

Groundbreaking Ceremony • July 4, 1817 • Rome, New York
1817 **ERIE CANAL SESQUICENTENNIAL** 1967
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Field Trip Guide May 19/20, 2017

**The Bicentennial of the Erie Canal
The Erie Canal - Central Oneida County**

Canal Society of New York State

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The Rome Canal of the Western Inland Lock Navigation Company

Phil Lord

Perhaps the most ambitious of the unprecedented navigation improvements of the Western Inland Lock Navigation Company (1792-1820), and without doubt the most strategically significant, was the Rome Canal completed in 1797.

Begun immediately after the opening of the Little Falls Canal late in 1795 (the first of the undertakings of the company involving creation of true canals), the Rome Canal surmounted once and for all the Great Carrying Place - a land portage that had separated the eastward flowing waters of the Mohawk River from the westward flowing waters of Wood Creek since prehistoric times.

The route selected by General Philip Schuyler, President of the WILNC, during his survey of the area in September 1792 required excavation through two miles of nearly level ground covered with virgin forests and extensive swamps. Although a differential of only two feet between the Mohawk and Wood Creek existed, lift locks of about 10-foot lift were to be installed at each end to raise boats to the summit level which separated these two watersheds. Because it was a summit, a feeder into the mid-section of the canal was to be drawn down from the upper Mohawk, as Wood Creek has insufficient flow to supply both the waterway west, and the canal.

By January 1796, arrangements were underway to secure a source of lime downriver from the construction site, as the decision had been made to build the locks on this canal of locally-produced brick. One might speculate that this decision was influenced by experiences with the wooden locks at Little Falls, which already were leaking and soon would be in need of replacement. But more likely the choice of materials was rooted in the experience of William Weston, an English engineer recently arrived in America and on loan from the Pennsylvania canal company building the Schuylkill Canal. His experience in England had been with masonry, and the location of a local clay source [still exploited in the late 19th century for brickmaking] no doubt sealed the decision.

Contracts for the construction of a brickyard at Fort Schuyler [Rome] able to produce 300,000 bricks [10" x 5" x 3"] by mid-summer with an additional 300,000 by September were offered, as were others for significant amounts of large dimension timber and burned lime for mortar. In February orders were placed for two large construction boats to be built in Schenectady with all to be in readiness by Spring.

However, this project was rife with problems from the start. Attempts to find local contractors able to supply the bricks and lime continued into March, and the only visible progress noted was the beginning of barracks near the ruins of Fort Stanwix for the housing of laborers who were beginning to arrive.

Weston arrived expressing his intention to complete the canal during the current season [1796] and the contract for the brick production was finally let. But by the end of May the brickyard was still not functional. The few bricks that were being made were inferior, necessary timber was lacking, and essential supplies had not arrived. The workers, attracted by handbills being circulated throughout the region, were now living

in the newly completed barracks and were kept busy grubbing up roots along the line of the canal, but little else was being done.

Such labor as was on hand was as often involved with disputes between contractors or with competing groups of potential laborers as in actual construction. But by early June of 1796, cutting the canal began at the old batteau landing on the Mohawk [Lower Landing]. The river dam at the Lower Landing was underway and the toll house foundations were laid there.

The summer saw work progress slowly, delayed by sickness of such scope that a temporary hospital had to be set up in the federal blockhouse that then stood in the ruins of Fort Stanwix.

By the end of August, disregarding the disappointing results of the summer, Weston still intended to complete the canal from the Lower Landing to the center of the village within the season. In spite of heavy rains in September that delayed work, the lock at the Lower Landing was completed in November and the canal had been dug as far as the Fort.

Although progress had been made late in 1796, the opening days of 1797 saw additional frustration. In January company agents faced competition for experienced laborers from Massachusetts companies constructing similar by-pass canals on the Connecticut River. Advertisements were run as far away as Pennsylvania and Connecticut to draw workers to Rome, in some cases attempting to overcome a growing reputation for miserable field conditions.

In early April, as approximately 150 laborers arrived from Pennsylvania, perhaps veterans of Weston's other project on the Schuylkill, work began on the west end of the canal at the Wood Creek landing. Cutting the canal was going well except for 100 yards west of the fort where a deep vein of quicksand was encountered, and work on the western lock and the feeder continued to keep pace.

On October 3, 1797, the Rome Canal was opened, passing three batteaux, two loaded and one empty, in just 40 minutes across a two-mile carrying place that used to take hours. But in spite of this success, Weston, now at work on the stone locks at German Flatts reported just six weeks later that due to inferior mortar in the Mohawk Lock [Lower Landing], and the frequent filling and emptying of the chamber, water had permeated the lock wall and "reduced the mortar into its original soft state." He suggested the company consider lining the chambers with elm plank, which, when properly caulked, would secure the chamber from further deterioration.¹

In his official report issued the following year, Schuyler summarized the completed works at Rome, diplomatically omitting the problems reported by Weston with the masonry:

"The length of the canal from the Mohawk to Wood Creek is two miles and three chains, one-third of which distance is cut through a gravelly hill from twelve to eighteen feet in depth. The width is thirty-seven and a half feet, and boats drawing three and a half feet of water may pass freely along it.

¹ Canal Society of New York State, Field Trip Guide for Western Herkimer County (Spring 1991); William Weston to Philip Schuyler, German Flatts, November 21, 1797, Schuyler Papers.

"A lateral branch is cut from the canal to the Mohawk River, upwards of five hundred yards in length, and from ten to twelve feet deep; by means of this feeder any quantity of water can be taken into the canal and discharged into Wood Creek or the Mohawk, as circumstances may require. To regulate this supply, and to prevent the works being injured by the freshets, a large regulating waste weir is constructed across the feeder; another of similar form is erected near Fort Newport, for the purpose of furnishing the necessary supplies of water to Wood Creek; and it is found by experience that these devices fully answer the most sanguine expectations, as now Wood Creek is rendered at least equal to any part of the navigation between thence and Schenectady. There is a lock at each extremity of the canal, the one of ten feet lift, and the other of eight feet. Five handsome and substantial bridges are constructed over the canal feeder."²

The following year [1799] Dr. Timothy Dwight recorded the severity of the deterioration first noted by Weston as he passed through Rome. "We examined the locks of the Canal - the Western Inland Lock Navigation - and were not a little surprised to see the bricks composing the locks already beginning to moulder away, although the work had been finished little more than two years. I have seen no good bricks in this region. In fireplaces they soon burn out; wherever they are exposed to the weather they speedily dissolve."

By 1802 the Company, encouraged by William Weston, determined to replace the rotten and leaking wooden locks at Little Falls with stone, and the collection of materials was underway. In August of that year Schuyler received a letter from Rome indicating "the necessary repairs to the locks at Rome & to the feeder will be attended to." In spite of several secondary sources that claim the Rome locks were rebuilt with stone at this same time, no clear primary source documentation has been found to support this assumption, notwithstanding the following reference made in 1810 by DeWitt Clinton on passing through Rome - "The locks at Rome were originally made of brick, which not standing the frost, were replaced by stone."³

There is ample primary source data during 1802 and 1803 supporting the reconstruction of the locks at Little Falls in stone under Weston's supervision, and ample documentation is found for works underway in Wood Creek west of Rome in letters originating from Rome during that period. But no mention is found of works on the Rome Canal, other than the brief reference to making "the necessary repairs" cited above.

And, unlike the letters coming downriver from "The Falls" during this period, which take pains to outline arrangements being made to reestablish the carry for boats while the locks are out of service during reconstruction, no such arrangements are cited from Rome.

Support for the reconstruction theory is found in secondary sources that claim bricks salvaged from the dismantled locks were used in the Rome Courthouse, built

² Philip Schuyler, "Second Report of the Western Inland Lock Navigation Company - 1798" in "Buffalo Historical Society Publications," Volume 13, pp.197-208.

³ George Huntington to Philip Schuyler, Rome, August 29, 1802, Schuyler Papers.

around 1806. The building burned in 1848, and at that time, according to the source, these bricks were re-used in the house on the northeast corner of North George and Court Streets.

However, DeWitt Clinton's technical details, recorded in 1810, are consistent with other primary observations: "The canal at Rome is 1 3/4 miles long; 32 feet wide at the top, and from 2 1/2 to 3 feet deep. The locks are 73 feet long and 12 feet wide; 10 feet lift on the Mohawk, and 8 feet on Wood Creek."

The completion of the canal at Rome removed the last land portage from the route west, with the possible exception of the Oswego Falls, which apparently could, on occasion, be navigated without portaging. This not only permitted the small batteaux, carrying 1 1/2 tons at best, to navigate freely along the route, but opened the way for the bigger boats, such as the Durhams, carrying up to 12 tons fully loaded, and too heavy to be portaged, to begin to use the system.

While the construction of Clinton's Ditch overran part of the eastern portion of the Rome Canal, making it no longer navigable, it avoided virtually all of the old canal within the village that had emerged near Fort Stanwix after the canal was completed in 1797. Clinton's Ditch cut across the channel of Wood Creek just a few yards southwest of the Wood Creek Lock of the old canal, and a direct connection was made at that point between the two troughs. As the shipping facilities of Rome had grown up along the Rome Canal, this connection avoided detaching the commercial district of the Village from the new canal system for a time.

In 1828 authorization was given to rebuild the lock and waste weir at the west end of the Rome Canal near the United States Arsenal to permit people to navigate "the old canal, from the Erie Canal to the Village of Rome" [Chapter 40, Laws of 1828]. Apparently, this was completed by 1829 "thus constituting a 'side-cut' which was continued in a navigable condition up to the time of commencing the work of enlargement upon the new line." The intent appears to have been to restore the side cut after completion of the enlargement. However, most of the Rome Canal east of this lock was over-run by the enlargement [now Erie Boulevard] and was thus no longer functional.

This lock site as well as the old Wood Creek batteau landing are now buried beneath pavement and fill near the Erie Boulevard bridge over Wood Creek. The present alignment of the creek postdates the Rome Canal, when a guard bank controlled the channel of the stream as it left the mill dam to the north [along the south edge of Dominick Street]. The original channel was between the present channel and Arsenal Street.

Urban development and its attendant processes of filling have obliterated much of this historic canal. However, three locations persist where field interpretation is still possible. The first, and most dramatic, is at the eastern terminus of the Rome Canal, where the "Mohawk Lock" brought boats off the river at the old batteau portage ramp known as the "Lower Landing." Here, etched in subtle relief around the historic monument raised there to commemorate that site, can be seen the outlines of that lock, the square basin with which it connected, and a length of the original 1797 canal running away to the west. Excavation here in 1991 revealed a section of the original brick lock wall, with its softened mortar clearly evident. Virtually no evidence of the 1803 stone lock that replaced it was found, a mystery that awaits further archeological

investigation. A pile of unused brick was recovered at the edge of the basin, perhaps where the contractor left it in 1797. Within it which were found some of the "common brick" and "culvert brick" cited in Weston's materials list for this lock.

A second interpretive site preserves a piece of the mainline canal where the route through Rome arched a bit more sharply north and was, therefore, avoided by the Erie's first enlargement. This alignment can be seen in the angled building front facing Erie Boulevard west of George Street, and in the narrow alleyway, Woodrow Avenue, that continues that line a curve to the west, behind the Burger King. Here one has the rare opportunity to drive along the 18th-century canal bed.

And a third site can still be found at the bridge that carries Erie Boulevard over Wood Creek. Although somewhat modified over the years, the junction of the Rome Canal with Wood Creek, and later with Clinton's Ditch, as well as the old batteau landing that served for a century before, can be found among the modern landmarks and remnants of the federal arsenal.

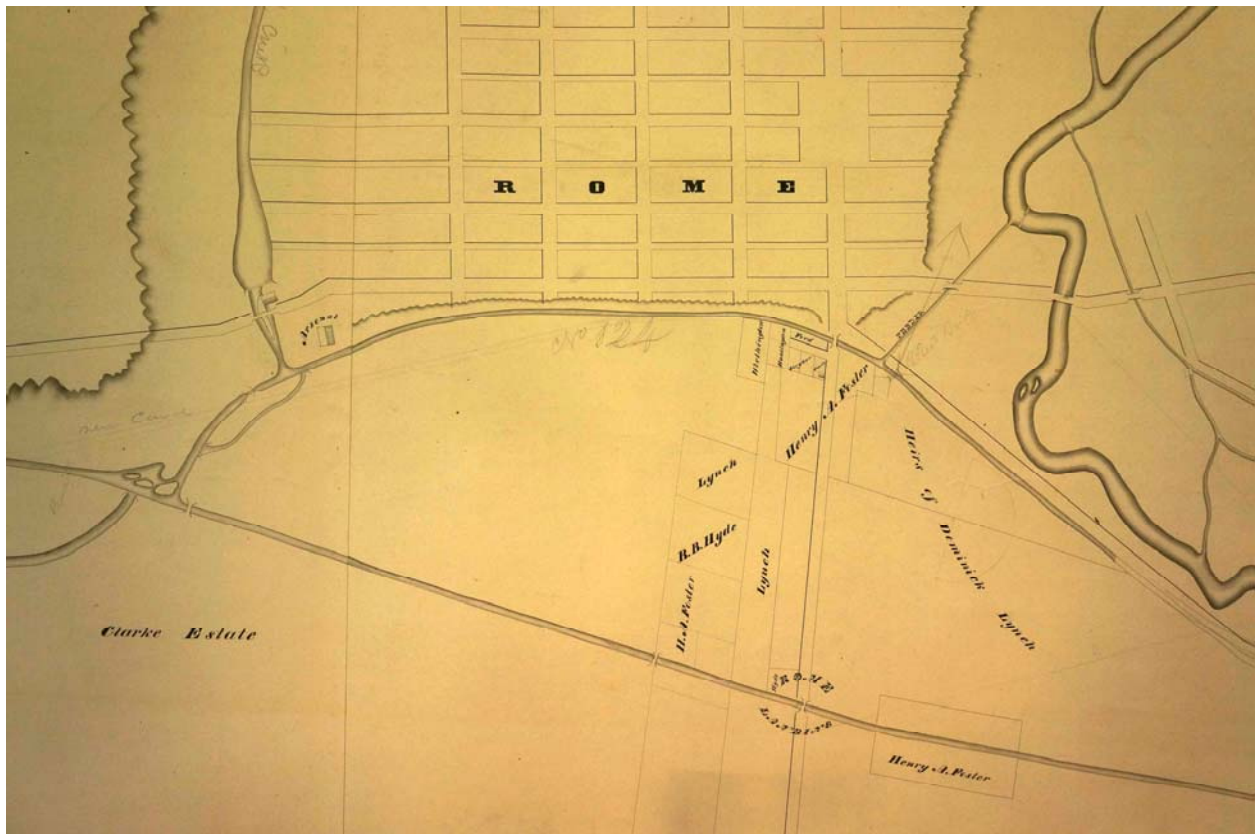


Figure 1. Map of Rome showing the Clinton's Ditch and the Rome Canal, 1841 (New York State Archives).

