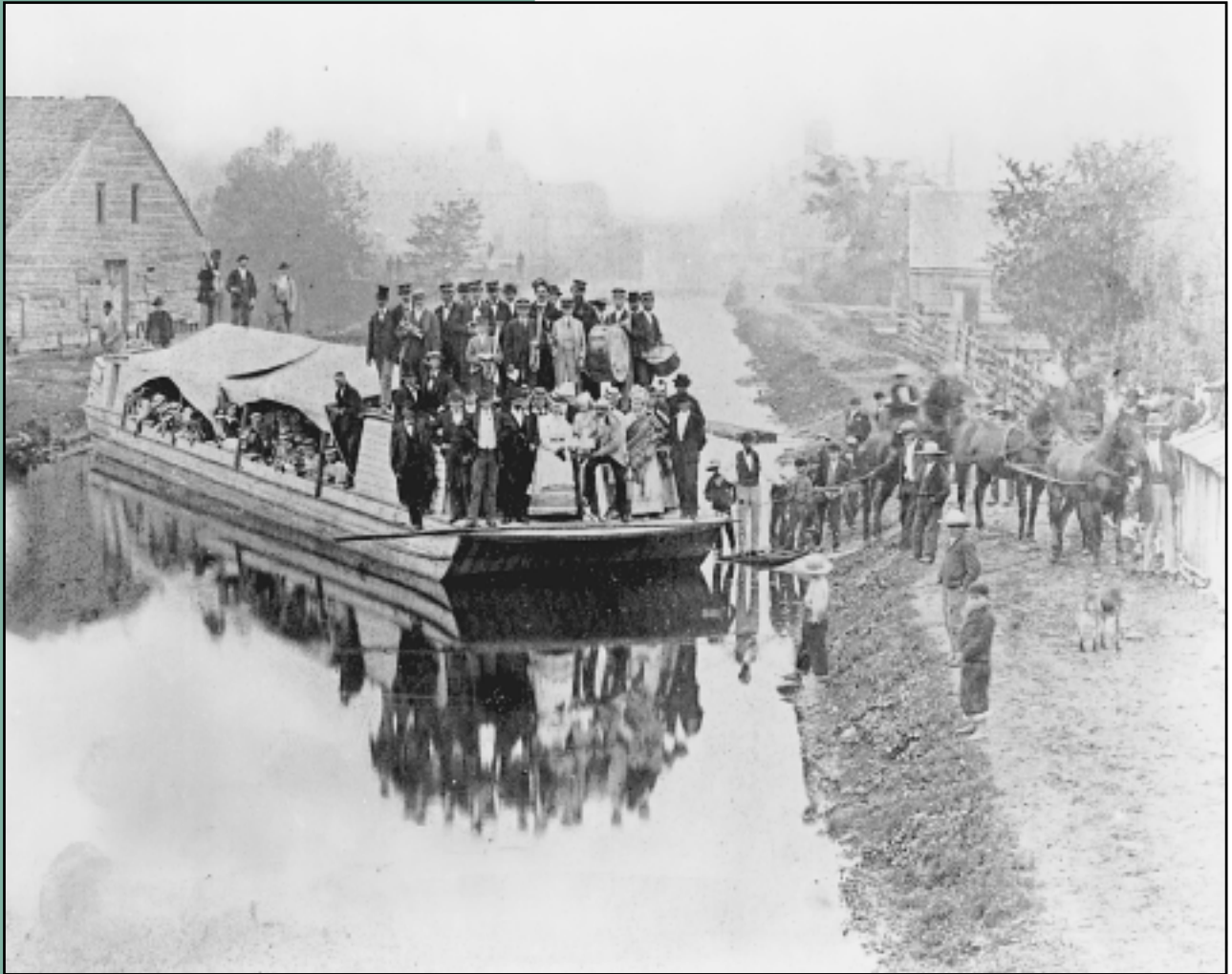


# The Indiana

*A Magazine Exploring Indiana History*

# Historian



*Canal Mania in Indiana*

# Focus

This issue and the next—September 1997—focus on Indiana canals of the nineteenth century. This issue provides general background about canals and internal improvements. It focuses on what travel on a canal boat was like and the economic effects of canals. The September issue will focus on how canals were constructed.

