

## Olean Through The Years

# Genesee Canal, Born Back In '36, United Olean and Rochester

Construction Costs For Water Way Totaled \$2,000,000, Which Was More Than Doubled Four Years Later—Work Started In 1837—Reached To Mt. Morris In 1840.

## TWO STORY SERIES ON GENESEE CANAL

With this section of New York State rich in historical lore, Miss Maud D. Brooks, Olean city historian, presents a series of two articles telling of the origin and construction of the Genesee and Allegheny Canal.

The water way which connected Olean and Rochester, N. Y., was originated in 1836. Four years later after construction work was started the project had reached Mt. Morris in 1840. Twenty-two years later, and at a cost of \$6,000,000 of state funds, the canal was abandoned.

### By MAUD D. BROOKS City Historian

From the time when the first clearing of the forests in this region began, nearly all plans for internal improvement centered upon the Allegheny River and roads leading to it from populous points in the East.

It was considered the natural highway and there was no idea of any artificial means of competition. But it was only a couple of decades before residents of this fertile valley were faced with the problem of getting their rapidly growing crops to markets outside of this area.

Finally the canal idea was evolved, the honor of originating this theory having several claimants, but it is now generally conceded that Jesse Hawley was the original projector of the American Canal system.

He was born in Bridgeport, Conn. in 1773, but spent most of his life in Rochester, N. Y., where he became a leading citizen.

#### Canal Suggested In 1807.

In 1807 he published a series of articles on the subject of a canal from Lake Erie to the Hudson River in the "Genesee Messenger" and it stated that DeWitt Clinton and other leaders received their first intimation of such a project from these articles.

Indeed 1817 to 1837 might be called the "Canal Era," and in this field of transportation New York soon took the lead, with the building of the Erie Canal.

The opening of this canal in 1825, soon began to divert westward emigration from the river route, so the people of Allegany and Cattaraugus Counties, still having faith in the superior advantages offered by the Allegheny River, held frequent meetings for the purpose of urging the state legislature to construct a branch canal from the

struct a branch canal from the Erie Canal at Rochester to Olean. **Committee Favors Move**

After several years, interest was aroused, and a committee of forty-five prominent men was appointed to call public attention to the subject.

Under its direction, a pamphlet was published entitled "An appeal to the People of the State of New York and their representatives in the legislature in favor of constructing the Genesee and Allegheny Canal."

This appeal, aided by petitions signed by hundreds of citizens of New York City and Brooklyn, strongly recommended the project and, finally a law "to provide for the construction of the Genesee Valley Canal" was passed May 6, 1836.

The estimated cost of the work was \$2,002,285, but four years later this sum was more than doubled.

Actual construction was begun in 1837, and completed to Mt. Morris in August 1840. As the canal lengthened many engineering difficulties were encountered and changes in the general plan were frequently made, too many to mention in detail. A few figures, however, may be of interest.

The length of the canal was 124 $\frac{3}{4}$  miles. The summit level above the Erie Canal at Rochester was 978 feet and 86 feet above the Allegheny River.

**Numerous Lift Locks**  
Among the mechanical structures were 112 lift-locks and two guard-locks, each 90 by 15 feet built of hammer-dressed masonry, laid in hydraulic cement.

The canal was 42 feet wide at water surface and twenty-six feet wide on the bottom, with banks seven feet high, and calculated for four feet of water.

Progress in construction was discouragingly slow after the completion of the first section, and twenty-two years intervened between the first survey and its completion to Olean.

The canal entered Cattaraugus County at the northeast corner of Hinsdale and extended through the town along the east bank of Oil and Olean Creeks. The first boat entered this county Saturday, October 4, 1856.

## Great Event At Cuba

Notice of the event appeared in a Cuba newspaper (The American Banner) the following week and reads as follows:

"By the perseverance and energy of Superintendent Chambers, a boat left Oramel Friday morning for Hinsdale.

"It arrived at Cuba Friday evening about five o'clock, and was received with great rejoicing, the firing of cannon, etc. by the people of the village.

"Quite a large number of persons were on board, accompanied by a band of music. An American flag floated on the breeze, and cheer upon cheer went up as the boat passed along. At six o'clock the people of Cuba formed a procession, preceded by a band of music, and marched to the boat.

"S. M. Russell Esq. called the meeting to order in a few brief and appropriate remarks, after which he introduced Gen. C. T. Chamberlain, who addressed the meeting about half an hour in a neat and feeling speech.