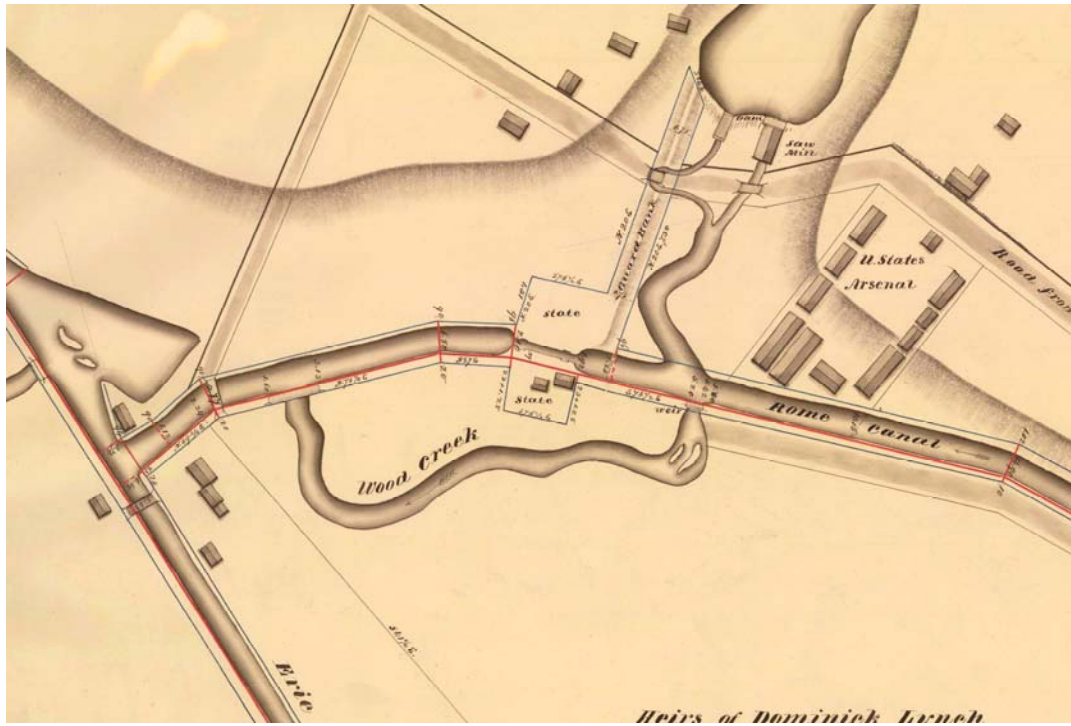


Figure 2. Hutchinson map of junction of Rome Canal and Clinton's Ditch, c1834 (New York State Archives).

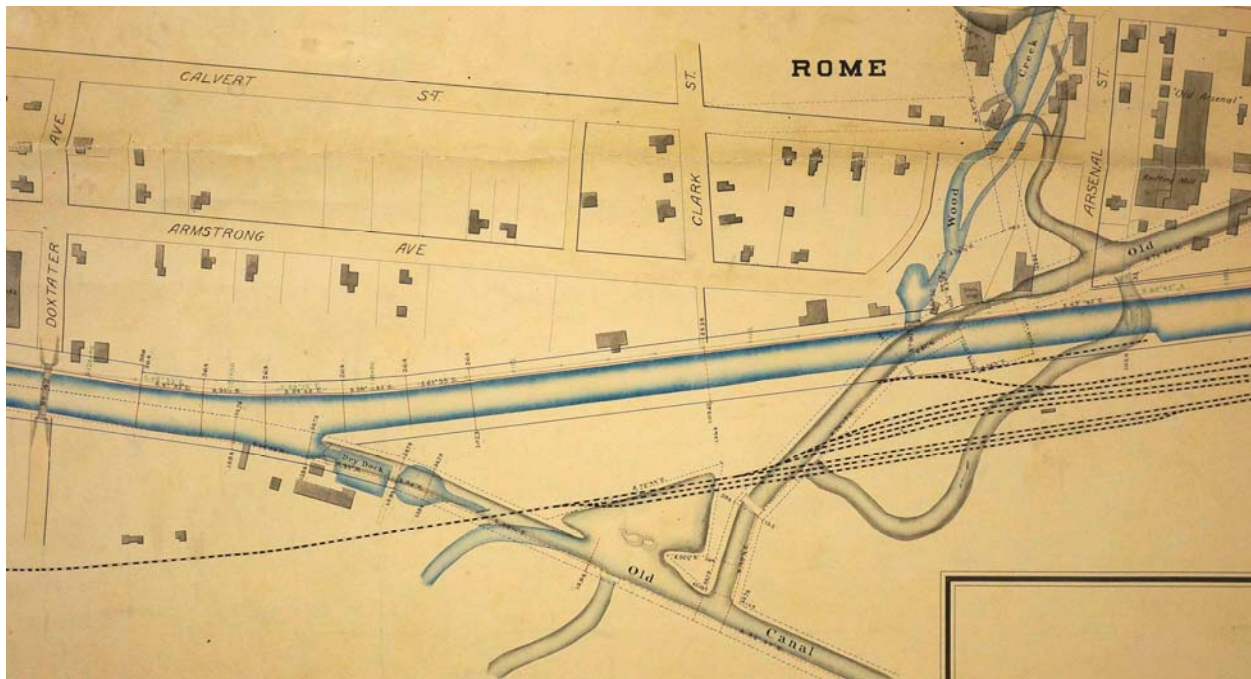


Figure 3. Schillner map showing Enlarged Erie (blue) and Clinton's Ditch and Rome Canal (gray), c1896 (New York State Archives).



Figure 4. Aerial view of west Rome over site of ceremonial first digging, c1959 (CSNYS).



Figure 5. 1813 Arsenal House on Dominick Street, 2017.

The Clinton's Ditch

With the War of 1812 over and the improvement of the Western Inland Lock Navigation Company at least stabilized and recognized, the people of Oneida County adapted to a commercial network that was tied together by the Mohawk. Several firms offered transport services. In May 1815 Eri Lusher and Company announced that they had "fitted up three packet boats for the accommodation of passengers from Utica to Schenectady", leaving Utica on "Monday and Wednesday mornings at 5 o'clock" and arriving in Schenectady the following day at breakfast. The reverse trip was not as quick, having to go against the current. Later that month, under the heading of "Stage Boats," came the notice that the "President" made the trip to Schenectady from Utica in sixteen hours with 33 passengers on board. J. Walton and Company of Schenectady stated that they will "despatch [sic] one boat, well covered, every Wednesday and Saturday... for Utica and Rome, on the same days, one boat for Oswego, Seneca-Falls and Cayuga. In addition to the above establishment, boats will be constantly ready, and be started whenever four tons of goods arrive."⁴

A cursory look at advertisements in the local newspapers from 1815 shows that firms from Sackets Harbor, Oswego, and Brownville (Watertown) as well as Schenectady considered Utica and Rome potential markets. When Utica's Columbian Gazette carried a notice in early 1817 that the navigation of the Black River at Watertown had been improved by the erection of two lift locks, the commentator was probably figuring that local merchants would look favorably on the improvement. The paper may have also described the work in hopes of building confidence in the local populace as it began its own experiment with canals, the Erie Canal.⁵

The citizens of the region had caught the same canal fever that swept the state after Clinton's famous December 1815 memorial. The state legislature received two petitions from the county in March 1816 advocating the canal's construction. Until the canal was finally authorized in 1817, local inhabitants held meetings to convince their state representatives to build the "Western Canal."⁶

There was a receptive audience to these appeals. Despite the Western Inland Lock Navigation Company's improvements, the Mohawk often remained the second of two bad choices for Upstaters. As the canal commissioners observed while evaluating the need for the Erie Canal, "though the road from Schenectady to Utica is far from being good, it is frequently preferred to the river." Recognizing the inadequacies of road or river transportation, the commissioners as early as their 1812 report opted for a totally artificial channel parallel to the Mohawk.⁷

⁴ Utica Patriot, May 8, 1815; May 22, 1815; May 29, 1815; for an excellent description of a river voyage even after the partial opening of the Erie Canal see, *Memoirs of an Emigrant - The Journal of Alexander Coventry* (Albany Institute of History and Art and the New York State Library, 1978), p.1733-1735.

⁵ Columbia Gazette, August 23, 1814; May 28, 1816; November 19, 1816.

⁶ Canal Laws, I, p.120; Columbian Gazette, January 23, 1817.

⁷ Canal Laws, I, p.48, 77.

The first detailed study with a canal in mind of the terrain between Utica and Rome was undertaken by a survey party under the direction of Charles C. Broadhead in 1816. With his manuscript account and the published version in the Canal Commissioners' annual report for 1817 in hand, a researcher can note the evolution of the canal alignment in central Oneida County. Broadhead left Rome in mid-August and headed east. At Oriskany, he noted the need to pass the woolen mill's canal under the State's canal. He recommended impounding the waters of the creek with a five-foot high dam to establish a feeder for the canal. The creek itself, he proposed, would be crossed by an aqueduct. Soon after Broadhead's report, the aqueduct idea was abandoned and his suggested dam was incorporated into a slackwater crossing. At Whitesboro, a northern and a southern route towards Utica were considered.⁸

Apparently about the time of Rome's "first-digging" ceremonies of July 4, 1817, the canal commissioners made two decisions that negatively affected the Rome community - one of only short term duration, the other causing hard feelings for decades. The authorizing legislation for the commencement of the canal was probably cast with only the section for Rome to the Seneca River in mind. The commissioners went to some length in their annual report in justifying their letting of contracts for the canal between Rome and Utica. They noted that without the latter section, traffic would still be dependent on a very awkward section of the Mohawk "for some time." Despite the efforts of the Western Inland Lock Navigation Company, the river between the two villages was "extremely serpentine in its course; and that its navigation, in low water, is much more difficult and imperfect than below... Utica; so much so, that this part of the route... frequently becomes a portage; boats being lightened or unloaded west of Rome, and their cargoes carried by land to Utica, where they are reloaded into boats and transported down the Mohawk." By completing the canal all the way to Utica, traffic could be encouraged and toll revenue generated. As it turned out, for Rome it simply meant being bypassed sooner than latter.⁹

The second decision of the canal commissioners, announced in their report for 1817, truly damaged Rome's prospect as a commercial center. Final changes in the canal's route removed the alignment to a distance south of the village. The reasoning behind the bypassing of Rome remains unclear and could never be adequately justified to the Romans. Instead of a short summit at Rome as decided upon the year previously, the famous, now ironically named, Rome summit would reach all the way from Frankfort to Syracuse. "By this arrangement, the cost of constructing two locks, the delay of passing them, and the future expense of repairs, would for ever be saved and prevented." The canal would thus be low enough on the landscape to take advantage of feeders from Oriskany and Wood Creeks and the Mohawk River. The people of Rome would not forget how the State left them high and dry.¹⁰

⁸ Canal Laws, I, p.247-250; for a first-hand account of working on this survey, see William C. Young, "Reminiscences of Surveys on the Erie Canal in 1816-1817" in Canal Enlargement in New York State (Buffalo Historical Society, 1909), p.33-347; Canal Collection, Broadhead Fieldbook, Oneida County History Center.

⁹ Canal Laws, I, 367.

¹⁰ Canal Laws, I, 367, 376; Pomeroy Jones, Annals and Recollections of Oneida County (Rome, 1850), p.379-380.

Overseeing the planning and construction at the local level on behalf of the State were several engineers. Isaac Briggs, described by the commissioners as "an eminent mathematician," worked on the Utica/Rome section. James Geddes also supervised the work until the line was ready for the letting of contracts. Canvass White was instrumental in conducting surveys in 1818 that enabled the commissioners to determine the best line through "the village of Utica," perhaps selecting from the northern or southern routes that Broadhead had documented earlier.¹¹

Two individuals, however, were especially critical to the success of these early days. Benjamin Wright (1770-1842) of Rome had worked on the Western Inland Lock Navigation Company's canal and, with the Erie, became the Chief Engineer. He later worked on canals and railroads throughout the northeast and has been called "the Father of American Civil Engineers." Myron Holley (1779-1841) was the "Acting" Canal Commissioner, meaning he actually did the administrative work of preparing contracts and making payments.

The contracts, the first for the Erie Canal, were arranged locally in three sections. To the west of Rome were the contracts described numerically beginning with John Richardson's Section 1 and continuing to the Seneca River. Richardson, who later went on to several other Ditch contracts, signed his agreement for Section 1 on July 12, 1817. It began "at a stake near the Fort-Bull-Lock fifty feet from the north side of Wood Creek and runs thence easterly on the canal line about 61 chains and 50 links." To the west of Richardson was John Seymour's contract for Section 2. Seymour's may have been the first contract actually issued and, perhaps, where the first work actually occurred. Whitford states that the first contract was issued on June 27, 1817. In the State Comptroller's accounting of contracts, the only candidate for that first contract is Seymour's. On June 30 he received his first payments. Unfortunately, Seymour soon failed in his work, the contract was abandoned and he disappears from the Erie's history.¹²

To the east of Rome were a series of alphabetically-arranged contracts to Utica, beginning with Jeremiah Brainerd's contracts for Sections A and B, dated July 8, 1817. Brainerd must have quickly earned a reputation for handling the difficult assignments. He took over the eastern part of Hathaway's swamp section and was instrumental in overcoming the problems with quicksand around the base of "Oriskany hill." In the latter case, his contract papers describe a plank and post affair that appears to have created a wooden liner for the canal along that portion. Those same papers document additional payments to Brainerd for the extra labor needed to excavate the deeper cut around Rome, making the famous Rome summit.¹³

Between the numerically-arranged contracts on the west and alphabetically-arranged contracts on the east were three contracts for the length of the Rome swamp.

¹¹ Canal Laws, I, p.370, 407; for Canvass White's manuscript expense account for 1819, see Box 10, Series A1125, New York State Archives.

¹² Series A1267, New York State Archives.

¹³ For more on the quicksand problem during the 181 construction "at the Oriskany-hill, in the neighborhood of Rome" see Canal Laws, I, p.406.

Joshua Hathaway undertook the eastern portion in an agreement with Myron Holley dated July 12, 1817. His mile-and-a quarter contract started at the western end of Section A, near "the place where the Road leading from Rome to Utica crosses Oneida Brook" and went westerly a little more than a mile. The work proved to be challenging. Benjamin Wright commented that in October and November of 1817 he found men working there "in the water nearly mid-leg deep. The excavation was the kind called hard pan, and extremely hard and difficult to remove and to be wheeled twelve feet high." Eventually, the difficult eastern portion of Hathaway's contract was turned over to Enos Chapin and Asa Brayton, the contractors on the middle portion of the Rome swamp.

On November 6, 1817, Chapin and Brayton signed their agreement to construct the mile-and-a-quarter length of prism from Hathaway's to "Wood Creek at the westernmost bend where the same is intersected by the canal line near the United State's arsenal." West of Chapin and Brayton's was the mile-and-a-half stretch covered by the December 19, 1817 contract with Joseph Miller.¹⁴

The launching of all of these efforts formally occurred on July 4th, 1817. "Accordingly, on that day at sun rise, a large number of citizens, accompanied by the commissioner and engineers, assembled and proceeded to the place appointed, on the line of the canal." They went to where the Rome Canal intersected the line of the new Erie Canal, just below the United States Arsenal. The only contemporary account continues "The Hon. J. Hatheway, on the part of the citizens present, with a few pertinent observations, delivered the spade into the hands of the commissioner, by whom it was presented to Judge Richardson, who had entered into the first contract for constructing a portion of the canal, accompanied with the following address.