On page 3 is a map demonstrating the long interest in canal building in Indiana, from 1805 through 1915.

On pages 4 and 5, there are brief overviews of Indiana's internal improvements efforts and canals in Indiana and nationally. Space has limited coverage to the Wabash and Erie Canal and the Whitewater Canal.

Two personal narratives are then used (pages 6-9) to demonstrate what it was like to travel by canal boat in Indiana in 1851. Both accounts describe travel on the Wabash and Erie Canal, but travel on other canals would have been similar.

The economic impact of canals is then discussed (pages 10-13). The interview of a

Whitewater Canal boat captain—who played an important part in the economy—demonstrates also the enthusiasm and spirit of the canal era.

The spirit of that era is continued in the present-day organizations and people who study and commemorate canals. The Canal Society of Indiana has been helpful in our quest for materials. Paul Baudendistel, a resident of Metamora on the Whitewater Canal, has been invaluable. Baudendistel's long involvement with the canal is the subject of "Behind the Scenes" on page 14.

As usual, a selection of resources is available on page 15.

We hope that this issue will help to interest more people in the canal heritage of Indiana. Students and others should investigate the effect of canals in their own areas. They should then add this information to the resources available at both the local and state level as a result of those investigations. There is still much to be learned about canals in Indiana, and every reader can contribute.

**Cover illustration:** A canal wedding, May 16, 1872, at Attica on the Wabash and Erie Canal.  
Indiana Historical Society Library  
(Negative No. A131).

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*The Indiana Historian* provides resources and models for the study of local history to encourage Indiana's citizens of all ages to become engaged with the history of their communities and the state of Indiana.

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## You be the historian

- Examine the map on page 3. Are any of the canals near your location? What is the closest canal—or proposed canal—to you? See what you can find in local history sources about the canal in your area.
- Investigate the Central Canal. How has that canal been used in the recent past?
- The eight projects of the 1836 Internal Improvements Act (listed on page 4) reached all areas of Indiana. What was planned for your area? Was the project ever completed? What results of this act can be located on an Indiana map today?
- There are many historical markers in Indiana about the canals and transportation. Locate any near you. If there are none, investigate acquiring a marker through the Indiana Historical Bureau.
- Railroads took the place of canals as the best means of transportation. Are railroads still the primary means of transportation? What has taken their place and why? What water transportation is an important economic factor in Indiana today?
- Throughout this issue, there are illustrations from a newspaper, the Brookville *Indiana American* from the 1840s. Does your area have a newspaper that goes back to the nineteenth century? What was going on in your area at that time? What subjects were frequently covered? What sorts of advertisements appeared?

# Indiana Canals

## 1805 - 1915

① Ohio Falls Canal—to provide passage around the Falls of the Ohio, 1805, 1816.

② Wabash and Erie Canal—to connect Lake Erie with the Ohio River through the Wabash Valley, 1827.

③ Whitewater Canal—to connect Whitewater Valley with the Ohio River, 1833, 1836.