"Speeches were also made by M. P. Champlain, Wilkes Angel and others. Saturday morning the boat passed on as far as Hinsdale.

"The low stage of the water below Hinsdale prevented the boat going as far as Olean until later.

**Lumber Industry Forseen**  
"A large amount of lumber is already on the banks of the canal for shipment, and we may expect a large lumber business will be transacted all along the line."

The rejoicings at Olean and other points were as enthusiastic as at Cuba and Hinsdale. But the end was not yet. An extension to Millgrove, about seven miles beyond Olean, was authorized in 1857 and work begun in June 1858, and completed in December, 1861.

(To Be Continued)

# Old Genesee Valley Canal

## Travel Opened Oct. 6, 1856;

### First Boat Welcomed Here

(The accompanying article, presented by Miss Maud D. Brooks, Olean historian, describes how the Genesee Canal, which linked Olean and Rochester was built from the idea of a Lockport man, an ancestor of a present day Olean woman. It also tells of the arrival of the first boat in Olean, a hundred years ago this week, Saturday, October 6.)

By MAUD D. BROOKS  
Olean City Historian

From time to time many queries are made about the early canal which entered this region, as to its name, its course, when constructed and operated and other details.

Many facts relating to this inland waterway have already been published from time to time, but very few persons, now living, have any recollections of this project.

As Saturday, October, 6, 1956, marks the 100th anniversary of the completion of the Genesee Valley Canal between Rochester and Olean, it may be of interest at this time to review its history.

In this day of rapid and efficient transportation one has little idea of the problems and perplexity that faced the residents of this area over a century ago.

Then there were no railroads and no surfaced highways leading in every direction while many of the great cities were still rather small communities.

**BUT CROPS** would grow and men were thrifty and ambitious, so means of getting their products to paying markets were necessary, hence the idea of canals became of general interest and for a time, filled a need, later amplified by the building of railroads.

The man, who is considered as advocating the idea of a canal across New York State was Jesse Hawley of Lockport, N. Y. As early as 1807 he first presented the idea in a series of articles published in the "Ontario Messenger."

This idea became of interest to Governor De Witt Clinton, who realized what a vast territory such a canal would benefit and he exerted a powerful political influence in favor of such a project.

It resulted in the construction of the Erie Canal, which was officially opened October 26, 1825, with elaborate ceremonies. Governor Clinton was accompanied by Jesse Hawley on the "Seneca Chief," the first boat to travel the full length of the canal.

IT IS INTERESTING to note that this original projector of the American canal system, was a great uncle of a present well-known Olean resident.

She is Mrs. Clarence E. Anderson, and, from documents in her family, interesting facts have been obtained. He owned the land where Cuba Lake now stands, and which was converted as a feeder for the old Genesee Valley Canal.

When Olean was founded, the Allegheny River was regarded as the natural highway to the great undeveloped west. It was the one with which no other route of travel could compete, but, with the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, the trend of emigration diminished, though there was some thought of connecting it with a branch to Olean Point, nothing however ever came of the suggestion.

Many prominent citizens of Allegany and Cattaraugus Counties were still interested in such a project and even succeeded in awakening an interest among leading business men in New York City, which resulted in a small survey of such a route.

ITS ESTIMATED cost was prepared and, May 6, 1836, a bill to provide for the construction of the Genesee Valley Canal was passed to construct such a canal, connecting with the Erie Canal at Rochester through the valley of the Genesee River to the Allegheny River.

The first estimated cost was a little over \$2,000,000, but four years later the same engineers placed the cost to more than \$5,000,000. Details of these plans are interesting to contemplate.

During the 22 years which intervened between the first survey and completion of the work the changes which were made from time to time in the general plan, and in almost every detail of it, were so many and frequent as to be bewildering and certainly too numerous to mention in detail.

Actual cost of construction, \$5,663,183.99. Length, 124 1/4 miles. Size of prism, 42 and 26 x 4 feet. Number of lift locks, 112 (104 in canal, 8 in branch; 28 of stone, 73 composit, 11 of wood.) Number of guard locks, 2. Size of locks, 90x15 feet. Total lockage, 1,127.89 feet.

(Canal — 1,045.39; branch — 82.5).  
Tonnage of boats, 70 to 76 tons.

ORIGINAL CONTRACT called for a canal 26 feet wide on the bottom, 42 feet wide at water surface, the banks 7 ft. high and calculated for four feet of water, the locks to be built of hammer-dressed masonry, laid in hydraulic cement, ninety feet long and 15 ft. wide.