"Fellow-Citizens, we have assembled to commence the excavation of the Erie Canal. This work when accomplished will connect our western inland seas with the Atlantic ocean. It will diffuse the benefits of internal navigation over a surface of vast extent, blessed with a salubrious climate and luxuriant soil, embracing a tract of country capable of sustaining more human beings than were ever accommodated by any work of the kind. By this great highway, unborn millions will easily transport their surplus productions to the shores of the Atlantic, procure their supplies, and hold a useful and profitable intercourse with all the maratime [sic] nations of the earth. The expense and labor of this great undertaking, bears no proportion to its utility. Nature has kindly afforded every facility; we have all the moral and physical means within our reach and control. Let us then proceed to the work, animated by the prospect of its speedy accomplishment, and cheered with the anticipated benedictions of a grateful posterity.'

"Thus, accompanied by the acclamations of the citizens and the discharge of cannon, from the U. S. Arsenal, has been struck the first stroke towards the construction of a work, which in its completion, will unite Erie with the Hudson, the west with the Atlantic; which will scatter plenty along its borders, carry refinement and civilization to the regions of the wilderness, and ever remain a proud and useful monument of the

¹⁴ The above descriptions of the first Erie Canal contracts were taken from the manuscript contracts themselves, now housed in Box 10, Series A1125, New York State Archives.

enlightened view of its projectors, and of the wisdom and magnanimity of the state of New-York." ¹⁵

The enthusiasm of the "first digging" ceremonies and the initial excavations met with a cold shower later in the year, literally. "The rains have surpassed in extent and duration all former example. More water has flowed in the Mohawk river the past summer, than was ever before witnessed in any season by the oldest inhabitants." So high was the water that the Mohawk River flooded the portage between it and Wood Creek and started to partially flow west into the Saint Lawrence drainage basin. The commissioners solemnly noted, perhaps tongue-in-cheek, that, as a result, all of northeastern New York State had thus become an island.¹⁶

There were other issues. Many of the first contracts had to be abandoned and relet as the work proved greater than expected. Simply getting the funds needed to purchase tools and pay laborers was always a concern even though Holley was regularly going up and down the line with cash advances. Timothy Hunt had a contract for a mile and quarter near Whitesboro. He wrote Holley on February 3, 1818, "Sir, I am Sorry to trouble you but I am in need of some money. I am Entirely Destitute and Expect to be Sued Every Day, the people whom I have been dealing with are poor, and I being a Stranger makes it worse... I have done a Good Deal of work since I seen you... I wish you would send 400 dollars." Hunt had his advance a few days later.¹⁷

By the end of 1817 contracts has been released for nearly every portion of the canal in the Utica/Rome section. Only "a few rods on each side of Oriskany creek, have not been let out, but are reserved in order that surplus earth may be used in the construction of a dam, which is to be built across the stream."¹⁸

Besides the contracts for prism work, numerous ones were released for supplies and smaller though no less important efforts. Among the more noteworthy was the receipt of Moses Bagg of Utica for "13 bottles of wine furnished the board of the canal commissioners, for their use while passing through the middle section of the canal, from Utica to Montezuma, and thence back to Rome."¹⁹

On October 23, 1819 the famous first and above mentioned trip on the Rome to Utica section was made by the "Chief Engineer of Rome," named in recognition of the services of Benjamin Wright. Governor Clinton was on board. An account of the trip still conveys the excitement. The voyage was made possible after the construction dams around the Oriskany crossing were removed, letting water into the new canal for the first time. Problems with quicksand around Oriskany Hill delayed the trip by a few days. Among the structures that were especially noted was the crossing of Nail Creek, just west of Utica. "There is an embankment over Nail Creek 21 feet high, above the natural surface of the ground, and 32 rods long, under which is constructed a large

¹⁵ Onondaga Register, July 23, 1817, from the Utica Patriot, July 15, 1817.

¹⁶ Canal Laws, I, p.375.

¹⁷ Box 10, Series A1125, New York State Archives.

¹⁸ Canal Laws, I, p.373.

¹⁹ Canal Laws, I, p.417.

semi-circular culvert of stone, for passing the water of the creek, under the canal, into the Mohawk river below. The arch of the culvert has a span of 15 feet, and the whole structure looks stable and well adapted to its object. In a canal, the triumph of art is most apparent, where the navigation is carried high over the neighboring lands: this embankment was therefore regarded with great complacency."²⁰

Altering the terrain was just part of building the canal. The State also needed to create systems of management to operate and maintain it. Among the first representatives of the State's ongoing role were the toll collectors. In 1821 Stalham Williams was appointed the Utica collector. His counterpart in Rome, also appointed that year, was Bela B. Hyde. That year Hyde needed to keep track of the 2,731 boats that passed his collector's office at Rome Landing. Another indication of the operational demands comes in 1825 when the canal commissioners reported that "the number of persons passing Utica in freight and packet boats... has exceeded 40,000, and the number of boats, arks, and cribs, which passed the same place has been equal to forty-two for every day throughout the period of navigation."²¹

The work of Williams and Hyde are interestingly reflected in their manuscript accounts, now housed at the New York State Archives. On May 31, 1825 Williams paid Charles Storrs \$50 "to making 20 graduating scales and boxes for weighing boats." These were then sent to other collectors across the state, including Hyde. Hyde paid Pliny Darrow of Rome over \$200 in October 1820 "for framing, raising, enclosing, laying 2 floors, making doors and window shutters and sash and sitting glass for 3 windows for Erie Canal Toll House at Rome 60 by 20 feet." He purchased of Reuben Hoag that same year chain to stretch across the canal to stop boats, perhaps to make sure that proper tolls had been paid. He bought of his own firm, "Wright and Hyde," a "Pad Lock" for the chain.²²

The completion of the Erie Canal still left the people of Rome with a bittersweet taste. When the "Wedding of the Waters" celebration came by their village, they expressed their frustration with a somber parody of it. An observer noted that the celebration's proceedings in Rome "were of a singular character, partaking of joy and sorrow, of chagrin and satisfaction. It will be remembered that the inhabitants of Rome contended for the location of the Canal through their village, instead of the route finally determined on, not so much as a matter of justice to them, as one of expediency and economy. Their hopes were frustrated, and they have never ceased to feel that they have been dealt by unjustly; and to manifest these feelings, they commenced their celebration by forming a procession in front of the hotel, at eleven o'clock, a.m.; uniform companies of citizen-soldiers preceded - immediately after them followed a black barrel (filled with water from the old Canal, which passes through Rome,) supported by four men - the citizens followed; and in this order, the muffled drums, they marched to the

²⁰ Lionel Wyld, editor, 40'x28'x4' - The Erie Canal (1967), p.52.

²¹ Canal Laws, II, p.14, 69; Annual Report of the Canal Commissioners (Albany, 1826), p.16.

²² Series A1125, New York State Archives

new Canal, into which they poured the contents of the black barrel. They then, in quick time, returned to Starr's Hotel, where they put aside their ill humor..."²³

That dissatisfaction in Rome over the loss of the Erie lingered after the completion is demonstrated by the 1828 legislative authorization to rebuild the western lock and waste-weir of the Rome Canal. The work was probably completed in the spring of 1829 with the hope that the old canal could be reused as a spur of the Erie and help keep the village's commercial center viable.²⁴

²³ Cadwallader D. Colden, *Memoir at the Celebration of the Completion of the New York Canals* (1825), p.304; for an account of Utica's much cheerier celebration see *Memoirs of an Emigrant - The Journal of Alexander Coventry* (Albany Institute of History and Art and the New York State Library, 1978), p.2121-2126; for a very early map (1822) of the buildings and streets in Utica along the canal see Box 20, 57/J, Series B0171-83, New York State Archives.

²⁴ *Annual Report of the Canal Commissioners* (Albany, 1829), p.191.

The Enlarged Erie Canal

Two major local alterations to the Erie were justified when the widening and deepening program was launched in the late 1830s. One was ironically derived from an attempt to keep changes to a minimum. The other, the Rome alignment, was to correct a situation that had caused animosity from the very start of the Ditch.

The initial survey and estimate for the Utica/Rome section was prepared by Frederick C. Mills and published in 1836. In Utica, Mills noted that the Ditch canal was crooked and "in several places so narrow, that but two boats can pass." Unfortunately, commercial structures had so tightly squeezed along the alignment that the estimated damages from widening gave the engineers and canal commissioners pause. The decision was reached in 1836 to avoid the problem instead of really resolving it. The Ditch alignment was kept and the new width would be kept to sixty feet "in the compact part of the city" instead of the mandated seventy feet. Another Utica concern was that the water level of Clinton's Ditch was already relatively high on the landscape. If the length of the Ditch summit level was to be maintained (from Frankfort to Syracuse), the deepening of the canal would necessitate an even higher level. Already, the bridge approaches in Utica were "high, and in some instances, inconvenient of access." A higher canal would make these approaches even more difficult. To avoid having to raise the towpath height, Mills recommended shortening the length of the summit level by placing a lift lock on the west side of the city. The new seven-foot depth could then be attained without materially altering the current level.²⁵

The citizens of Rome moved with speed and determination to correct the Erie alignment near their community as soon as the enlargement program was announced. The new route was authorized by a special act of the legislature in 1836. By veering the enlarged Erie north into the center of Rome, the State could also make some savings by reaching the new Black River Canal alignment a little further up the line. Amazingly, the State would still not miss the chance to rub salt into a now healing wound.²⁶

Actual work on enlarging the Erie came soon. Despite the complications described above, the need in Utica for an improved Erie was great. Contracts were let for the length between Genesee Street and Nail Creek in August 1837. By 1839, the city's entire length was being worked on. The new canal was nearly complete at the end of 1840.²⁷

The new Rome alignment was underway in August 1839. The canal commissioners noted that in spite of the deep cutting that was necessary, a speedy

²⁵ "Report and Estimate of Frederick C. Mills, engineer, from Frankfort to Lyons," (Albany, 1836), Assembly Document 99, p.126-127; Whitford, p.150; Annual Report of the Canal Commissioners (Albany, 1837), p.17-18; for more information on damage claims in the area see Digest of Canal Claims (1860) and the damage awards on file at the Oneida County Clerk's Office as listed in Index of Corporations - Grantee, 1791-1884 under New York State.

²⁶ Whitford, p.153; "Report and Estimate of Frederick C. Mills, engineer, from Frankfort to Lyons," (Albany, 1836), Assembly Document 99, p.159.

²⁷ Annual Report of the Canal Commissioners (Albany, 1837), p.24; (Albany, 1838), p.20; (Albany, 1839), p.6; (Albany, 1840), p.54; (Albany, 1841), p.33.

completion of these sections would still be sought so as to tap the water supplies of the Black River Canal and the Enlarged Erie Mohawk Feeder. Good progress on the route was reported the following year. Unfortunately, at the same time, the State and nation were being plunged into an economic depression. The state legislature faced mounting debt from the enlargement program. Instead of pursuing the public works to restart the economy, they retrenched. The Stop and Tax Act of 1842 froze work at Rome and throughout the line of the Erie's enlargement. Only about half of the work had been completed in Rome. The incomplete portion, by blocking the water supply, prevented use of any of it including the still struggling remnants of the old Rome Canal. The commissioners felt doubly embarrassed because they had purposefully ignored maintenance of the soon-to-be-replaced length of the Ditch and now that was hardly adequate to meet the demand.²⁸

The citizens of Rome were now worse off than ever before. They had no direct connection with the Erie. Even the canal commissioners, biased parties in the whole affair, painted a discouraging picture.

"At the time of the act suspending further expenditures on the public works, then in progress in the State, was passed, the contractors for this independent line had nearly completed some parts of it, and had commenced their excavations over the whole line. The cutting is an average depth of about 12 feet, the first six feet consisting entirely of muck, composed of decayed vegetable matter, and the remainder of clean gravel. The exposure of so large a mass of this muck excavation to the action of the sun, in the summer of 1841, is represented by the inhabitants, had the effect of causing many severe, and in some instances fatal cases of fever, in this village.

"A large number of highly respectable citizens of Rome, soon after the adjournment of the Legislature in the spring of 1842, called the attention of the acting Canal Commissioner having in special charge that portion of the enlargement of the Erie Canal, to the fact that pestilential diseases had been caused by the unfinished state in which the work was left, which it was feared would continue until the canal was completed and filled with water. They also alleged that the village being situated higher than the canal, and upon soil of a porous character, the excavations then made had the effect to drain most of the wells in the village, thereby occasioning to the citizens great inconvenience for the want of water. This difficulty they believed would be obviated as soon as the canal was filled.

"For these reasons they urged, strenuously, that the public works, in their village should not be left in a condition imminently hazardous to the public health, and causing great private inconvenience and loss.

"The Commissioner deeming that the act of 1842 was imperative in its provisions, felt himself constrained, notwithstanding the strong case made out, to forbid any farther progress being made with the work and directed a written notice to that effect to be served upon the contractors.

"A communication from several citizens of Rome, of high standing and character, addressed to the acting Commissioner on that part of the canal, has been recently

²⁸ Annual Report of the Canal Commissioners (Albany, 1840), p.56; (Albany, 1841), p.33; (Albany, 1843), p.32-33.

received, in which the injury to the public health resulting from the condition in which the work was left is particularly set forth, and corroborated by the certificate of the medical gentlemen of the village. It is therein stated, that when it became known that the Canal Commissioners did not consider themselves authorized to prosecute the work farther, that the citizens of Rome felt it to be their duty to 'assume the responsibility of taking such measures as would protect the public health; and that they had made such arrangements as had secured the prosecution of the work, and had brought it nearly to completion.'

"It also states that since the excavations have been finished the sickness which they alleged was owing to the unfinished state of the work, had wholly disappeared.

"It will thus be seen that the citizens of Rome have taken the matter into their own hands, and that the contractors, with their aid, have placed this new line nearly in readiness for navigation.

"It is not necessary to repeat that this has been done, not only without the sanction, but against the express direction of the Canal Commissioner in charge, and without the supervision or direction of any officer or engineer in the employment of the State.

"Navigation can be opened the coming spring, if it is deemed expedient, through the new line, at very trifling expense.

"The question whether the State shall avail itself of the new line for navigation, which has been completed for use under the circumstances stated, is respectfully referred to the Legislature."²⁹

The new line was brought into use in pursuance of a special legislative resolution of March 1844.³⁰

The completion of the enlargement of the Erie's prism between Utica and Rome had to wait for nearly a decade due to the State's fiscal shortcomings. Completion of survey work in 1841 allowed contracts to be let in November of that year for most of the undone sections. Regrettably, the work never got under way due to lack of funds and most hopes for any quick start ended with the Stop and Tax Act of 1842. The failure to get this eleven-mile length of the Erie finished before the Stop and Tax Act of 1842 compounded an already bad situation. The summit level lacked adequate water supplies. The narrow Ditch prism did not allow enough water to reach the eastern end of the summit and the enlarged portions below. Serious navigation "embarrassments" resulted.³¹

Not until 1853 were contracts let for all of the prism work between the two communities. Hopes were expressed that navigation problems resulting from insufficient water would soon be a thing of the past. As part of their report for 1855, the canal commissioners proudly stated that the "portion of the canal between Oriskany and

²⁹ Annual Report of the Canal Commissioners (Albany, 1844), p.31-33.