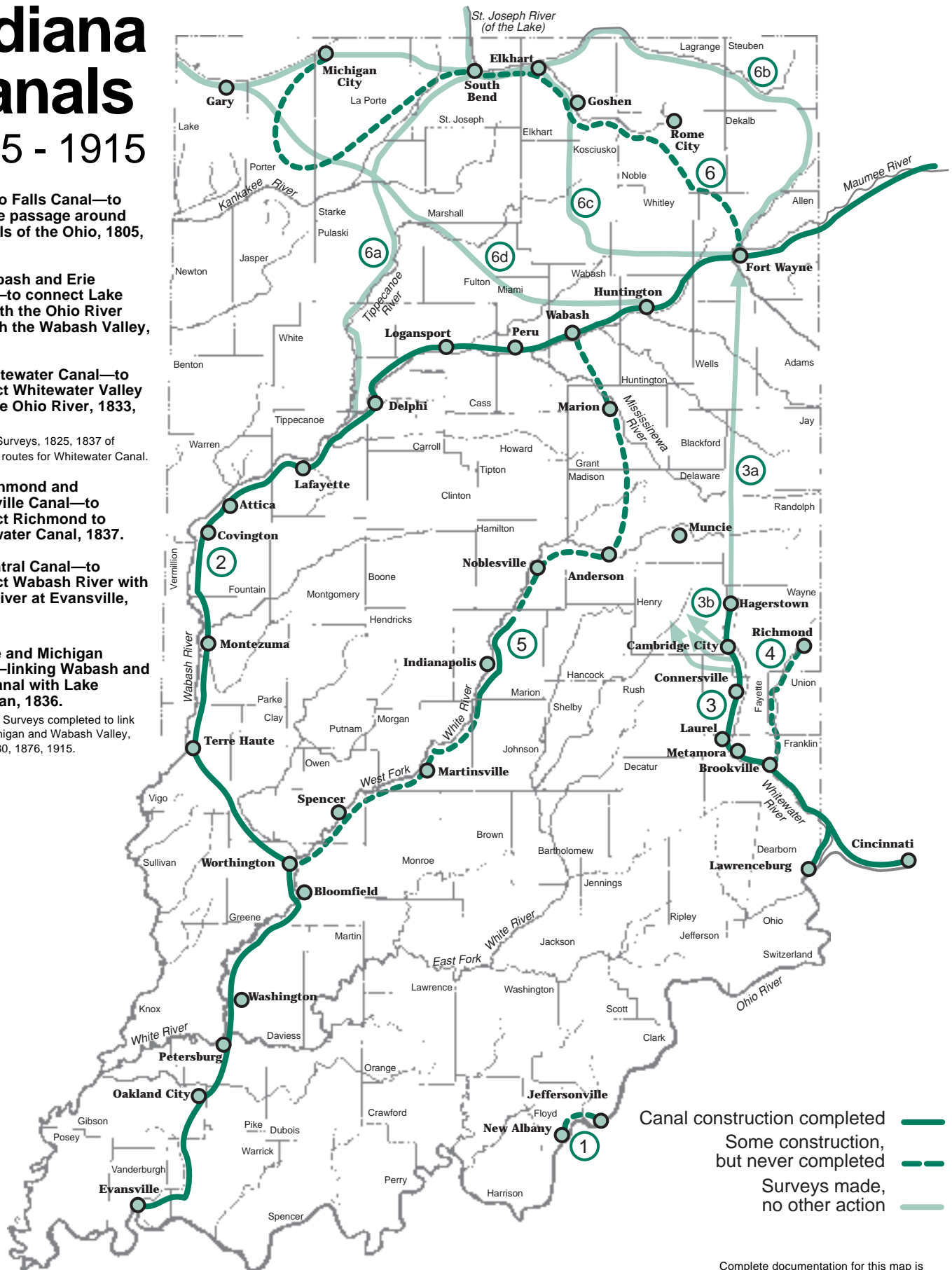
③a, ③b. Surveys, 1825, 1837 of proposed routes for Whitewater Canal.

④ Richmond and Brookville Canal—to connect Richmond to Whitewater Canal, 1837.

⑤ Central Canal—to connect Wabash River with Ohio River at Evansville, 1836.

⑥ Erie and Michigan Canal—linking Wabash and Erie Canal with Lake Michigan, 1836.

⑥a - ⑥d. Surveys completed to link Lake Michigan and Wabash Valley, 1829, 1830, 1876, 1915.



Canal construction completed ———  
 Some construction, but never completed - - -  
 Surveys made, no other action ———

Complete documentation for this map is available from the Indiana Historical Bureau.

# Opening Indiana

In the early nineteenth century, in Indiana—as in the rest of the existing United States—travel was accomplished on foot or horseback, in wagons pulled by animals, or by water. Since roadways were quite primitive, water was the preferred means of travel when possible.

As early as 1805, there was interest in improving water transportation in the Indiana Territory. The territorial legislature chartered a company to build a canal around the falls in the Ohio River near Jeffersonville. No Indiana canal was built there. Kentucky later built a canal on its side of the falls.

New York's very successful Erie Canal was started in 1817 and finished in 1825. It provided the impetus and the model for canal building that erupted in the nineteenth century from the east coast to Illinois.

Indiana's canal building started with the Wabash and Erie Canal at Fort Wayne in 1832. This canal was enabled by a federal grant of land in 1827 following a

treaty with the Miamis and Potawatomis in 1826.