There were 17 aqueducts, 5 dams, and 103 highway bridges. The total cost was about three times the original estimate, while the repairs cost over \$20,000 a year. In fact, it was not a profitable venture. Actual work on the canal was begun in 1837.

It was navigable from Rochester to Mount Morris, with a branch touching Dansville by 1841, but a long time of weary waiting was in store for the friends of this project before it was completed.

By 1851 the canal had reached Oramel, 78 miles from Rochester and two years later as far as Belfast, reaching Cuba early in October, 1856, where it was received with great rejoicing.

The first boat to enter Cattaraugus County was on October, 4, 1856, and two days later it reached Olean being welcomed with enthusiasm, as it had all along the route.

Later in the year the State Legislature passed an act extending the Canal to Mill Grove in the town of Portville on the appeal of prominent lumber men of that locality.

THIS EXTENSION was made with the consent and approval of the people of Olean, who later had some cause to regret this change in plan. After being in operation for 22 years the canal was finally closed and abandoned September 30, 1878, never having realized but a small fraction of what its friends had expected.

Of course when the project was first considered, railroads were unknown and untried until several years later.

For a time the canal played its part in the economic life of this area, but the building of the Erie Railroad in 1851, and the western New York and Pennsylvania Railroad in the early 1870's proved the canal's death blow. There are still vestiges of this artificial waterway in this neighborhood.

It entered Cattaraugus County at the northeast corner of Hinsdale and extended through the town along the East bank of Oil and Olean Creeks, which flow south, originally planned to enter the Allegheny River at Olean, but later at Mill Grove.

THE DEPOT TERMINAL and a large warehouse occupied the land just across from the P.R.R. tracks on North Union St. and traces of the canal bed may still be followed through the property of the Olean General Hospital and northward to Hinsdale and thence to Cuba Lake, which was originally constructed as a reservoir to feed the Canal.

The site of Bradner stadium was formerly a large pond, a part of the canal basin. The canal carried both freight and passengers, the fare from Olean to Rochester being \$4.27.

According to records, the boatmen were a rough and ready lot and there was often a good deal of fighting among them, due in most cases to the frequent indulgence of whisky at various points along the route.

THE FIRST BOAT that came to Olean in 1856 was captained by Whit Gould of Hinsdale. The boats which plied the Genesee Valley Canal are said to have been well built, clean and attractively painted.

They were round at the bow and square at the stern, and were about 80 feet long and 14 ft. wide, with a cabin at the stern end for living quarters and one at the other end for use of the crew, or for horses.

These boats were drawn by horses, usually three, driven tandem, the driver riding the rear animal. The horses were changed at certain points but the crew usually continued to the boat's destination.

Every boat bore a name, either descriptive, or fanciful, among them being "The Wave," "The Betsey King," "Fashion" and the "Crescent." If there were passengers, they were seated on the deck, where they had full view of the country-side. A Currier and Ives print, issued in those early days, gives a colorful and interesting picture of such a scene.

Of course the cargo, shipped from this region was largely lumber, wheat and agricultural products, but the incoming boats brought many unusual articles and

comforts not obtainable in the small inland communities.

The receipt of such a cargo was announced in the "weeklies," which brought the housewives to town, to lay in a stock of coffee, tea, salt, raisins, candles and even packages and pails of tobacco, pipes and matches.

IF ANY OF these old bills of lading could be found, they would reveal lists of many articles then in demand, but unfortunately when these old stores and homes are destroyed, or the original families moved, old records, letters, broadsides and maps are the most likely to be discarded.

It is recorded that the first shipment of grain from Cattaraugus County by the canal was made by W. O. Leland of Hinsdale in 1863 when he shipped two boat-loads of oats to Albany.

The canal however, was never a paying venture, the tolls failing to cover the cost of operation and repairs. Weather conditions also caused long tie-ups.

However it is of interest to recall the needs and development of our community from time to time and to realize that each venture and improvement in conditions and services rendered have meant progress.

Several of the towns, located along the route of the canal, have observed the 100 years of its opening to that point and thus have preserved its history.

## Olean Through The Years

# Olean Lost Title As Canal Terminus With Millgrove Extension

Site Of Present Bradner Stadium Was Part Of Original Canal Basin — Traces Of Site May Still Be Seen — First Boat Arrived Here In 1856.