³⁰ Annual Report of the Canal Commissioners (Albany, 1845), p.50-51; (Albany, 1846), p.38; Rome Sentinel, June 29, 1967; March 19, 1844.

³¹ Annual Report of the Canal Commissioners (Albany, 1841), p.33; (Albany, 1842), p.22, 36-40, 66-67; (Albany, 1843), p.32; (Albany, 1852), p.24.

Rome, which for years has been so difficult to navigate, in consequence of the shallow water, narrow channel, and rapid current caused by the feeder at Rome" was finally enlarged.³²

Under the 1895 Improvement program, the Enlarged Erie in the Utica-Rome area received extensive work though without radically altering its route or appearance. The most major aspect of the Improvement was the deepening to nine feet. In Utica, the most visually striking part of the work was probably the covering of the laid-stone vertical walls with concrete. Middle Division Contract 1 covered the length between the east county line to Lock 46. Contract 18 went from Lock 46 to the Oriskany Aqueduct. Contract 19 went from there to Greenfield Bridge and Contract 20 continued west through Rome to New London.³³

The transition from the Enlarged Erie Canal to the Barge Canal was neither quick nor easy. The 1918 completion of the Barge Canal actually left much of the Enlarged Erie in central Oneida County still operational. The portion of the Erie from the new Barge Canal to the junction of the Black River Canal was kept open in order to maintain navigation on the latter. Since the elevation of the Barge Canal was lower, a junction lock was constructed as part of the general contract for that portion of the Barge. The lock, just west of the Rome terminal, lifted boat up from the Barge Canal into the Enlarged Erie's alignment. Though information on when the lock was last used has not been located, it almost certainly died of neglect as the Black River Canal became unusable in the early 1920s. In hindsight, the connection along with the relocated Black River Canal locks at Delta Dam represents a very expensive example of wishful thinking.

A more complicated story concerns the junction lock on the south side of the Barge Canal at Rome. As part of the original designs for the Barge Canal, it was assumed that the old canal through Mohawk, Ilion, Utica, and Oriskany would be discarded. In 1911, however, a clause surprised many in the new law (Chapter 746, Laws of 1911) authorizing Barge Canal terminals. It required that the thirty-mile stretch be kept open. To meet the requirements of the law, junction locks were built at the eastern and western ends.

The justification for the retention is difficult to define. Engineers pointed out that the Oriskany Creek feeder was insufficient to supply, on its own, water for the retained section. To some extent, this handicap was probably offset by the construction of a dive culvert (Chapter 346, Laws of 1918) between the two Rome junction locks to supply water. At about the same time that one arm of the State was performing these construction tasks in 1918, another branch of the State (the legislature) was already preparing to sell portions of the canal in Utica.

The most vocal opposition to the retention of the old canal seems to have come ironically from along its length. A public hearing on July 16, 1919 demonstrated the

³² Annual Report of the Canal Commissioners (Albany, 1854), p.34, 38; (Albany, 1855), p.33, 50; (Albany, 1856), p.41.

³³ For final accounts of this work see, for Contract 1, Volume 99, p.289-446; Contract 18, Volume 104, p.1-220; Contract 19, Volume 104, p.221-390; Contract 20, Volume 107, Series B0377, New York State Archives.

insistence of citizens in Utica to get rid of the old canal in their city. Even the State Engineer and Surveyor and the Superintendent of Public Works concurred. They had recommended two months earlier that, in particular, the portion between Schuyler Street and Third Street be formally abandoned. With some official recognition, that portion of the canal started to be filled the following year. By the end of the year, even the State's engineers were recommending that the whole project be scrapped. An amendment to the state constitution that allowed this action was approved by voters in 1921.³⁴

Gradually, physical reminders of the Enlarged Erie faded away. The "old iron" in the Westmoreland Street bridge in Whitesboro was sold in 1922. The River Street Bridge in Oriskany was sold for scrap in 1925. Rome's Washington Street bridge was removed in 1927. Two years later the George Street bridge was gone, described as the last one west of James to be removed. Much of the filling in of the Erie's prism in Rome was performed under public works monies during the Depression. Between 1932 and 1937 the stretch between Washington and James Streets and other areas were filled in. There was little published opposition to doing so. One village resident declared in 1931 that the area east of James was "in very bad shape, and is anything but a credit to the city." Some of the blame was once again directed at the State since it would apparently not quickly abandon the land down to the river. A 1935 aerial view of Rome shows that the Enlarged Erie prism west of Wood Creek still had water in it. By the early 1940s the plans for an arterial through the city using the Enlarged Erie were well developed. The last remnants of the Erie's prism, near the junction locks, were buried about 1960 as part of the new highway.³⁵

The 1915 Yorkville bridge over Oriskany Boulevard survived as a reminder of the Enlarged Erie Canal until its removal in 1970. The c1897 lift bridge at the Varick/Whitesboro crossing in Utica came down in the 1920s and its truss reinstalled as a bridge over Oriskany Creek on Judd Road at Colemans Mills, where it remains to this day.

³⁴ Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Works (Albany, 1919), p.60-61; (Albany, 1920), p.62, 74-75, 112; (Albany, 1921), p.95-98.

³⁵ Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Works (Albany, 1923), p.78; (Albany, 1926), p.64; Scothon Scrapbooks, Erie II, p.1, 3, 4, New York State Museum.

The Erie Barge Canal

The State Engineer and Surveyor's initial and now classic 1901 planning report for the Barge Canal tried to fairly weigh two possible routes through central Oneida County. One was simply the Enlarged Erie route made bigger. The other, clearly the favorite, called for a new line between points north of Utica and south of Rome. It was hoped that the latter route would enable Utica to complete its "dream of river straightening" and offer a wonderful site for industrial development between the New York Central tracks and the canal. As for the old canal in the city, Bond stated that "with the canal filled and leveled, with business houses erected on the space, with the unsightly canal structures eliminated in the heart of the city, there is no doubt that Utica will be benefitted by the barge canal in the Mohawk River." Ditto for Rome, sort of.³⁶

The option of keeping the canal through the center of Rome was perhaps more seriously considered by the State but eventually ruled out due to the prohibitive cost of bridge maintenance in the city. In what was becoming a classic scenario for the citizens of Rome, these initial considerations once again enabled the State to hand Rome a package that clearly represented second-best. "In the first instance arose the almost frantic objection of the populace on learning that for the state to retain the line through the business district... would mean the elimination of a long string of businesses to allow for a wider channel, and then the erection of a complete set of far higher bridges disfiguring the landscape. Next it was found that the new type of canal upon the same route would conflict with the operation of the New York Central's four-track main line...", perhaps a more valuable asset for the city. In the end, the State negotiated with the New York Central and the main line was moved south of the Barge Canal. Rome lost the canal and the railroad.³⁷

Though not specifically oriented to the central Oneida County area, a particularly fascinating report on laborers on the Barge Canal was publicized in 1909. The commentary was drawn from an investigation by the State's Bureau of Factory Inspection and almost certainly reflects conditions on the Oneida County contracts. The report also reflects the prejudices and biases of the investigators. Twenty-one Barge Canal contracts were inspected on which 4,516 workers were employed. Forty-six percent were foreign born, "only two of whom had taken out first papers for citizenship." Nearly all of these workers were housed in labor camps. The investigators concluded that several of these were of poor condition.

"It is apparently the general rule among the contractors (to which, of course, there are exceptions) to provide 'shanties' for the laborers at the job. These 'shanties' or 'shacks,' together in some cases with outlying huts, constitute the laborers' camp. In some cases additional camps are provided for the skilled labor, mechanics, timekeepers, etc., but as a general rule the better class of employees board in nearby cities or villages or at farmhouses along the line of the canal, while the unskilled laborers live at the job. The latter method is preferred by the contractors for the reason

³⁶ Edward Bond, Report on the Barge Canal from the Hudson River to the Great Lakes (Albany, 1901), p.31.

³⁷ Bond, p.37, 97-99; Scothon Scrapbook, Erie I, p.11, New York State Museum.

that the help is close at hand to resume work after a storm or temporary layoff, or in case of emergency.

"After erecting the shanties and building bunks therein the contractor turns the use of the building over to the padrone, or labor agent, who is depended on to supply all necessary unskilled laborers in return for the privilege of conducting the supply store for the men. The padrone also has for himself all moneys received for bunk space in the shanties...

"As to the manner of boarding, the Austrians and Hungarians generally engage a 'board boss' who buys and cooks the food. Occasionally a married couple does this. At the end of the month the cost is assigned pro rata among the members of the mess. The Italian, however, prefers to buy his own supplies and do his own cooking. The contractor protects the padrone by deducting from the wages of the men the amount owing to him... These bunks are merely board berths filled with straw or hay, over which the occupant throws an old blanket of some kind. It is exceptional to find cots or beds. Usually the bunks are all together in a large room which is badly ventilated, these men seemingly having a dread of fresh air for sleeping purposes, although they work in it all day. Sometimes the hay or straw is changed, at least I am so informed; but, as a matter of fact, I saw no indications that such is the case. The camps, with few exceptions, are located near running streams or lakes, but, truth to tell, the alien laborer generally remain among the great unwashed.

"In several instances the padrones have taken out licenses to sell beer. In some cases whiskey is sold without a license. Arrests have been made for this violation but, so far as learned, no convictions have been obtained. The contractors, for obvious reasons, discourage the selling of beer and liquors at or near the camps.

"Instances are known where the padrones charge the men for getting the jobs, charge them for sleeping room, charge for the room whether used or not (as the price of retaining a job), which is extortion pure and simple... Still it has to be acknowledged that but little sickness exists among these men and they are often able to take a vacation in their foreign homes during the winter months...

"The camps, as a whole, are carefully located on high ground and allow for ample drainage, although improvement could be made at some camps. The drinking water is usually supplied from driven wells of ample depth to insure a good quality of water. On all contracts water-boys are employed whose duty is to keep the men well supplied with fresh drinking water."³⁸

The prism of the new Barge Canal in Oneida County was divided between two contracts. Navigation of the new prism was possible with the opening of the 1917 season.³⁹

³⁸ "Housing Conditions and Wages on the New York State Barge Canal...", Engineering News (August 5, 1909), Volume 62, Number 6, p.154.

³⁹ Noble Whitford, History of the Barge Canal (1922), p.264.



Figure 6. Barge Canal labor camp east of Stoney Creek, 1910 (New York State Archives).



Figure 7. Barge Canal labor sign found near Utica, c1910 (New York State Museum).

Contract No. 42/42A

The scope of the contract included all of the prism from the Herkimer-Oneida County line to the crossing of Oriskany Road, just west of the future site of Lock 20. Lock 20 itself was part of the contract as were various other structures such as bridges, spillways, and stream entrances. The contract was let to Shanley-Morrissey of New York City in the summer of 1909. By the fall of that year "three New Era graders, 25 slip scrapers, two plows, twelve dump wagons, and 68 head of mules" were working on the line. The hydraulic dredge *Hudson* arrived on site via the Enlarged Erie, coming down Oriskany Creek from Oriskany. It began operations in October. Another dredge was assembled a year later, just below Lock 20. By mid-1911 about thirty percent of the contract was completed.⁴⁰

Work was not going quick enough to satisfy the State's engineers. In the early summer of 1912, work by this contractor was suspended and, in July, the contract along with the other Shanley-Morrissey contracts (70, 71, and 72) was canceled by the Canal Board.⁴¹

In February 1913 the contract, now called 42A, was relet to Grant Smith and Company and Locher of New York. The contractor began reassembling a construction plant almost immediately. By March, "stone and sand bins were repaired, mess and bunk houses, etc. are being built and supply track repaired." Among the first structures completed was the Genesee Street bridge in Utica, opened for partial use in September 1914. Work on the prism was continually mentioned in the Barge Canal Bulletin for several more years. On June 21, 1918 the contract was declared completed.⁴²

Contract No. 43

The eastern edge of Contract No. 43 began where No. 42/42A left off and continued to "1,500 feet west of Mud Creek," just west of Rome. It included the northern junction lock and its neighbors, the Mohawk retention dam and west guard gate. Though the contract was awarded to the M. A. Talbott Company of Baltimore in October 1909, work did not actually begin on site for another year. On April 29, 1911, the hull of the 20-inch suction dredge *Stanwix* was launched. The dredge was ready for work by June and was later joined by the dredge *Hanson*. The volume of work noticeably slackened off in early 1916. Final estimates were being prepared in October 1917.⁴³

⁴⁰ Barge Canal Bulletin (August 1909), p.298; (October 1909), p.374; (October 1910), p.417; (November 1910), p.454; (June 1911), p.162.

⁴¹ Barge Canal Bulletin (June 1912), p.170; (August 1912), p.243; Proceedings of the Canal Board - 1912 (Albany, 1913), p.312.

⁴² Barge Canal Bulletin (February 1913), p.64; (March 1913), p.87; (April 1913), p.127; (October 1914), p.362; (June 1918), p.171; (July 1918), p.201.

⁴³ Barge Canal Bulletin (October 1909), p.388; (January 1910), p.21; (June 1910), p.247; (November 1910), p.455; (May 1911), p.141; (July 1911), p.204; (October 1913), p.329; (July 1916), p.191; (April 1917), p.110;

The overall design of the Barge Canal today in Oneida County differs from the original construction specifications as a result of the enlargement program that was launched with federal Emergency Relief Act funds in 1935. The focus of this improvement was on the historic route from tidewater to Oswego. The program deepened the canal and raised the height of bridges. Secondly, and at least initially, the program sought to get people back to work in the midst of the Depression. When bids were received in July 1935 for the first U.S. contracts, several Oneida County sections were among those targeted. U.S. Contract 4 (Morrison-Knudson Company, Inc., Blue Island, Illinois) was for the excavation of the channel between Locks 18 and 20. U.S. Contract 8 (W. E. Callahan Construction Company, Dallas, Texas) covered the length from Lock 20 to Rome and Contract 9 (Arundel Corporation, Baltimore, Maryland) went from that point to Lock 21. Dredging the prism began in September of that year. U.S. Contracts 4 and 8 were completed in 1937 and Contract 9 soon thereafter. The entire program, including the raising of bridges and the lowering of lock miter sills, was not completed until the early 1960s.⁴⁴

(September 1917), p.269; (November 1917), p.324.

⁴⁴ Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Works (Albany, 1936), p.22, 77; (Albany, 1937), p.23-24; (Albany, 1938), p.22-23.

Utica Harbor / Barge Canal Terminal

Over two hundred years ago, while the Western Inland Navigation Company (1792-1820) was just beginning its first canal at Little Falls, boat traffic on the Mohawk/Oneida corridor was limited to small, light, Mohawk River batteaux. Merchandise moved upriver from Schenectady to Utica, and agricultural produce made the return trip. Passengers could travel either way in these same small boats, which were often equipped with seats and awnings for their comfort.