Passage by the General Assembly in 1836 of "An Act to provide for a general system of Internal Improvements" marks the state's further commitment to opening Indiana for expanded trade and travel.

The 1836 law provided for eight projects to construct roads, canals, and railroads throughout the state. See the chart on this page.

This 1836 law resulted in financial disaster for Indiana. Construction on projects was stopped in 1839; the state was unable to pay interest on its debt in 1841. Paul Fatout has asserted that the system "was conceived in madness and nourished by delusion" (76). The many reasons for the failures are too complex to discuss here.

As a result of the experience, Indiana's 1851 Constitution prohibits the state from going into debt. During the debates at the 1850 constitutional convention, Judge David Kilgore, who voted for the 1836 bill in the legislature, noted in part what went wrong:

It never entered into the minds of those who voted for the bill directing those surveys that all the public works . . . should be carried on simultaneously. We sent out engineers, chain-bearers, and workers, to get useful information of different routes and localities upon which to base a good and practical system of internal improvements. But, sir, the very fact that those surveys were made . . . made the people lose

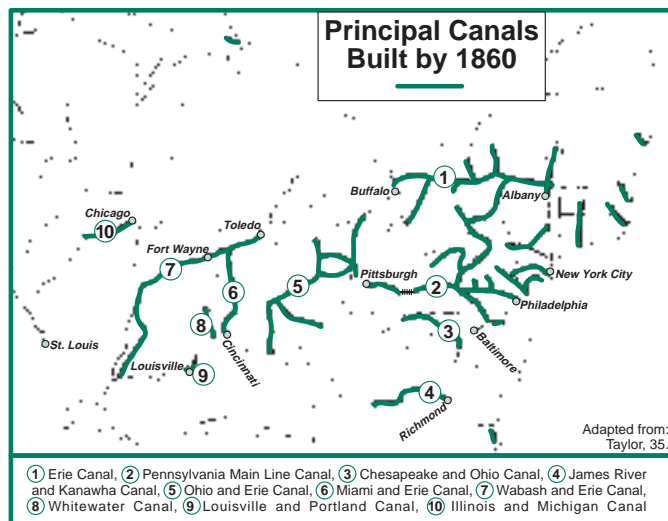
their mental balance; every neighborhood became so intoxicated with the idea that a railroad or canal was to pass near it, that the people became mad, as it were, and were unable to judge. *Report of the Debates and Proceedings of the Convention for the Revision of the Constitution of the State of Indiana, 1850* (Indianapolis, 1850), 677.

As James H. Madison concludes, "Simultaneous construction . . . began on many dispersed segments: when it was halted the state was left with bits and pieces of 'scatteration,' rather than any single completed project" (86).

The fact remains that Indiana committed in 1836 to projects that would connect it, its people, and its products to the rest of the country and the world. Remnants of those projects are part of Indiana's landscape today.

Madison has a kinder assessment of those early pioneers:

The generation that appropriated ten million dollars to revolutionize transportation at a time when the state's annual revenues averaged less than \$75,000 took a risk. They lost, and looked foolish in the end, but only in the end. At the outset one must appreciate the forward-looking optimism, the belief in progress, the intense desire to lift Indiana out of the mud and leave behind the isolation of pioneer life (85).



## Projects and Appropriations in Indiana's 1836 Internal Improvements Bill

(see map on page 3 for canals)

1. The Whitewater Canal, \$1,400,000
2. The Central Canal, \$3,500,000
3. Wabash and Erie Canal, \$1,300,000
4. Madison to Lafayette Railroad, \$1,300,000
5. New Albany to Vincennes macadamized road, \$1,150,000
6. Jeffersonville to Crawfordsville railroad or macadamized turnpike, \$1,300,000
7. Removal of obstructions in Wabash River, \$50,000
8. Survey for Fort Wayne to Michigan City canal or railroad, no appropriation

# Indiana's canals

Most references to Indiana's canal era emphasize the failures. The canal era and canals, however, need to be studied as "a once vital dimension in the growth of the Old Northwest." Canals contributed "agricultural expansion and the export of agricultural surpluses, the import of eastern merchandise, and economic diversification towards manufacturing and commerce" (Shaw, 107, 105).

