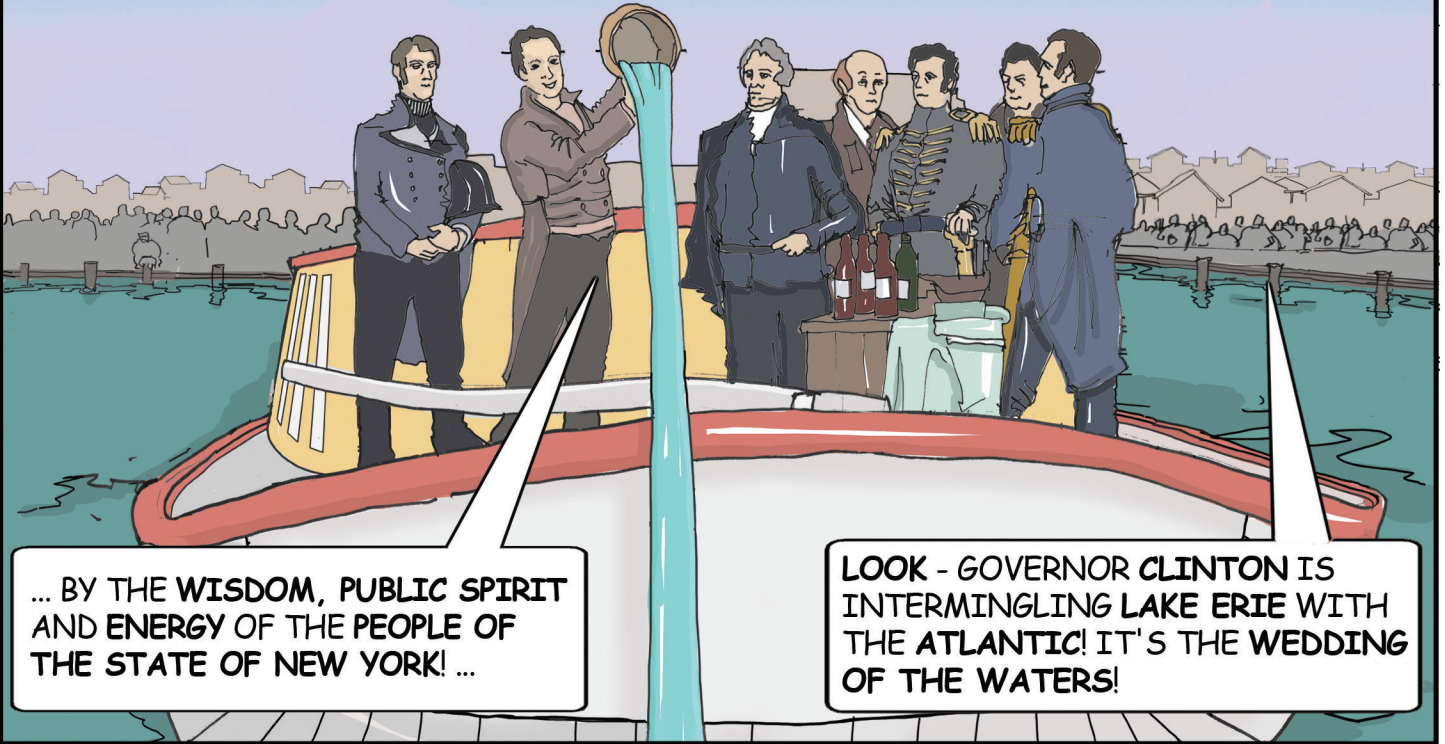
THE 363-MILE CANAL WAS A **MONUMENTAL** NEW YORK STATE PROJECT, AND IT NEEDED A TERMINUS AT ITS WESTERN END. SO SOME OF BUFFALO'S **WEALTHIEST** CITIZENS DECIDED TO MAKE IT SO. LED BY BUSINESSMAN **SAMUEL WILKESON**, THEY AIMED TO **DREDGE** OUT A **HARBOR**, BY **HAND**, WHERE THE CREEK EMPTIED INTO LAKE ERIE.

ABOUT **25 LABORERS** TOOK PART IN THAT FIRST DAY OF DREDGING IN MID-MARCH OF 1820, USING OAK-PLANK SCRAPERS **SHOD IN IRON**, ROPES AND **WINDLASSES** AND AN IMPROVISED **PILE DRIVER** POWERED BY A **BLIND HORSE** THAT **WALKED IN CIRCLES** ON A WORK SCOW. THE WORK WAS **BACKBREAKING**, BUT 221 DAYS LATER, IT WAS DONE. **BUFFALO HAD ITS HARBOR**, SHELTERED BY A PIER THAT KEPT SANDBARS FROM BLOCKING THE ENTRANCE. (THE PIER, IN MODIFIED FORM, IS **STILL IN PLACE** TODAY.)





IN 1825, THE **ERIE CANAL** REACHED BUFFALO. AMID **BOISTEROUS CELEBRATIONS** ON WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 25, GOVERNOR **DEWITT CLINTON**, HOLDING A BUCKET OF **LAKE ERIE WATER**, STOOD ABOARD THE LINE BOAT **SENECA CHIEF** AS IT SET OFF FOR **NEW YORK CITY**. THERE, **EIGHT DAYS** AND MORE THAN **500 MILES** LATER, AMID STILL MORE **JUBILANT CELEBRATIONS**. HE WOULD EMPTY THE BUCKET INTO THE **ATLANTIC OCEAN**.



... BY THE **WISDOM**, **PUBLIC SPIRIT** AND **ENERGY** OF THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK! ...

LOOK - GOVERNOR CLINTON IS INTERMINGLING LAKE ERIE WITH THE ATLANTIC! IT'S THE WEDDING OF THE WATERS!

THE WEST AND THE EAST WERE NOW **JOINED**. BUFFALO WAS ABOUT TO BECOME A ROLICKING, TWO-FISTED **MARITIME PORT**.