The batteaux landing at Old Fort Schuyler, now Utica, was located very near the end of the present Utica Harbor, and boats frequently stopped there for the night. In the early days, boaters often camped on the riverbank here, pitching their tents in the front yard of John Post's Tavern where he also had a large warehouse and store, about where the main canal shop is today. Usually batteaux bound for the west continued on up the Mohawk to Fort Stanwix (Rome), where they were portaged over into Wood Creek to continue their voyage.

After 1800, with the completion of a network of turnpikes, land travel became more dependable. Shippers and passengers alike, seeking to connect with the "Genesee Country" to the west, would frequently disembark from their batteaux and take wagons or stage coaches west along the Seneca Turnpike, which today is still traceable as Genesee Street and NY Route 5 west.

About this time, the Western Inland Lock Navigation Company had completed its canals at Little Falls, German Flatts, and Fort Stanwix and had improved the navigation of Wood Creek west of Rome to Oneida Lake, opening the entire route to the new, bigger, Durham boats. These sixty-foot-long river freighters could now run all the way between Schenectady and Oneida Lake without portaging, and could continue on to Oswego or the Finger Lakes region with little difficulty.

But Utica continued to be a hub for inland transportation, both on land and water. Shipping companies and passenger boat lines often had offices and storage facilities in both Utica and Schenectady to hold cargo waiting shipment, or "forwarding."

It was not until the completion of the Erie Canal, in the 1820s, that the river landing at Fort Schuyler became obsolete. Around the end of that century, that entire portion of the Mohawk was drained as part of the straightening of the river channel necessitated by the new New York Central railroad alignment and expansion.

With minor irony, the Barge Canal reestablished the river's historic route. The west portion of today's harbor follows the channel of the old river bed. Construction photographs of building the harbor show that the bed was apparently dry but still discernible.

The construction of the Barge Canal's Utica Terminal and harbor was the product of Barge Canal Terminal Contract 15. As with all the terminal contracts, the project was designed to facilitate local use of the canal. Besides the excavation and construction of the harbor, the contract also included the harbor lock connection to the canal itself and the taintor-gate dam about a mile down the realigned river channel. The dam created a navigable spur along which, it was hoped, industry would develop.

Work began on the harbor in May 1913 with Albert M. Banker of Gloversville as contractor. By the end of the year, foundation piles and flooring were ready for the concrete dock walls along the east and south sides of the harbor. The channel from the lock to the harbor was finished by July 1914 at which point the rest of the harbor itself was excavated. The contract's work on the lock was essentially completed by August 1915, the remaining work including snubbing post settings, the storehouse, and the counterweights for the lift-gates. The first use of the lock appears to have been on September 5, 1915 when the dredge that was excavating the harbor passed through it to the canal. Construction of the lift gate and the storehouse was resumed in 1916 and completed by the end of the year. The masonry of the river dam was completed by the end of 1913 and the taintor gates installed and in operation by August of the following year.⁴⁵

Some supplemental work at the harbor was accomplished under Barge Canal Terminal Contracts 15-D, 15-M, and 63. Contract 15-D was specially designed to install better drainage around the harbor yard. It was awarded in the summer of 1917 to the Mohawk Dredge and Dock Company of Herkimer, the only bidder. The work was completed by the end of the year. Contract 15-M completed machinery and electrical work around the harbor lock. The contractor was Lupfer and Remick of Buffalo. Receiving the contract in October 1918, the firm finished about a year later. Construction reports mention assembling the lift gate machinery and erecting the lamp poles.⁴⁶

Contract 63 installed track and pavement around the terminal. The work was performed by Harry W. Roberts and Company of Utica in 1918. The track constructed might be the same that was in use as late as the 1970s around the yard. The last vehicle to use the system, a steam-operated crane still sits in the back yard of the terminal. Upon completion of the contract, the harbor was "opened to traffic."⁴⁷

Additional equipment was installed around the harbor under Terminal Contract 106 which acquired in 1918 a Byer tractor crane for the site.

⁴⁵ Barge Canal Bulletin (January 1914), p.30; (April 1914), p.139; (August 1914), p.310; (September 1914), p.348; (September 1915), p.283; (October 1915), p.313; (February 1916), p.46; (June 1916), p.173; (September 1916), p.261; (October 1916), p.295.

⁴⁶ Barge Canal Bulletin (September 1917), p.282; (October 1917), p.308; (November 1917), p.337; (December 1917), p.364; (May 1918), p.152; (July 1918), p.212; (September 1918), p.276; (November 1918), p.330; (December 1918), p.359.

⁴⁷ Barge Canal Bulletin (May 1918), p.152; (June 1918), p.183; (September 1918), p.275; (October 1918), p.304; (November 1918), p.330.

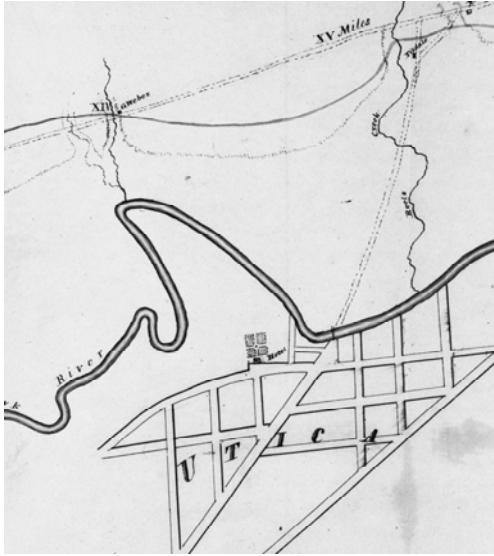


Figure 8. Utica, 1811.



Figure 9. Utica harbor, c1965.



Figure 10. Constructing the Utica shop building, 1933 (New York State Museum).

Utica Terminal Freight House Barge Canal Section Shops

The locations of the State's canal shops in Utica before the move to the terminal are still not well defined. This portion of the canal was included in a section that extended from the eastern Oneida County line to Canastota, at least at the turn of the century. The 1899 Sanborn Insurance map of Utica shows a State carpenter shop just south of Lock 46 and a blacksmith shop just west of the old weighlock. In 1907 two workshops were reported for the section.⁴⁸ One of these was almost certainly the Rome shop. In 1906 Utica's State Shop and its fence were painted. The earliest mention that could be found of the terminal as a section headquarters is in 1922. For the first time, the local assistant division superintendent listed his address as the "Canal Terminal Building." The office along with other maintenance responsibilities probably operated out of the freight house. As early as 1918, however, a boat house was built by state forces at the harbor. The 1925 Sanborn Insurance Map of the south and east portions of the harbor shows only the freight house.⁴⁹

The terminal contract (205) for the Utica freight house also included the Rome facility. Both are like the many other freight houses that the State built along the new canal to encourage local traffic. Indeed, an August 1918 photograph of the interior of the Utica freight house shows it piled high with local products. The contract, after one false start, was awarded to William R. Kimmey of Albany in March 1917. The structure was finished by the fall of the year.⁵⁰

An extension to the Utica freight house was made in 1918 due to the "demands of traffic requiring additional space." Work on the addition was specified in Terminal Contract 220 which was awarded to James T. Young of Watervliet.⁵¹

The most significant alteration to the Harbor's landscape since the completion of the terminal harbor and its freight warehouse was the 1933 construction of the shop building along the south wall. Until that year there had "been little canal freight passing through the Utica terminal warehouse. That warehouse has been occupied for the storage of supplies and the housing of machinery used in the maintenance work of District No. 2. During the past navigation season considerable freight was offered for storage at Utica and it was found necessary to make other arrangements for our supplies and repair equipment. Funds for payment of labor were made available by the

⁴⁸ Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Works (Albany, 1908), Senate Document 13, p.147; Annual Report of the Canal Commissioners (Albany, 1872), Assembly Document 29, p.27; (Albany, 1877), Assembly Document 45, p.74.

⁴⁹ Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Works (Albany, 1907), Senate Document 14, p.118; (Albany, 1919), Legislative Document 27, p.173; (Albany, 1923), p.61.

⁵⁰ Barge Canal Bulletin (March 1917), p.86; (April 1917), p.124; (May 1917), p.153; (July 1917), p.224; (August 1917), p.249; (September 1917), p.282; (November 1917), p.337; (August 1918), p.251.

⁵¹ Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Works (Albany, 1919), p.37; Barge Canal Bulletin (September 1918), p.276; (October 1918), p.304.

Temporary Emergency Relief Administration and a shop 50 x 200 feet in plan has been constructed..."⁵²



Figure 11. Utica Terminal freight house in flood, c1925 (New York State Museum).



Figure 12. Terminal crane at Utica harbor in flood, 1956 (New York State Museum).

⁵² Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Works (Albany, 1934), p.20.

Holmes Hutchinson (1794-1865)

Hutchinson was the first to formally survey the first Erie Canal. In a sense, he defined the Erie Canal. His maps of the Clinton's Ditch remain a benchmark in canal history. Amazingly, the Erie Canal was already completed and demonstrating its legendary success well before the State addressed the need to determine just what it owned along the Erie's alignment. In 1827 the legislature ordered a comprehensive survey of the Erie Canal. By 1834 Hutchinson was able to offer his portfolios of maps to the State's Canal Board. One indication of the permanence of Hutchinson's effort is reflected in the still-used term of "blue line." Hutchinson used blue ink to outline the limits of the State's property, a practice that continues on to this day.⁵³

There is some confusion as to where Hutchinson was born. Noble Whitford states Port Dickinson in Broome County while local Utica sources claim Genoa in Cayuga County. The latter sources imply that Hutchinson may have been in the same neighborhood as the noted canal contractor, John Richardson, perhaps providing the link to how Hutchinson became involved with the Erie Canal. Both Whitford and local sources agree that the birth occurred on January 5, 1794.⁵⁴

Whitford continues that "Mr. Hutchinson was appointed an Engineer on the Erie Canal... in 1819. He held this position until 1835, when he was made Chief Engineer, performing the duties of this office during the enlargement of the canal, until 1841. He surveyed and made the original 'blue line' maps for the Erie, Champlain, Oswego, Black River, Chenango, Crooked Lake, and Chemung canals. The Chemung canal was completed under Mr. Hutchinson's direction for an amount less than his estimates. His plans for locks on the Chenango and on the enlarged Erie were used in their construction. He had charge of the Cumberland and Oxford canals in Maine, and of the Blackstone in Rhode Island and Massachusetts, and was frequently employed in locating and defining valuable tracts of land in Oneida and other counties of New York State... He was one of the directors of the Utica and Syracuse Railroad until its consolidation with the New York Central..."

In reporting on his death, the Utica newspaper noted that "he was a man of stirring enterprise, of remarkable energy, of clear perception, and careful judgment. In business his sagacity and his integrity were proverbial; without rashness, he was bold and far-seeing, and few men counted more confidently than he on the advancement and growth of our country. Quiet in demeanor, and always courteous of speech, he attracted men who were brought into his presence, and commanded their confidence and respect... His age was seventy years, although his vivacity and energy made him appear much younger."⁵⁵

⁵³ For an excellent discussion of the survey project, see Mike Riley's "The Story Behind the 1834 Holmes Hutchinson Canal Maps," *Bottoming Out*, Winter-Spring 2011.

⁵⁴ Noble Whitford, *History of the Canal System of the State of New York* (1906), II, p.1157; Daniel Wager, *Our County and Its People* (1896), II, p.189.

⁵⁵ *Utica Weekly Herald*, February 28, 1865.

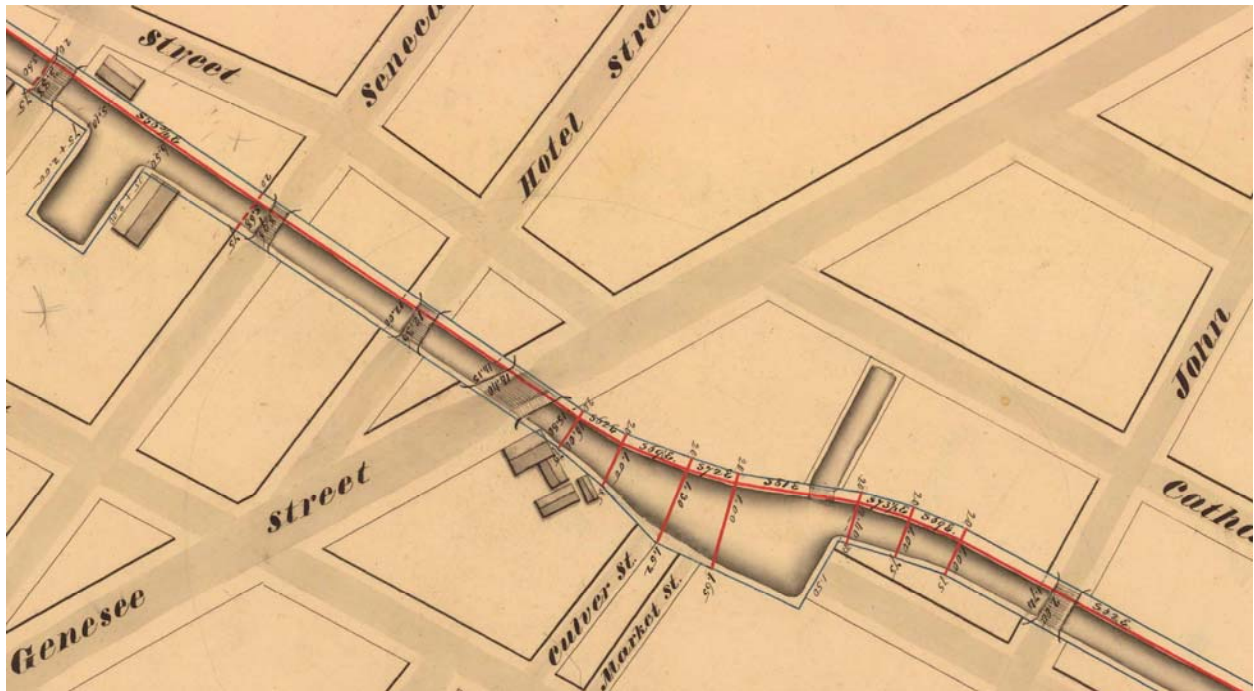


Figure 13. Hutchinson map of Utica showing blue line, c1834 (New York State Archives).