## In Indiana,

the two . . . canals which were completed and in operation for some twenty to forty years—the Whitewater and the Wabash and Erie canals—had a positive impact upon their regions, served to stimulate agricultural and urban growth, and helped develop the towns, the millsites, the population, and the trade which the railroads of a later time dominated so completely. Gray, 129.

The 468-mile-long Wabash and Erie Canal was the longest canal in the country. It connected Lake Erie at Toledo with the Ohio River at Evansville in 1853. It was begun in 1832 at Fort Wayne, and crossed through Peru (1837), Lafayette (1843), and Terre Haute (1849). It cost approximately \$8,200,000.

After 1841, Indiana could not pay the interest on its canal and internal improvements bonds—many of which had been purchased by people in foreign countries. Work on the Wabash and Erie Canal continued because of more grants from the federal government of land to sell. Bondholders, under the leadership of attorney Charles Butler, supported continued operation and completion of the canal under trustees to recoup some of their money. There were periods when the canal was profitable. Floods,

vandalism, and railroads (which were built along the canal routes) finally caused closure of the canal in 1874.

The Whitewater Canal in the Whitewater Valley of southeastern Indiana eventually extended from Cincinnati, Ohio to Hagerstown, Indiana. The canal was proposed in 1825. Progress was first made with the incorporation of the Whitewater Canal Company in 1826. Much of the canal was completed through the efforts of private citizens who organized into construction companies. Explore the timeline in this issue for events of its progress.

After the Whitewater Canal ceased operations in 1865,

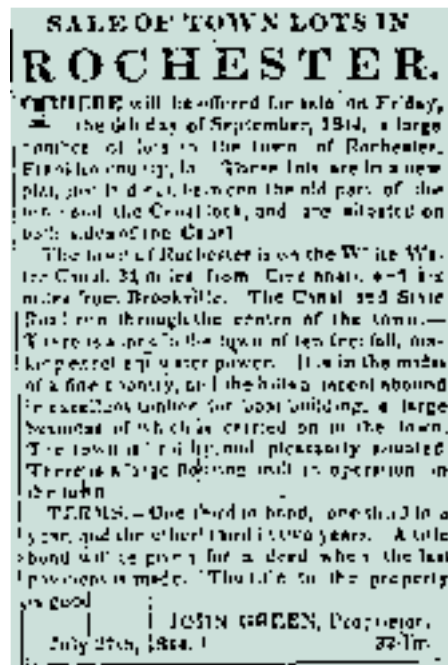
. . . it continued to serve a number of mills and, on the section between Milton and Connersville, to develop hydro-electric power for almost a century thereafter. . . . the canal had a long history and a long term of spasmodic usefulness. . . . Among the earliest in Indiana, they [canal supporters of the Whitewater Valley] were also foremost in determination, in tenacity, and in blind courage. Fatout, 156.

The map on page 4 demonstrates that canals were an important step in the process of connecting the areas of the United States. As Shaw notes, "the cost of transportation fell dramatically from more than ten cents per ton mile to as little as a cent; a canal network of 3,326 miles was built by 1840 at a cost of more than \$125 million, and the way was opened for the railroad to follow" (100).

Indiana's late entry into the canal era, in hindsight, doomed its efforts. New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio had built over 1,000 total miles of successful canals by 1830. In 1830, only Pennsylvania

(seventy miles) and Massachusetts (three miles) had built railroads. By 1840 in all states, the complete mileage of canals was nearly equal to the complete miles of railroads. By 1850, the complete railroad miles were roughly two and one-half times the canals. By 1860, the complete railroad miles were roughly eight times the canals. The canal era had given way to railroads (Taylor, 79-80).

Canals were expensive. Most were possible only with governmental support from states. Many were possible only because the U.S. Congress granted public land that could be sold to support construction. The concept of such public support for internal improvements has continued to the present day, for example, with the interstate highway system.



Brookville Indiana American, August 2, 1844.

Rochester, later Cedar Grove, Franklin County, is typical of towns that prospered or were founded because of canal construction. Carefully read the advertisement. What other transportation advantage did the town offer? What were some of the canal-related businesses?