By MAUD D. BROOKS  
City Historian

The Millgrove extension connected the canal with the Allegheny River, and by navigation of twelve miles on a river, and a projected railroad of about twenty miles, it was to connect with coal mines and vast timber tracts in Pennsylvania.

Thus "original project of making Olean the terminus of the Genesee Valley Canal and its connection here with the river was not accomplished", though the extension was done with the consent of the people, who later had cause for regret.

The site of the present Bradner Stadium was formerly a large pond, a part of the canal basin, the depot terminal being about where the Windsor (Donovan) Hotel is now located, just across the Pennsylvania Railroad tracks on North Union Street.

## Canal Traces Still Seen

Traces of the canal bed may still be followed through the Bradner estate, back of the Olean General Hospital and northward through the town of Hinsdale and Cuba Lake, the popular summer resort, which was originally constructed as a reservoir to feed the new canal.

The canal carried both freight and passengers, the fare from Olean to Rochester being \$4.27. A thousand pounds of bacon was carried one mile for one mill, domestic salt at the same rate.

Furs were carried 100 miles for \$1.00 a thousand pounds and the same amount of furniture, wagons and sleighs for forty cents. Sufficient freight was transported at these rates to net the canal \$25,546.98 in 1855, and \$30,232.68 in 1860.

The population of some of these towns along the route are also of interest, as compared with present-day figures.

For example—Alfred, a hundred years ago (at the time of the 1840 census) had 1630 people, Allegany had 809 and Hinsdale more than twice that number, 1768 people lived in Cuba, 1085 in Machias, 462 in Portville, while Olean had only a population of 638.

## Rough, Ready Boatmen

According to the records and legends of the canal period, the boatmen were a rough and ready lot. The boats which plied the Genesee Valley Canal are said to have been well built, clean and attractively painted.

They were round at the bow end, square at the stern, and were about 80 feet long and 14 feet wide, with a cabin at the stern end for living quarters and one at the other end for use of the crew, or horses.

The carrying capacity was about 90 tons and often fifty to eighty thousand feet of lumber, or as much as fifty cords of wood, comprised the freight. If overloaded, the boat would drag on the bottom of the canal, and it also made it difficult for the horses to pull.

The horses were changed at certain points along the route, though the crew usually continued to the boat's destination. Every boat bore a name, either descriptive, or fanciful. Among them being "The Wave," "Fashion," "The Betsey King," "Homer," and "Crescent."

Olean Boat In 1856

Captain Gould was in charge of the first boat that came to Olean in 1856, where it was welcomed with great enthusiasm and also considerable whiskey. It is a matter of record that there was a great deal of indulgence in strong drink and much fighting among the canalers.

One historian records that there were whiskey shops in every town along the canal route, so even Olean could not escape from alcoholic notoriety. The following quotation from a letter, written by James F. Johnson, dated Olean, October 4, 1857, gives a graphic picture of the conditions which prevailed.

"I have attended three services today, the third being preached by Rev. Cowles on one of the canal boats that now throng this port with their profligate, dissipated, boastful compliment of harlots and loafers.

"A large crowd of citizens, attracted by the novelty of the same, or other cause, came to hear the sermon, or see the sights, among the latter class, I might perhaps as well confess myself.

## Sight To Remember

"But, after all, it was a sight, which, new as it was to me, I shall ever remember. There stood that old silver-headed man of God (as I really believe) with his head bared to the sunlight.

"His hands were pointed upward, and his voice was plaintive and mellow by his own emotion, but still self-possessed and earnest, and pleading for those bloated beings around him, who listened without moving a muscle, or without seeming to hear. It made me involuntarily think of casting pearls before swine."

In the "Olean Advertiser" of April 29, 1858, these items appear: "—Yesterday was the day appointed for the opening of the canal. There is plenty of water, to all appearances, in the Genesee Valley Canal.

"The first boat of the season from Olean, the "Forest City," cleared today for Albany, with 85,000 feet of lumber belonging to Weston Brothers.

"Boat Launch-The 'Abram Merritt' of Olean, canal boat, was launched from the boat yard of S. Creamer at the canal basin, in

this Village, yesterday morning. This is the second boat built here by Mr. Creamer. We believe he is to commence another immediately."

These packet boats continued to transport produce and passengers "up to Olean" for the Pittsburgh flatboats for several years, but it was never a paying investment.

## Grain Shipped In 1863

The first, and only shipment of grain from Cattaraugus County by the canal, was made by W. O. Leland of Hinsdale in 1863, when he shipped two boat-loads of oats from Hinsdale to Albany.