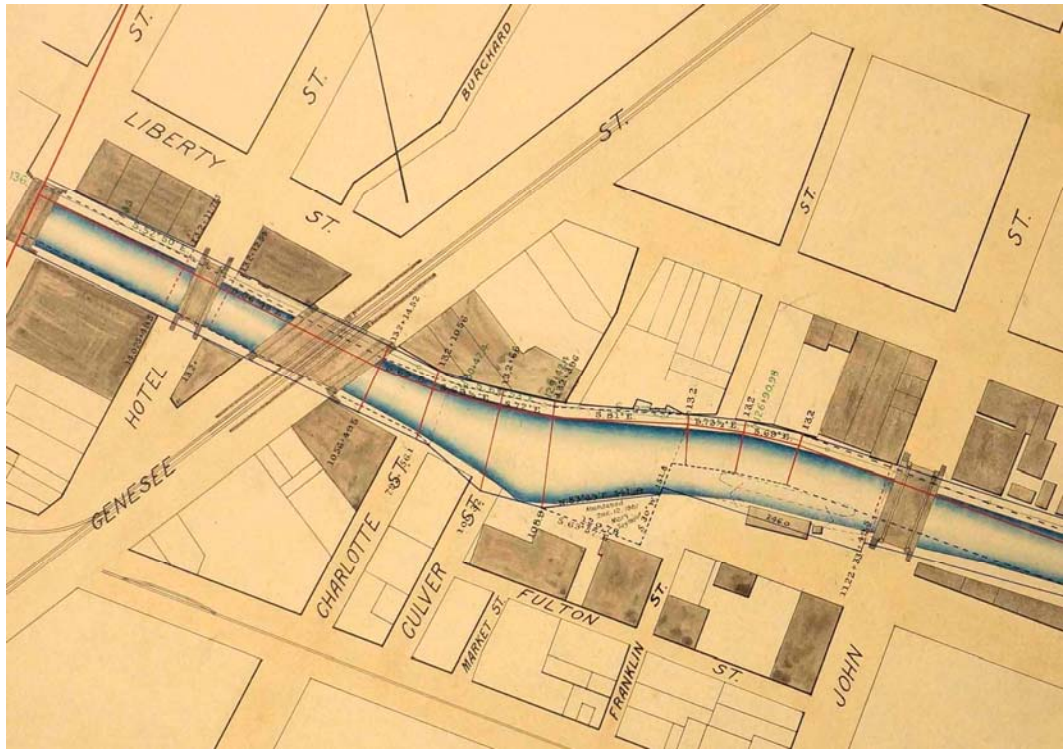


Figure 14. Schillner map of Utica showing the Hutchinson alignment in dotted line, c1896 (New York State Archives).

Henry Seymour (1780-1837)

In 1819 Seymour was appointed as one of the State's canal commissioners and was immediately tasked with overseeing much of the Erie's construction, operation and maintenance in central New York. It was the same year that he moved to Utica from Pompey Hill in Onondaga County where he already been elected to the state legislature. His start with the Erie Canal likely predates those events as his wife was related to Joshua Forman. It was Forman along with Benjamin Wright who introduced the famous canal resolution of 1808, one of the founding documents for the Erie Canal. As a canal commissioner, Seymour would later work closely with Wright as well. He remained a canal commissioner until 1831 when he resigned, assuming new duties as mayor of Utica in 1833. Later in the decade he became president of the Farmers' Loan and Trust Company of New York City, only to see his works and investments dissolve in the financial panic of 1837. Returning to Utica in August of that year, his despair perhaps led to his suicide on August 26.⁵⁶

Seymour's son, Horatio (1810-1886), was governor of New York State in the 1850s and again during the Civil War. Daughter Julia (1827-1893) married another noted New York State politician, Roscoe Conkling. Both are buried near their father's modest gravestone.

⁵⁶ Albany Evening Journal, August 28, 1837.

"New York State Lunatic Asylum"

How is this remarkable building related to the Erie Canal? The canal itself was just a quarter mile north. Many of the construction materials were brought in by canal. When completed, the Asylum was a prominent landmark to those on boats and the towpath, easily seeing the full facing facade. It was the largest Greek-Revival facade in the nation, on a scale never before seen in Upstate New York. With the Asylum's 1843 opening, an observer also noted the striking view from the Asylum's cupola of boats and people going east and west, a visual demonstration of the Canal's success.

There is another more significant connection. The Erie Canal was among the first and most successful public enterprises in the nation. The people of New York State through their state government built and operated the canal. This active participation of government in the economy and culture was not only welcomed but expected. Only government could efficiently marshal the needed resources to build the canal. Government could be held accountable. That second quarter of the 19th century was an age where the "perfectibility" of society became a goal and government was often in the forefront.

The Erie Canal proved that State government could make the difference. Its success inspired attempts to address other needs in society as well as providing the economic resources to do so. Among the most prominent calls for action at the time was to ameliorate the treatment and conditions of those deemed mentally ill. New York State became a leader in this campaign. In early 1838 it started the construction of a massive complex that would hopefully provide adequate care statewide. The Asylum building that is seen today was to be one of four, the four forming a large quadrangle on this hill overlooking the Erie Canal.

The other connection with the history of the Erie Canal is not as positive. The Asylum's construction was launched at the same time that the first enlargement of the Erie was being commenced. The legislature looked at the wealth that the canal was generating and felt it could easily afford these ambitious public works. Unfortunately, the financial panic of 1837 and the resulting national economic depression soon crippled these expectations. As a result, in 1842 work on the enlargement was halted. Construction of the asylum buildings was likewise paused. The foundations for the other three buildings were nearly complete. By the time work resumed, the foundations were deemed unusable due to weathering. Many of the Erie's half-completed structures suffered the same fate. Instead of the three originally proposed buildings, much smaller wings were added to the rear of the one completed structure. Stones from the failed foundation were recycled later in the 1840s to make the still standing maintenance building, just south of "Old Main," resulting in its distinctive checkerboard appearance.



Figure 15. "New York State Lunatic Asylum" as originally proposed, c1837 (New York State Museum).



Figure 16. Asylum building made of reused foundation stones, 2017.

Oneida Institute

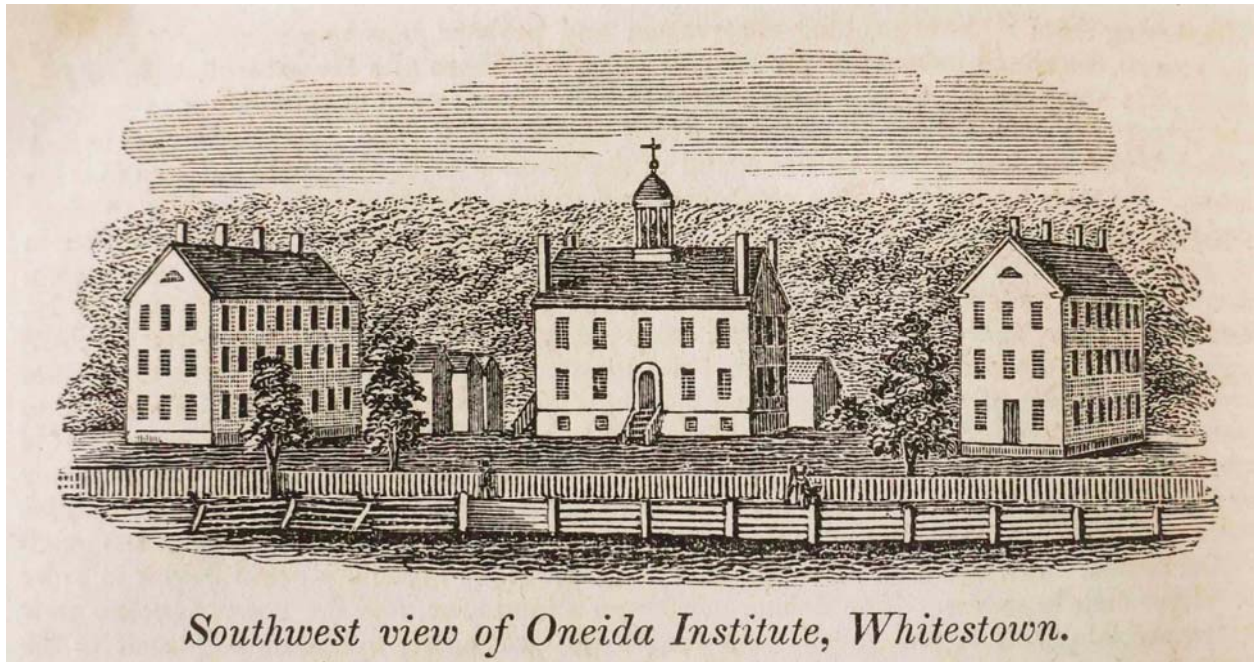
The Erie Canal brought tremendous social as well as economic changes to Upstate New York. Many historians link the canal to the unprecedented religious revivalism that swept like wildfire through central New York in the 1820s and 1830s, characterizing the region as the "Burned Over District." The perfectibility of society became a dedicated mission for those inspired by the new beliefs and abolitionism became one of their primary goals. The original intent of the Oneida Institute was as an evangelistic training school for ministers who would further this religious revivalism.

An 1841 description of the school stated that "the 'Oneida Institute of Science and Industry,' was found in 1827... The design of this Seminary is to furnish means to obviate the evils resulting to students from the usual application to a course of professional study, and the attendant deprivation of bodily exercise. The plan that the Seminary has established to effect this, is to blend productive manual labor with the course of study. Three hours labor per day is required of each student in the young men's department, and somewhat less of each in the juvenile department. The farm consists of the flat on the left bank of the Sauquoit, and contains 114 acres..."⁵⁷

In 1833 Beriah Green assumed leadership of the school. A passionate abolitionist, he soon made the school a center for anti-slavery activities. African American students were enrolled on a par with others. The abolitionist newspaper *Friend of Man* was published at the school. The buildings were recognized stops on the Underground Railroad. Numerous meetings and abolitionist societies gathered here in the decades preceding the Civil War. Those walking the towpath just a quarter mile south could no doubt sense that the times were a changing.

It remained a school into the 1880s. In 1890 the buildings were purchased with a new purpose in mind, as a knitting mill. The main building, substantially rebuilt from the 1840s, still houses manufacturing facilities. Eversan, Inc. produces scoreboards and other video displays, using some of the most modern equipment in the nation.

⁵⁷ John W. Barber and Henry Howe, Historical Collections of the State of New York (1841), p378-9.



Southwest view of Oneida Institute, Whitestown.

Figure 17. Oneida Institute, 1841.



Figure 18. Whitesboro, 1841 (New York State Archives).

Oriskany Feeder

The history of the Oriskany Feeder actually begins with the Clinton's Ditch. The Erie's alignment at that time took advantage of the Creek to help supply water. However, after the 1823 construction of the Ditch aqueduct, that source dried up. The next careful look at Oriskany Creek for feeder purposes came in 1856 when maps were prepared.⁵⁸

When the addition of the new Oriskany Feeder was announced in 1871, the canal commissioners went into some detail as to the reasoning and history behind it, going all the way back to 1817. The immediate spark for the feeder, however, was the extreme failure of the water supply for the Rome Summit during the navigation season of 1871. An unexpected increase in traffic on the canal and the near exhaustion of the Black River Canal reservoirs led the commissioners to resurrect emergency powers granted to them under an 1833 law. In August 1871, a temporary appropriation was made of the waters of the creek and authorization given to construct a feeder. Work began on the feeder at the end of August and was completed by October. Though rain later in the fall helped replenish the reservoirs, the new feeder still proved "of great value in keeping up that portion of the level." Formal approvals and appropriations of the action by the commissioners and the Canal Board came later in the year.

The feeder was about a half mile long between the Erie and the feeder's bulkhead. Its prism had a twenty-six foot water line and a width at the bottom of fourteen feet. The depth was four feet. The dam across the creek, located upstream of the mill dam, was 214 feet in length and eight feet high.⁵⁹

The "entirely worthless" bulkhead of the feeder was rebuilt from the foundation up in 1883 though the repair might represent the enthusiasm of a newly-appointed superintendent more than an actual need. That same superintendent also called for repair of the 215-foot wide apron below the feeder dam. He described the apron as being "formed of small wooden poles, drift bolted to a crib foundation filled with stones; the poles have become decayed, also the top sticks of the crib, and the stone filling in a number of places washed away."⁶⁰

The Feeder became even more useful when the State realized that by channeling all of the old Chenango Canal reservoir water into Oriskany Creek it would bring more water to where it was dearly needed. After the closing of the Chenango in 1878, the northern portion of the canal was maintained to assist the State's "asylum" in Utica. Water was apparently not used directly by the State facility. It powered a pump that then drew spring water. State officials recognized that the arrangement "wastes in time of greatest need one-half of the supply" by dumping it below the summit level. In 1887 Oriskany Creek became the sole receiver of water from the southern reservoirs.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Annual Report of the Canal Commissioners (Albany, 1857), Assembly Document 145, p.44.

⁵⁹ Annual Report of the Canal Commissioners (Albany, 1872), Assembly Document 29, p.56-57.

⁶⁰ Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Works (Albany, 1884), Assembly Document 9, p.60; for other repairs see (Albany, 1873), Assembly Document 6, p.32.

⁶¹ Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Works (Albany, 1887), Assembly Document 24, p.60;

In the battle to maintain canal structures, the forces of nature were always able to hold their own against the State's forces. An 1892 flood carried away a portion of the wing wall. In 1902 a break in the Feeder system was repaired and the feeder bank was strengthened and widened. The State lost the battle in February 1925 when ice jams and high water tore a hole through the feeder dam. State crews demolished most of the remaining portions of the now unneeded structure a week later. The State right-of-way remained with the canal office for several decades. The ghost of the old feeder course can be seen in the road to the ball field along the creek. Reservoir water from the creek now flows directly to the Mohawk, entering the Barge Canal system at Frankfort.⁶²

In 1916 a gate house was built over the bulkhead gates of the feeder.⁶³

Clinton's Ditch Oriskany Crossing and Oriskany Aqueduct

The construction of the Oriskany Creek dam offered several challenges. It is not surprising that for the project the State selected John Richardson, among the more experienced and well-known of the young corps of canal contractors. Another major Ditch contractor, Jeremiah Brainerd, built the guard locks at either end of the Crossing.

Work on the crossing probably held up completion of the Utica-Rome section. At the start of 1818 the commissioners could report that "a few rods on each side of the Oriskany creek, have not been let out, but are reserved in order that surplus earth may be used in the construction of a dam, which is to be built across the stream." By the following year "some progress" had been made on what the commissioners described as "the only expensive dam" on the middle section of the Erie. When the first boat made the crossing in October 1819, a description stated that "the pond in the Oriskany creek, above the dam, is about 50 rods wide, and as the towing-path bridge is not yet made across it, it was necessary to move the boat over it by setting poles." A floating towpath bridge was apparently completed soon thereafter.⁶⁴

Granting that the entire Erie project was ambitious for its time, the design of this first crossing shows a surprising amount of confidence that was, in hindsight, not really justified. The experience of controlling creeks such as Oriskany would teach the State some very difficult lessons in the years ahead. One wonders whether the major breach that occurred in late 1819 "in the north bank of the canal, at Oriskany" resulted from the creek overflowing. It would not be repaired until the following spring.⁶⁵ The experience may have contributed to the decision in 1822 to entirely abandon this first crossing and replace it with an aqueduct.

(Albany, 1888), p.64.

⁶² Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Works (Albany, 1893), p.76; (Albany, 1903), Assembly Document 61, p.79; (Albany, 1911), Assembly Document 16, p.81; Scothorn Scrapbook, Erie II, p.4, New York State Museum.

⁶³ Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Works (1917), p.169.

⁶⁴ Canal Laws, I, p.373, 415, II, p.419; Lionel Wyld, editor, 40'x28'x4 - The Erie Canal (1967), p.53.