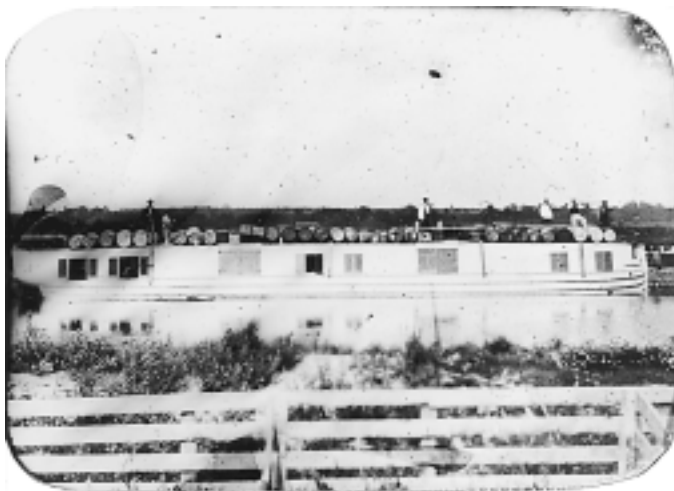
# Canal travel

Indiana author Maurice Thompson in his 1898 work *Stories of Indiana*, noted that “Many old people now living remember the peculiar experiences of voyaging on board a canal boat” (217). Thompson presented the following summary:

The canal boat was a long, low, narrow structure built for carrying both passengers and freight. Its cabin and sleeping berths were of the most primitive description, ill-ventilated and dimly lighted. The boat looked like an elongated floating house, the height of which had been decreased by some great pressure. It was drawn by one or two horses hitched to a long rope attached to the bow of the boat. The horses walked on a path, called the towpath, at the side of the canal, and were driven by a man or boy, who sometimes rode, sometimes walked. The boat had a rudder with which a pilot kept it in its proper place while it crept along like a great lazy turtle on the still water. Surely there never was sleepier mode of travel. Thompson, *Stories of Indiana* (New York: American Book Company, 1898), 217-18.

As the boat diagrams throughout this issue illustrate, the construction of canal boats varied. The dimensions were limited by the standard lock size of approximately fifteen feet wide by ninety feet long. Locks on the Whitewater Canal varied in size. As with every mode of travel, passengers (many thousands) who traveled on these boats had differ-

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Canal boat *William Speece* of Delphi on the Wabash and Erie Canal. Fatout, following page 92.

ent reactions to the speed—reports vary from three to eight miles per hour—and the comfort. Overall, however,

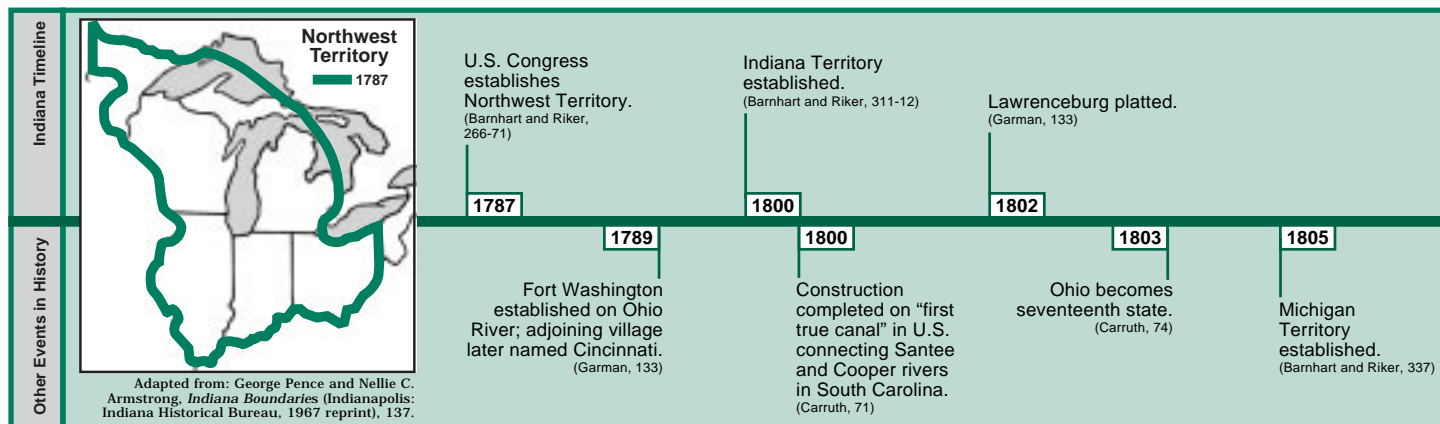
Compared to stage or wagon, canal boat travel was smooth, seemed effortless, and the close banks or forest enhanced the sense of speed. Day and night travel changed the concept of distance. Shaw, 106.