The opening of the Erie Railroad across the state in 1851, before even the completion of the Genesee Valley Canal, had an adverse effect on its contemplated service, as it provided a quicker and more direct means of communication to and from this region.

The sponsors had been too long in trying to realize their dream, so, after 22 years, the \$6,000,000 invested became worthless and the canal was finally abandoned September 30, 1878, under authority of the State Legislature.

This abandonment was enforced in the face of strong remonstrance, and in many cases, great wrong was inflicted upon both private and local interests. Investments having been made on the implied pledge of the state to continue and maintain the work.

## Genesee Valley Views

# Save Genesee Valley Canal?

By GEORGE QUESTA

The old Genesee Valley Canal of more than a century ago continues to fascinate people.

To refresh your memory, the Canal was built in the middle and late 1800s to connect Rochester with Olean, ran 123 miles, took 20 years to construct, cost \$6,725,000, contained more than 100 locks, reached the Olean vicinity in 1856, stimulated Genesee River valley settlement — and was abandoned in 1878, when the speedier railroads were laid.

Thoughts about the Genesee Valley Canal were revived just last month, when the new Cuba Historical Society viewed slide pictures of the remains of the canal by Mr. and Mrs. J. Hayward Madden of Livonia, including construction in the Cuba-Black Creek areas.

Cuba comes into the picture, because Cuba Lake was originally impounded as a reservoir for the canal.

**MOST** recently, a former Oleander now living in California, who remembered family stories about the canal, visited a well-known part of the canal's route near Oakland in Livingston County.

He is Clifford F. Marshall, who worked for the former Socony Vaccum Oil company in Olean, and took up residence in San Diego, Calif., in the 1940s as a retired federal Civil Service employe.

Now in Olean on a vacation trip, he recalls that his great-aunt, Clara Crozier, had journeyed to the Southern Tier from New England, traveling at least part of the way by canal boat. His impression is that such stories spread the word that the canal was a kind of "gateway to Olean" and area.

**ON** A Sunday drive recently, Mr. Marshall saw the remains of Genesee Valley Canal locks below Oakland.

The column recalls that about four years ago, Dr. Frieda Gillette of Houghton College had given a talk on the canal before the Thelma Rogers Genealogical and Historical Society in Wellsville in which she pointed out that "quite well preserved" remains of the canal include locks at the Livingston County community of Oakland, near Nunda.

That's what Mr. Marshall saw, and he says the masonry of the locks appears still to be "in good repair," at least good enough so that the viewer can tell roughly what it was. A "deep cut" is also recognizable, he adds.

All of which leads him to ask, Why not preserve the Oakland locks, as a historical and tourist attraction project, incorporating them into an entranceway to Letchworth State Park?

**DOCKS** and warehouses for the canal boats, he says, also were located near Oakland.

Speaking of the canal and Cuba Lake, another area lake, although nowhere

near as large, had to do with the historic waterway — Rockville Lake, hidden away off Rt. 305, the Cuba-to-Belfast road.

One Rockville Laker says the watery gem actually was a "feeder" for the canal.

Another says the pathway to her dwelling at the lake is over what used to be lock number 89 of the old canal. "Old planking" and "stone walls" of which locks in that area were constructed — engineering marvels at the time — reportedly can still be seen in the Rockville area, but the column suspects you'd have to have someone along who knew what to look for and where to find it.

Getting back to Dr. Gillette's canal talk, she had reported that in a swampy area south of the old Pennsylvania Railroad depot on the outskirts of Belfast, there was said to be the remnants of an old canal boat sunk beneath the surface of the swamp. Adventurous lookers, who have an idea of what to look for and where, can find it by probing with sticks, the story goes.

**THRIVING** taverns and stores sprang up in almost every locking place along the way, and at least two have been remodeled as present-day residences near Houghton and Fillmore.

The Erie Canal, opening a watery thruway from New York City to Buffalo in 1825, provided the lead over its neighbors that made New York the Empire State; and, in the same way, the construction of the Genesee Valley Canal, and its busy if brief lifetime, literally boomed the economy of the Genesee Valley.

The bustling villages and settlements along the route, before its abandonment in 1878, testified to the commerce it stimulated. Many towns owned their very existence to the canal and its construction.

The canal, which aimed to channel the prosperity of the Hudson and Mohawk valleys, enriched by the Erie Canal, into the timber stands, rich farm lands and unsettled areas along the Genesee and Allegheny rivers, cut through the Allegheny County towns of Hume, Caneadea, Belfast, New Hudson and Cuba.