⁶⁵ Canal Laws, I, p.451.

The stated reason for the change documents another type of concern that has stayed with the canal offices of the State ever since. The new aqueduct "disconnects the canal from the creek, and the mills and manufactories around it, which were enabled to draw to their use, the waters of the canal, whenever the creek failed to give them a full supply. The value of the water to these works; the difficulty of ascertaining with certainty what they were justly entitled to; and the strong inducements of private interest, to take the greatest quantity which could be justified under colour of right, threatened such serious interference with the navigation of the canal, as to render it advisable to make the above mentioned alteration." By early 1823 the new aqueduct was nearly completed, just south of the Enlarged Erie aqueduct and in the approximate alignment of the current road bridge. Indeed, historic wooden pilings that might be from this Ditch aqueduct can be seen in the creek bed from the northwest portion of the bridge.⁶⁶

A decade later the creek would again remind the State of its abilities when flood waters severely damaged the 1823 aqueduct. "A road bridge which stood a short distance above, was carried down against the aqueduct, and with other timber, formed a dam, which prevented a free passage for the water under the aqueduct." The water then scoured below the structure and undermined several of its abutments. A temporary fix with a single-lane trunk was made until the abutments could be rebuilt and a new full-width trunk installed. As part of the reconstruction, the local engineers worked out an arrangement with the "commissioners of highways, by which the abutments of the road bridge are placed the same distance apart, and directly above those of the aqueduct" so as to allow a freer passage of water and debris. The towpath apparently crossed the aqueduct on a wood plank pathway erected on the piers and abutments. After the aqueduct was replaced by its enlarged descendent, portions of north abutment and some of the piers were apparently recycled into a new road bridge.⁶⁷

In 1846 a spring freshet combined with an ice dam against the aqueduct undermined the structure. Two piers were destroyed and portions of the trunk and towpath bridge lost. "The aqueduct was repaired by substituting rows of large piles driven in the place of the piers, on which heavy caps of timber were framed from the support of the trunk and bridge." The same procedure was used when more of the aqueduct failed a few weeks later.⁶⁸

A new trunk was installed in 1840.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Canal Laws, II, p.108; for comment on filling up "old floom, old canal", probably the post-1823 Ditch, see Annual Report of the Canal Commissioners (Albany, 1864), Assembly Document 8, p.22.

⁶⁷ Annual Report of the Canal Commissioners (Albany, 1833), Assembly Document 36, p.7; (Albany, 1834), Assembly Document 55, p.6; (Albany, 1841), Assembly Document 72, p.14; Book 52, p.18, Series B0293-84, New York State Archives.

⁶⁸ Annual Report of the Canal Commissioners (Albany, 1847), Assembly Document 20, p.27.

⁶⁹ Annual Report of the Canal Commissioners (Albany, 1840), Assembly Document 60, p.6; (Albany, 1841), Assembly Document 72, p.14.

Enlarged Erie Canal Oriskany Aqueduct

A new location for the enlarged aqueduct was determined as part of a realigning of the canal in the village. Plans for that realigning were approved as early as 1836. Unfortunately, the Stop and Tax Law of 1842 stalled all work on the plans.⁷⁰

The contract for the new aqueduct was awarded in 1849 to Kasson, Moore, and Kasson. It was brought into use in 1851. The structure is still in use, being incorporated into the NY Route 69 crossing of Oriskany Creek. It is one of five Erie aqueducts that are still carrying their weight and more (Onondaga Creek, Genesee, Sauquoit, and Lashers Creek being the others). It received substantial rebuilding in 2000.⁷¹

As before, the creek was the most serious threat to the structure. In 1867 stone-filled cribs were placed around the apron at the foot of the aqueduct. The reasoning for the cribs was to stop ice from scouring the foundation. Apparently in the season previously, ice had dredged the creek channel eight feet below the foundation.⁷²

The most common and predictable repair, if not the most obvious, was the replacement of the always decaying wooden trunk. The debate usually focused not on whether to do it but when. The State almost never did it before it was clearly necessary. A new trunk was installed again in 1902.⁷³

More extensive repairs to the body of the aqueduct occurred in 1885 in response to leaking. The berm face walls were taken down and relaid in cement which, with other repairs, closed the leaks.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Annual Report of the Canal Commissioners (Albany, 1837), Assembly Document 73, p.17; for local reasons for the new alignment see Assembly Document 225, March 3, 1838, "Report of the Canal Commissioners on the petition of Hiram Blanchard and others."

⁷¹ Annual Report of Canal Commissioners (Albany, 1850), Assembly Document 45, p.14; (Albany, 1852), Assembly Document 33, p.22-23; for building plans see 43/E, Box 19, Series B0171-83, New York State Archives and p.18, Book 52, Series B0293-84, New York State Archives; for final accounts see Volume 4, Series B0377, New York State Archives.

⁷² Annual Report of the Canal Commissioners (Albany, 1868), Assembly Document 9, p.18.

⁷³ Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Works (Albany, 1903), Assembly Document 61, p.79.

⁷⁴ Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Works (Albany, 1886), Assembly Document 31, p.56.



Figure 19. Schillner map of Oriskany, c1896 (New York State Archives)

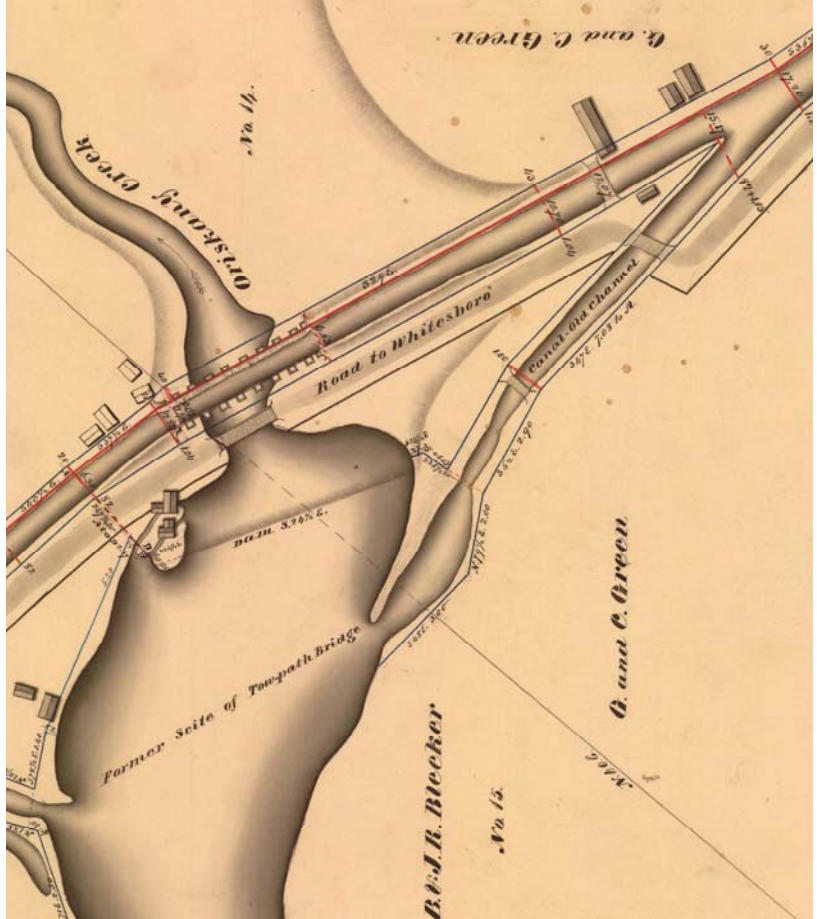


Figure 20. Hutchinson map of Oriskany, c1834 (New York State Archives).

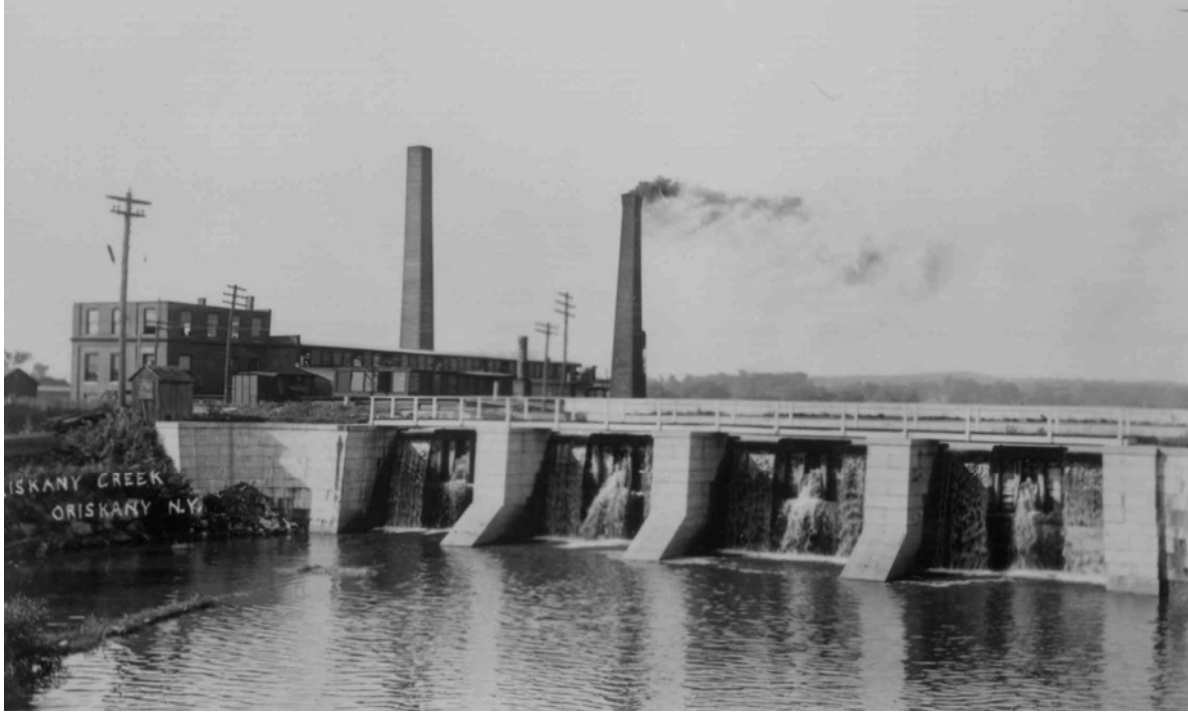


Figure 21. Enlarged Erie Oriskany Aqueduct, c1905 (CSNYS).



Figure 22. Enlarged Erie Oriskany Aqueduct during 2000 rehabilitation (CSNYS)

Oriskany Battlefield State Historic Site

The August 6, 1777 battle was a pivotal event in the Revolution. It was also among the bloodiest battles of the war. American forces were trying to reach Fort Stanwix to break the siege by British forces. The campaign recognizes the strategic importance of New York's waterways and its geography. What later becomes Rome was a gateway between the interior and coast-hugging settlements of colonial America. Those geographic characteristics were also what made the Erie Canal so successful. It is no coincidence that the Erie Canal's route hugged the base of the hill just below the memorial obelisk.

That 1884 obelisk contains another connection to the history of the Erie Canal, though certainly of more minor significance. Nearly the entire upper portion of the obelisk was built with stone recycled from the outside pier of the c1840 Utica Weighlock. With the 1883 abolition of tolls on the Enlarged Erie Canal, the Utica Weighlock became superfluous. Indeed, even a year earlier the Utica Weighlock was described as having been "for a long time a useless structure, and always in the way of passing boats." In 1882 the pier and scales were removed. One wonders whether the proposed monument may have encouraged the removal. The reused stone was already being described at the time of the dismantling. A March 1882 newspaper account noted, "for years this pier has been a dread to navigators, and caused a sight of damage, but we are pleased to state that it is fast disappearing now, and the large stone pillars will be converted into a monument to be erected on the battle field of Oriskany."⁷⁵

A year later, while reporting on the dedication of a time capsule in the base, the *Rome Sentinel* described the partially built obelisk. "The base of the shaft which stands 19 feet from the ground, has been completed. This is of granite. The shaft itself will be built of limestone donated by the state. The stone was taken from the canal weighlock at Utica. The stone is all ready for the builder, and... the contractor thinks he can complete the work by the middle or last of September. The work thus far has been done in the most complete and perfect manner."⁷⁶



Figure 23. Utica Weighlock, with outside pier removed, c1897 (Onondaga Historical Association).

⁷⁵ Rome Citizen, March 31, 1882.

⁷⁶ Rome Sentinel, July 30, 1883.

Lower Landing and the Rome Canal

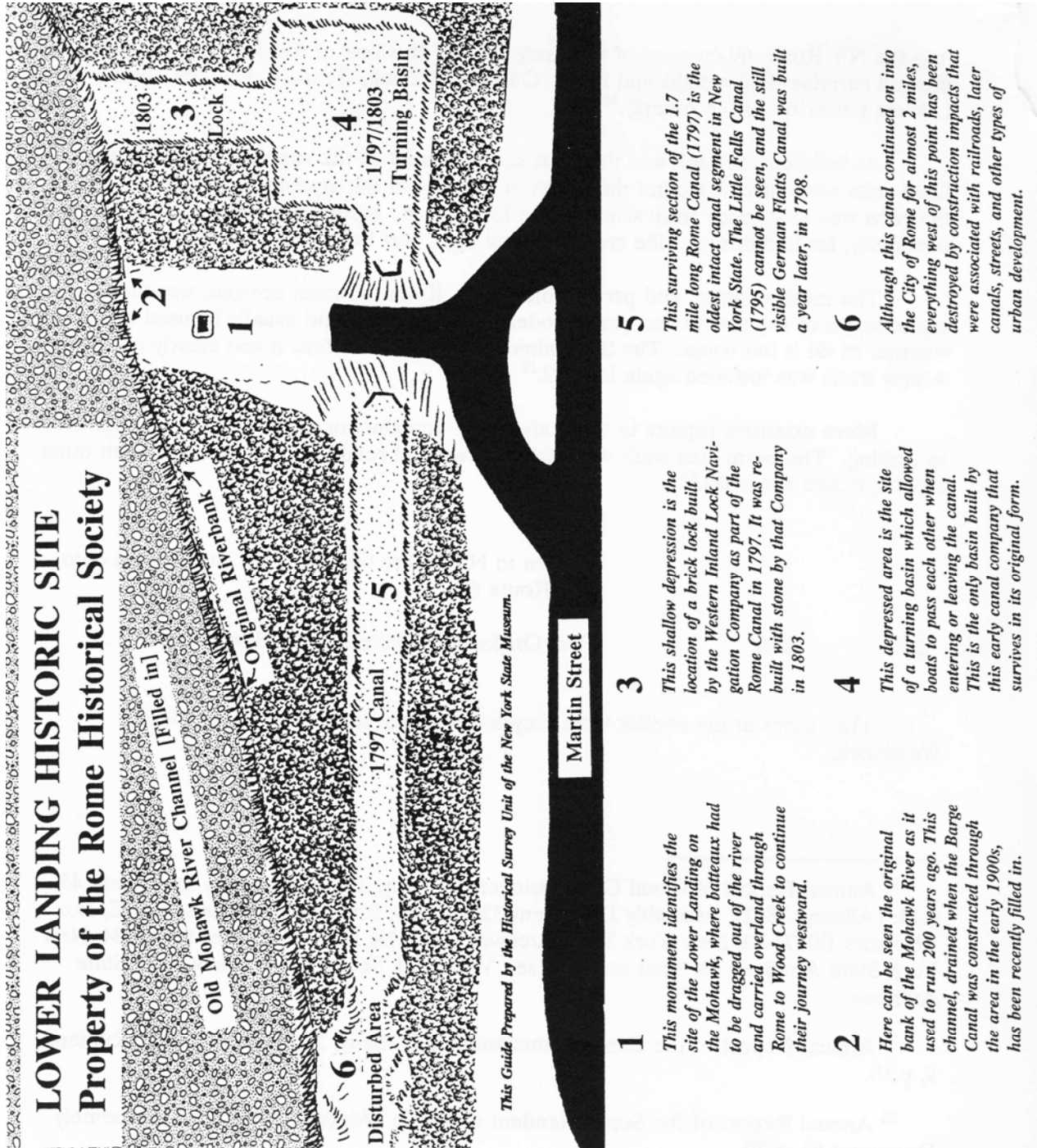


Figure 24. Map of Lower Landing.

