

An Historical Geography of NYS Settlement Sequence II

CANAL ERA

1815-1855

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Canals of NYS

Exercise 13 (extra credit) looks at the site and situation of canals built in NYS during the “Canal Era.”

2

The Erie Canal

- Gov. DeWitt Clinton persuaded the NYS Legislature to fund the building of a canal to link the Hudson River with Lake Erie.
- The Erie Canal was constructed between 1817 and 1825.
 - First segment was from Rome to Seneca (easiest digging).
 - East and west ends required technology.
- Canal diggers were mainly immigrants from ships arriving in NYC. (Most settled in NYS along the canal.)

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Erie Canal

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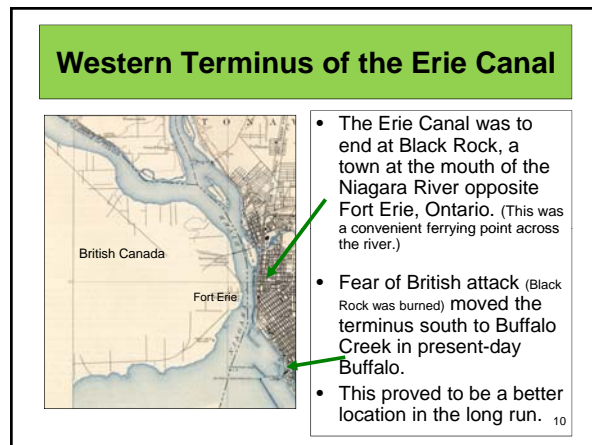
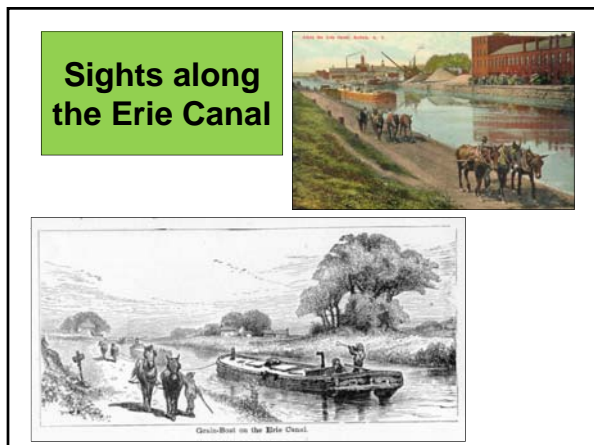
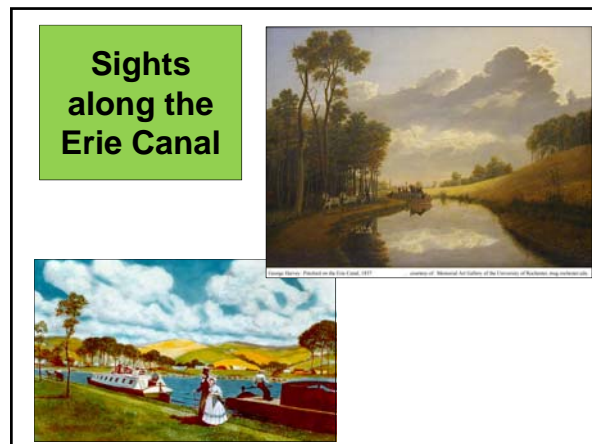
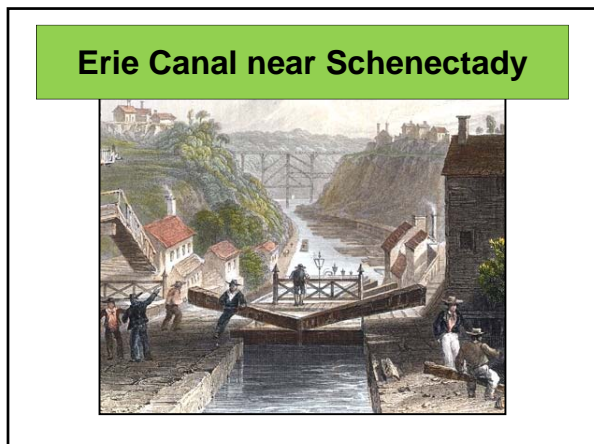
Erie Canal

- Built between Buffalo and Albany at a cost of \$8 million.
- Provided an all-water route between New York City and the Great Lakes, greatly expanding NYC’s hinterland.
- For a ton of goods, it reduced NYC-Buffalo hauling time from 26 days to 6 days, and the cost from \$100 to \$10.
- The canal was 40 feet wide and 4 feet deep.
- Boats were pulled by horses/mules walking on adjacent towpaths.
- NYC became the gateway to the West. It’s population doubled between 1820 and 1840.