**THE WATERS** of the Genesee and the Allegheny were joined at Millgrove, near Portville, in 1861. River navigation past Olean and a 20-mile rail line were to have opened the coal and timber of Northwestern Pennsylvania to canal traffic, but the last links were never forged.

The last section of the route, which would have joined the system to the Allegheny River at Olean, was never completed. Only a few miles intervened, since the terminal of the canal was about in the present location of Bradner Stadium.

Oramel, in its day the queen of the canal towns, is a drowsy hamlet today. But the canal gave the spark of life to Fillmore, which now is the liveliest of the Northern Allegany villages. And Houghton, which has the distinction of being one of the few college towns in America where neither tobacco or alcoholics are sold, was in Genesee Valley Canal days called Jockey Street because of the horse races there.

A sparkling little lake in the hills that bears the name of the nearby village of Cuba is a child of the canal. It is a man-made lake, once known as the second largest artificial lake in the world. It was built to feed the Genesee Valley Canal when it was found that the lockage through the southern hills used a tremendous amount of water. The lake is still there, lined with Summer cottages and a popular resort for the neighborhood.

The Rapids, the area around the junction of Brooks and Plymouth Aves., is now a part of the 19th Ward of Rochester. In the heyday of the Valley Canal it was a rough place. There were many fights and a murder or two in its grog shops. At the Rapids lived Ben Streeter, the "Rochester Canal Bully," who once fought a one-hour, one-round battle in the Reynolds Arcade with the "Bully of Buffalo" and licked him.

But all that is folklore now and the Genesee Valley Canal is history. There remain the pretty like canal-born lake in the green hills, the "Deep Cut" that sweating men scooped out by hand, the dismal hole in the hillside at Portageville and here and there the sturdy old locks of stone, like those hidden under the brush at Dumpling Hill.

SECTION

Want Ads

Fraternal

ROCHESTER, N. Y., SUNDAY, JUNE 24, 1951

ESTABLISHED IN 1842.

NEW YORK  
—AND—  
GENESEE VALLEY CANAL LINE  
LAKE BOATS.

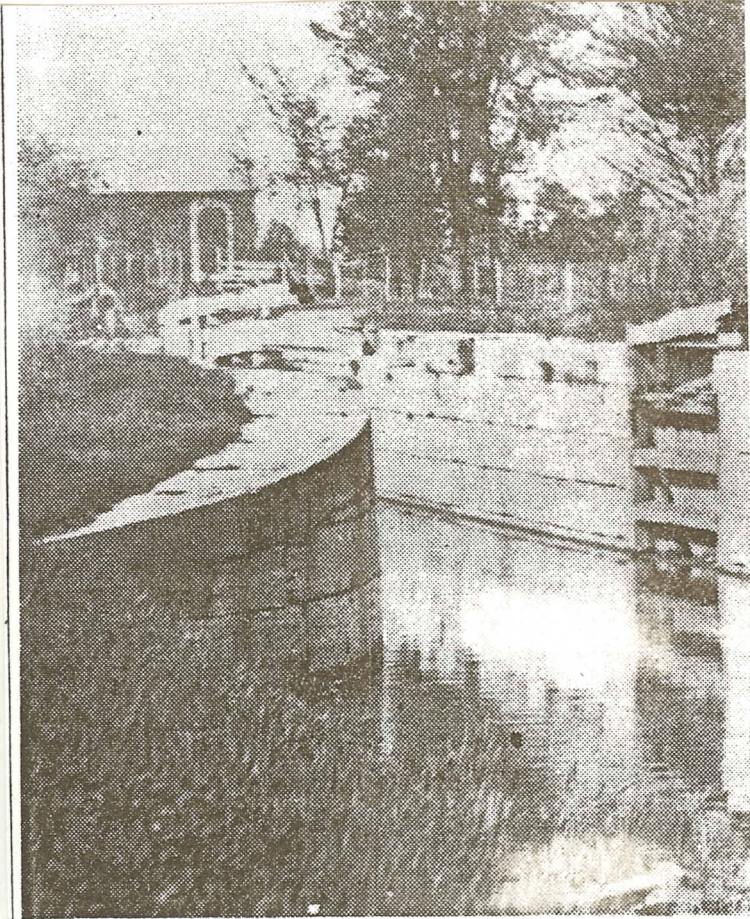
1860. CARGOES INSURED. 1860.