Junction of the Enlarged Erie and the Erie Barge Canals

Dive Culvert

The intent was to maintain navigation on the Enlarged Erie from Rome to Mohawk. If it worked at all, it didn't work long. Nonetheless, engineers had to figure out how to supply water to that section south of the Barge Canal at Rome. The Oriskany Feeder was insufficient. Prior to the Barge Canal, that level was part of the Rome summit and received its major water supply from the Mohawk and the Adirondack reservoirs. To still capture those northern waters, an eight-foot diameter dive culvert was authorized in 1918 to connect the waters of the north to the south channels. Even by Barge Canal standards, it was a substantial effort. Even though the junction locks were soon abandoned, the dive culvert pipe remained well into the 1930s. The plans for U.S. Contract 9 of the 1935 improvement called for its removal as per direction of the canal engineer. Curiously, the final estimate for that contract shows no clear indication that the pipe was removed. Indeed, the small land parcel for the northern entrance of the culvert was abandoned to the City of Rome, perhaps for reuse? Is it still there?

South Junction Lock and Tunnel

The south junction lock was the result of the poorly planned attempt to maintain the Enlarged Erie Canal between Mohawk and Rome as a spur of the new Barge Canal. It locked up to the south as the Barge Canal level was lower. The lock was built under Barge Canal Contract 81, let to the firm of Chesley, Earl, and Heimbach of Buffalo in October 1916. Work commenced in November of that year. A tumble gate in the north end and snubbing posts were installed in May 1917. By September 1917, the contractor was clearing the area and already shipping the construction plant to another site. The contract was declared completed in December 1917. It is doubtful that the lock was used for more than a few years.⁷⁷

Of course, once locked up and to the south, the boater faced the new large embankment of the New York Central Railroad. The embankment was formed with dredgings from the new canal. In 1912 an arched concrete tunnel cut through the embankment for the route of the Enlarged Erie.

North Junction Lock

The north junction lock was constructed as part of reestablishing the connection with the Black River Canal. It was included in the original specifications for Contract 43 and was probably ready for use as early as the fall of 1915 when the report was made of placing the snubbing posts at the lock. Indeed, photographs from the early summer

⁷⁷ Barge Canal Bulletin (November 1916), p.314; (December 1916), p.342; (June 1917), p.171; (October 1917), p.298; (January 1918), p.14.

of 1914 show the lock essentially complete. In order avoid interrupting traffic on the Erie during the Barge's construction, the lock may have been in use long before Contract 43's completion.⁷⁸



Figure 25. View of Rome from the southeast looking over Clinton's Ditch (left) and Enlarged Erie Canal (center), c1959 (CSNYS).



Figure 26. View from the south overlooking the junction of the Enlarged Erie and the Barge Canal, c1959 (CSNYS).

⁷⁸ Barge Canal Bulletin (November 1915), p.331.

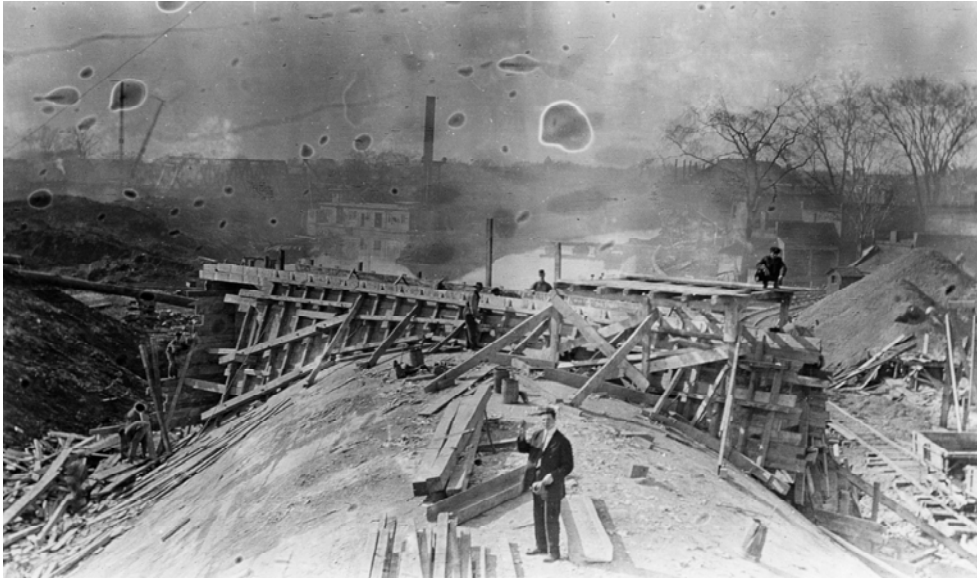


Figure 27. Construction of the 1912 tunnel taking the Enlarged Erie under the New York Central, looking north (New York State Museum)



Figure 28. The Enlarged Erie tunnel with south junction lock in distance, c1930, looking north (New York State Museum)

Rome Terminal and Freight House

The freight house was constructed under Terminal Contract 205, which also covered the construction of its Utica counterpart. It was built in 1917 by William R. Kimmey of Albany.⁷⁹

In later years, the structure housed maintenance and administrative offices for the Rome subsection of the canal.

Under Barge Canal Contract 16, work on the Rome Terminal began in January 1913. The M. A. Talbott Company of Rome was the contractor. Much of the harbor's excavation was preceded by the construction of the dock wall. After the concrete work on the wall was completed, dredgings from the harbor were used as backfill. The harbor excavation was completed in December 1914. All work on the contract, including the piles and fenders along the wall, was finished a year later. Paving the terminal grounds, under Contract 16-P, was begun in June 1917 by E. Brown Baker of Herkimer. His firm finished with their gravel and crushed stone by the end of the year.⁸⁰

The fender system along the north wall was reconstructed and new piles driven in 1928.⁸¹

To assist with the loading, unloading, and other handling of any freight, the design of the Terminal incorporated several derricks. A "simple form of derrick" was installed in 1916. A freight conveyor was built at the Rome terminal in 1918.⁸²

In 1929 the steel stiff leg derrick at the Rome terminal was transferred to the New London drydock for unloading and repair work where it remains today.⁸³

⁷⁹ Barge Canal Bulletin (March 1917), p.86; (April 1917), p.124; (June 1917), p.184; (July 1917), p.224; (August 1917), p.249; (November 1917), p.337.

⁸⁰ Barge Canal Bulletin (January 1914), p.30; (April 1914), p.139; (July 1914), p.267; (September 1914), p.349; (November 1914), p.420; (December 1914), p.455; (January 1915), p.32; (February 1915), p.74; (June 1915), p.182; (January 1916), p.18; (June 1917), p.184; (July 1917), p.224; (September 1917), p.282; (December 1917), p.364; (January 1918), p.27.

⁸¹ Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Works (Albany, 1929), p.12.

⁸² Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Works (Albany, 1917), p.29; (Albany, 1919), p.165; see also Terminal Contract 101 for construction of a derrick at Rome in 1917-1918, Barge Canal Bulletin (November 1917), p.336; (July 1918), p.211.

⁸³ Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Works (Albany, 1930), p.8.

Worthington Industries

Maybe the Erie Canal indirectly led to this becoming an industrial site. The first steel firm on the property appears to be the Halstead Wire Company. The Company had a manufacturing plant on the site by 1923, perhaps having moved there only a year or two before. It was bought out by the National Musical String Company of New Jersey in 1926. Possibly the site became more viable for factory space as it was no longer restricted by an open waterway along its north property line. The Erie Canal was no longer. By the end of 1926 the local Chamber of Commerce had encouraged Rome Strip Steel Company, "Rome's newest manufacturing concern", to occupy the site. In early 2015 Rome Strip Steel was acquired by Worthington Industries of Ohio.⁸⁴

Joshua Hathaway (1761-1836)

His tombstone inscription reads "In memory of the Hon. Joshua Hathaway, more than 40 years a resident of this town. He was born at Suffield, Ct., Aug. 13, 1761; graduated at Yale college in 1787, and died at Rome, Dec. 8, 1836. - 'Requiescat in pace.' - As a husband and father, every worthy, loved, and venerated. As a man and Christian, upright and exemplary; a friend to the needy and the injured; and a father in the church. As a magistrate and judge, by the grace of God, an executor of justice, and maintainer of the truth, 'a terror to evil-doers, and praise to such as did well.' As a patriot, he bore arms in two wars for his country; and sustained at all time the cause of the people with zeal and fidelity. As a citizen, ever active and enterprising for the benefit of our common country, and among the foremost for the improvement of this favored portion of it; to him was assigned the honor of breaking ground on commencing that great and beneficial work, the Erie Canal, July 4th, 1817. In the various relations of life, he fulfilled it duties as in the fear of God, with faithfulness, ability, and honesty of purpose. He died lamented - 'the memory of the just is blessed.'"

Jeremiah Brainerd (1777-1848)

According to the family history, Brainerd "was a prominent man of his day, a contractor on the Erie Canal. The inventor of the weighlock, wheelbarrow, stone crusher, and many other useful machines. He was a personal friend of DeWitt Clinton and many other prominent men of his day... In middle life he settled in Rome, N.Y. He was famous for his great ingenuity and firmness of character. He labored with DeWitt Clinton on the construction of that great work, the Erie Canal. The work at Little Falls was done by him on contract. He built the first 'weighlock' and the first wheelbarrow that

⁸⁴ Rome Sentinel, December 6, 1926.

was ever made in its present form. His inventions were numerous and useful, but he never derived any personal benefit from them.

"The following is from an obituary notice written at the time of his death. 'Mr. Jeremiah Brainerd has been favorably known as an active, ingenious and enterprising man, possessed of uncommon powers of mind in mechanism; and an inventive genius equalled by few in this or any other portion of the country. He was intent upon originating and perfecting such implements of machinery as he believed would prove a benefit and his inventions have for the most part been of great practical utility. From wheelbarrow and an iron paddle gate to a gigantic weighlock, they were adopted and have ever since been used on that great work, the Erie Canal. At this time not a railroad is constructed or canal excavated in our land without the aid of implements and engines of his creation. Like most men of genius, he was too much absorbed in his effort under the guidance of his master passion to realize personal remuneration, while others more tenacious of gain reaped the benefits of his inventions and improvements. He was a liberal and free hearted man, kind and obliging neighbor, and faithful in all his domestic relations. He was prostrated many months by paralysis, and when he could no longer create or add to the common benefit, went to the grave mourned by his numerous relations and friends."⁸⁵

John Bloomfield Jervis (1795-1885)

According to Noble Whitford, Jervis was born on December 14, 1795 at Huntington, Long Island and died January 12, 1885 at Rome.

"Mr. Jervis began his career in 1817 under Benjamin Wright on the Erie Canal and in 1819 was promoted to the position of Resident Engineer, remaining on the canal till near its completion. He served as Assistant Engineer with the Delaware and Hudson Canal Company in 1825 and became Engineer-in-Chief in 1827. In 1830 he was appointed Chief Engineer of the Albany and Schenectady Railroad and later of the Schenectady and Saratoga Railroad, retiring to accept a position as Chief Engineer of the Chenango Canal. In 1835 he made preliminary surveys and estimates for enlarging the Erie Canal. Mr. Jervis became Chief Engineer of the Croton Aqueduct in 1836; in 1846 he was Consulting Engineer of the Cochituate Water Works; in 1847 he was made Chief Engineer of the Hudson River Railroad; in 1850 of the Michigan Island Railroad, and in 1854, its President. He returned to Rome in 1858 and lived a retired life for three years, from which he emerged to become Superintendent and Engineer of the Pittsburg, Fort Wayne and Chicago Railroad. Retiring in 1866 from active railroad management, Mr. Jervis aided in organizing the Merchant Iron Mill at Rome in 1868. In 1872 he was elected Secretary and held the office of Trustee of this company until his death."⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Lucy Abigail Brainard, The Genealogy of the Brainerd-Brainard Family in America (1908), p.57-58.

⁸⁶ Noble Whitford, History of the Canal System of the State of New York (1906), II, p.1157.

New London Junction Lock / Drydock

The 1903 legislation for the new Barge Canal system required that the Enlarged Erie Canal from New London to the Orville (Butternut) feeder be kept open as a navigable canal. This would also allow for the Jamesville, DeRuyter and Erieville Reservoirs to still provide water for navigation. As the elevation of the Enlarged Erie Canal west of New London was higher than the level of the Barge Canal, a junction lock was required to connect the old and new waterways.

The lock was included in Barge Canal Contract 44. Work at the lock site probably began in early 1914 with concrete being poured by April and gates installed in June. Minor work continued through 1915. Its first service was to maintain navigation across the still being completed Barge Canal.⁸⁷

By the mid-1920s, traffic on the older section could no longer justify the preservation of navigation on it. In 1927-8 the lock was converted into a drydock for the floating plant of the Utica region "by the installation of a tumble gate at its lower end and the removal of the lock gates. [C]oncrete ways with timber caps have been constructed, a 10-inch steam pump and boilers have been set up and a 50 ton overhead fixed crane erected at the upper end." The crane from the Rome Terminal was moved to the lock. The older lock machinery from the junction lock was to be reinstalled in Lock E-24. The steel gates were later rebuilt at the Syracuse Shops and, in 1938, installed in the upper end of Lock CS-3.



Figure 31 (left). Crane at Rome Terminal that was later moved to the New London drydock, 1922 (New York State Archives).

Figure 32 (right). Tug *Roosevelt* at New London drydock, c1950 (New York State Museum)

⁸⁷ Barge Canal Bulletin (February 1914), p48; (July 1914), p.249.



Figure 33. Looking northeast towards Rome over Wood Creek (center) and the Erie Canal (right), with the site of WILN Lock 2 (1802) in the cut-off portion of the loop just below center, c1959 (CSNYS).



Figure 34. Looking west over the Erie Barge Canal, with the New London drydock just left of center and the curved Clinton's Ditch on the right, c1959 (CSNYS).