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Canal Cross-section

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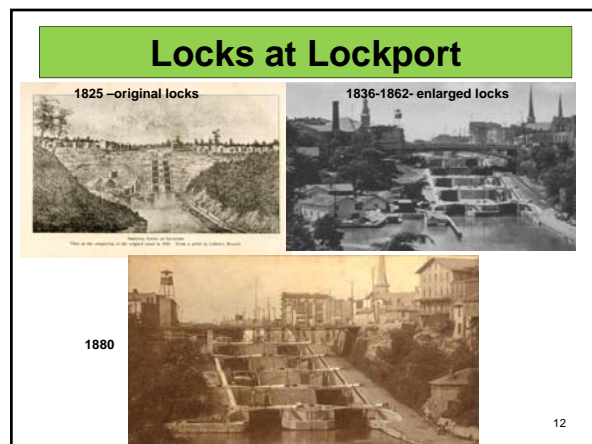
Dimensions of the Erie Canal

ORIGINAL ERIE CANAL

- 363 mi long with 83 locks
- 40 ft wide/28 ft bottom
- 4 ft deep
- Dug by hand
- 8-10 ft wide containment berms
- Mules towed the canal boats.

- Enlarged/straightened twice during the 1800s; mechanized.
- 1918 renamed the **NYS Barge Canal** after it was enlarged to its present size with only 57 locks.
- Much of the original canal bed was abandoned.

<http://www.eriecanal.org/index.html>



Lockport Today: 2 locks

13

Canal Lock

A lock is used to raise and lower water in sections of the canal. Original lock operations were gravity-flow. Today pumps speed the process.

The Erie Canal

- It provided an all water link between the Atlantic Ocean and the Great Lakes.
- Cut travel time from NYC to Buffalo from 20 days to 8 days.
- Cut cost of freight from \$120/ton to \$5/ton reducing the price of food and lumber.
- By 1840 NYC handled more tonnage than all other major US ports combined.

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The Erie Canal

- **Instigated national canal-building mania.**
- Cities developed along its route (1850 census saw 75% of NYS population living within 10 mi of it).
- Because of its success, it had to be enlarged several times to handle heavier cargo and larger barges.
- **Speeded the development of the railroads which needed level land and commercial centers** (freight terminals).

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Canals of NYS

The Richelieu River was canalized to connect the St. Lawrence River with Lake Champlain.

The Delaware & Hudson connected the coal fields of Pennsylvania with the Hudson River.

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Delaware & Hudson Canal System

- Built 1825-1829.
- First canal privately financed in US.
- Connected Wilkes Barre, PA with Kingston, NY.
- Consisted of a 108 mi long canal with 108 locks + 16 mi of gravity railroad.

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Delaware and Hudson Canal

The map shows the Delaware and Hudson Canal route in red, starting from Carbondale, PA, passing through Port Jervis, NY, and ending at New York City, NY. It also shows the anthracite coal route in blue. Key locations include Carbondale, PA; Port Jervis, NY; New York City, NY; and the Hudson River. A small inset image shows a bridge over the canal.

<http://www.nps.gov/upde/photosmultimedia/The-Delaware-and-Hudson-Canal.htm>

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Canals of NYS in 1855

The map, titled 'CANALS c. 1855 Fig. 46', shows the extensive canal network in New York State. The Erie Canal is the most prominent, connecting the Hudson River to Lake Erie. Other canals shown include the Delaware and Hudson Canal, the Champlain Canal, and the Oswego Canal. A legend and scale are provided in the bottom left corner.

The success of the Erie Canal began the Canal Era in the US but no other state had the combination of landforms and water sources as did NYS.

The Delaware and Hudson Canal was the first privately built canal in the US. Its purpose was to carry coal from eastern Pennsylvania to NYC.

The late 1850s saw the end of the Canal Era as the rail network grows.

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Settlement Sequence 1780-1865

Why was this period's settlement pattern important?

- End of period saw the imprint of the basic population distribution pattern.
- Focal points of higher population densities developed.
- These focal points became links in the modern transportation system

(major roads "called turnpikes" >> canals >> railroads).

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