Merchandise, &c., forwarded daily from New York to Clyde, Lyons, Pahrara, Rochester, Scottsville, Canawanzus, Caylerville, Mount Morris, Dansville; also to Nunda, Portage, Belfast, Cuba, Olean, and intermediate places.

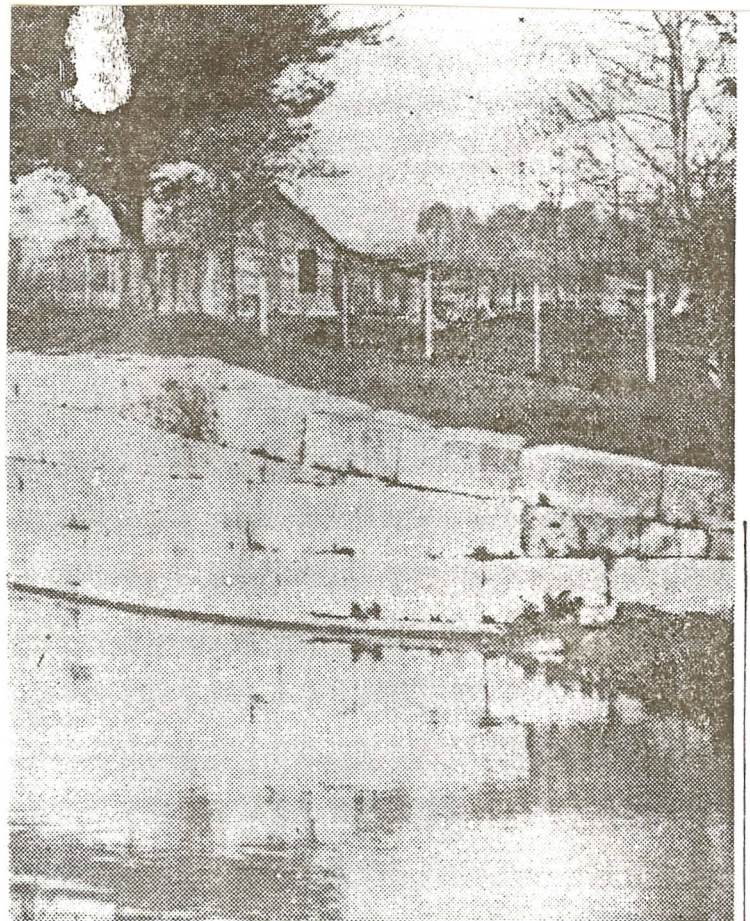
WITHOUT RE-SHIPPING.

M. F. JAMES, Agent, 105 Broad Street, New York.

CARGOES INSURED reads this 1860 advertising card of the New York and Genesee Valley Canal Line. This was lent by Mrs. Sally Patchin of Wayland. Canal finally was completed from Rochester to Olean in 1856, closed in 1878.



NOW JUST AN OLD DITCH — This picture, taken about 1900, shows lock of the abandoned Genesee Valley Canal near Dumpling Hill as it looked then, already out of use more than



20 years. This part of canal was completed by 1840. Picture was lent to Arch Merrill by Gerald Kindelin, 275 Norwood Ave., who as a boy lived in house overlooking lock.

5-30-92

# History traces 'routes' of local waterway

*Genesee Valley Canal had been designed to connect Rochester and New Orleans*

(First in a four-part series)  
By JENNIFER REISCH

□ The Times Herald

BELFAST — Competition from railroads, too little water, floods, delayed construction and even crabs contributed to the demise of the Genesee Valley Canal, which ran between Olean and Rochester in the late 19th century.

**THE CANAL WAS** originally intended to join Rochester and New Orleans via the Allegheny, Ohio and Mississippi rivers.

In fact, in its lifetime the canal gained access only to the upper portion of the Allegheny River which went to Couderdport and Port Allegany in Pennsylvania, not New Orleans, said Henry Baxter, director of the New York State Canal Society.

The canal was 106 miles long from Rochester to Olean, had 106 locks and a summit of 1,489 feet above sea level, the highest of any United States canal. An 11-mile branch with five locks extended to Dansville from Shakers and a seven-mile extension went to Millgrove to connect with the Allegheny River.

**CONSTRUCTION BEGAN** in 1837 and continued until 1842 when the Stop Work Law halted construction. Work resumed in 1847, but at a slow pace. Travel began on portions of the canal as they were completed.

