

Wabash & Erie Canal
Cass County
09.1966.1

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Marker Text

Trade and emigration route from Lake Erie to Evansville. Completed through Logansport 1840. Followed Erie Avenue and 5th Street, crossing Eel River by wooden aqueduct. Abandoned about 1876.

Report

The first sentence of the marker is correct. The Wabash and Erie Canal was a trade route that linked Lake Erie to Evansville. According to Ralph D. Gray's essay "The Canal Era in Indiana" from *Transportation and the Early Nation*, county populations bordering the canal grew from 12,000 before the canal in 1835, to 60,000 in 1845, to 150,000 in 1855. However, the marker's second sentence is slightly incorrect. A search of the Logansport newspapers revealed that the canal was opened to that city's traffic in 1839, not 1840.

An exact date for the canal's completion through Logansport could not be determined because IHB staff was not able to locate several issues of the *Logansport Herald* or the *Logansport Telegraph* for April and most of May, 1839. However, the *Telegraph* of March 23, 1839 reported, "The Wabash and Erie Canal will be opened for navigation between Logansport and Fort Wayne, about the first of April." Then on May 28, 1839, the *Herald* reported, "The Canal. - Boats are arriving almost daily. Business is becoming better every day. In a few days the water will, we understand, be let in to Gorgetown [sic] six or eight miles below." There were also advertisements running for two canal cargo companies (the Wabash and Erie Packet Boat Company and Spencer, Rice, & Hopkins Storage, Forwarding, and Commission) in the 1839 *Herald* and *Telegraph*.

The location of the canal in Logansport is correct. The atlas *The Combination Atlas Map of Cass County* (1878) was consulted but did not contain a map of Logansport proper. However, Jehu Z. Powell's *History of Cass County* (1913) described the canal as "coming in on...Erie avenue, to Fifth street, running north on Fifth to Eel river, crossing that river on an aqueduct." According to an article in the *Logansport Weekly Journal* on May 3, 1873 there was a wooden aqueduct.

The marker states that the canal was abandoned "about 1876," and while this statement is acceptable because of the qualifying "about," the correct date is probably 1875. Several county histories as well as the 1878 *Combination Atlas Map of Cass County* disagree, and give 1875 as the abandonment date. Newspaper accounts reveal that in 1873 the Cass County Commissioners, under public pressure, appropriated \$5,000 to provide for repair of the canal. It is evident from these articles that the canal was not in good shape. In May, 1875, the *Logansport Weekly Journal* reported that "The 'Iceberg' ...arrived last Monday, being the first canal boat of the season." In the *Weekly Journal's* year-end recap of local happenings for 1875 it noted, "May 3. The canal boat Iceberg...was the first and last arrival of the season." There was no recollection whatsoever of canal activity in the *Weekly Journal's* year-end review for 1876.