The canal was completed in 1856, but always had major operational problems including

cesses and deficiencies of water and structural defects. The canal also had problems with creeks depositing sediment into it, which made the canal shallower. Instead of bottoming out the canal — that is, clearing out the canal to return it to its original dimensions — they would sometimes instead raise the water level until the canal nearly overflowed its banks. The canal also developed leaks because of animal life, including muskrats and crabs.

A feasibility study was done on an extension from Belfast to Wellsville. The cost was estimated at \$678,105. The proposal was rejected.

Lumber was main product shipped on the canal. Some iron ware, salt, and coal also traveled along the canal.

Genesee Valley Canal had revenues of \$860,165, and operating costs of \$2,814,809. Therefore the canal realized operating losses of \$1,954,644. Cost of construction had been \$6,737,431.

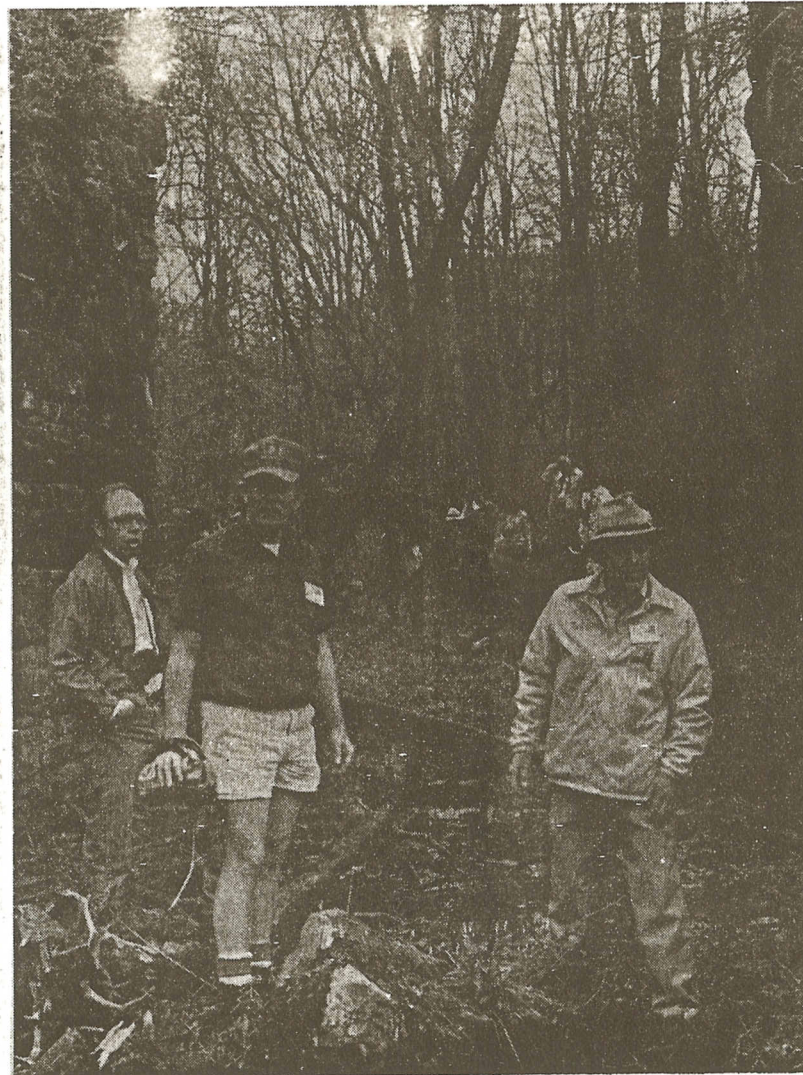
**MR. BAXTER** attributes failure of the canal to many different reasons:

■ The missed Mississippi connection.

■ Delay in construction. The canal should have been done in 1842, which would have allowed it to develop commercial ties.

■ Railroad competition. The New York and Erie Railroad ran between Olean and Cuba five years before the canal did.

■ Lack of water. Navigation was sometimes closed at sum-



Jennifer Reisch/Times Herald

**A gate once stood between these two stone walls to let water into the Ischua Creek feeder of the Genesee Valley Canal. Craig Braack of Almond (left), plus an unidentified member of the New York State Canal Society, stand with Tom Grasso (right), president of the society.**

and 60 days in 1863. Water was brought in from lakes as far as 20-30 miles away to get enough water at the summit.

damaged structures and washed out towpaths.

*Next, how fossils are used to trace the route of the Genesee*