A 1912 source provides the comparison below to prove that canal boats were a great benefit over stagecoaches to the traveler or business person.

... the round trip from Brookville to Cincinnati was regularly made between Monday evening and Wednesday morning at the following expense: Passage to Cincinnati and back, including board, \$4; dinner at Cincinnati, fifty cents; one day lost (worth), \$1; total \$5.50. This amount is

thus compared with the expense of the trip by stage, causing the loss of four days on account of them only running tri-weekly, and occasioning the following items of expense: Passage to Cincinnati and back, \$6; dinner on road going and coming, seventy-five cents; fare at ordinary house for three nights and two days, \$5; four days lost (worth), \$4; total \$15.75; making a saving of \$10.25 for one trip. Henry Clay Fox, editor, *Memoirs of Wayne County* . . . (Madison, WI: Western Historical Association, 1912), 125.

The travel accounts on the following pages give two perspectives of life on a canal boat during trips of several days. Keep in mind how you travel today as you read the words of travellers written on canal boats on the Wabash and Erie Canal in 1851.



# A Kentucky lady on the Wabash and Erie Canal, 1851

Thompson quotes from a series of letters in July 1851 by “a young lady of Louisville, Kentucky.” He does not explain the origin or location of the letters from which he quotes. Tom is her brother. This excerpt is from Thompson, 218-23.

We went on board, by way of a board, a gangplank, that is, and soon found ourselves in a dark, hole-like room, where it was hard to breathe and impossible to see plainly. . . . We presently went up a steep little stairway and came out upon the top of the boat, which was already in motion,—very slow motion, though,—and the dingy houses began to slide, so it looked, back to the rear. A single horse pulls our vessel, and the loutish boy who manages him has hair that is as white as tow. It looks as though he had never combed it. He chews tobacco and swears at his horse; but yet he seems good-natured, and he sings between oaths some very doleful hymns, alternating with love songs of a lively cast. Sometimes the horse pokes along; sometimes the boy makes it trot for a short distance.

I am sitting on a stool on top of the boat, writing with my paper on my knee. . . . The first lock that we went through caused me to have a very queer feeling. Our boat entered a place where the sides of the canal were walled up with logs and plank, and stopped before a gate. At the same time a gate was closed astern of us, and then the boat began to rise, up, up, as the front gate was slowly opened. By this means we were lifted to a higher level, upon which we proceeded. But when the boat began to rise, I felt as though something dreadful was about to happen.

It seemed . . . that all of the heat spent by the sun during the day had settled down into that hot and stuffy little room, and that all the mosquitoes ever hatched in the mud puddles of Indiana were condensed into one humming, ravenous swarm right around my hard little bed. . . . All night I lay there under a smothering mosquito bar and listened to the buzzing of the insects, perspiring as I never supposed that anybody could. It was awful, horrid! It seemed that daylight was never going to come again.

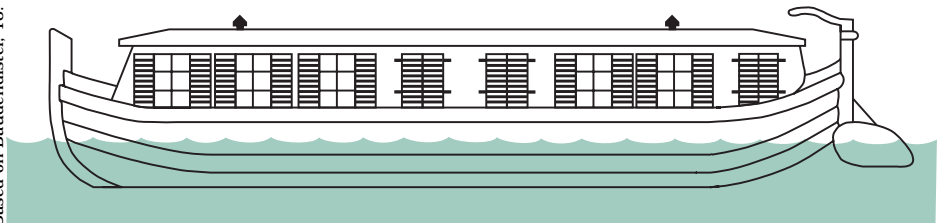
You cannot imagine how tedious this way of traveling is. You creep along like a snail in perfect silence. There are two horses to our boat now, but we go slower, I think. Our present driver is a little red-headed man, not larger than a twelve-year-old Kentucky boy. He never curses, but he smokes a pipe all the time. . . . He wears no coat and has but one suspender, a dingy blue, over his red shirt, slanting across his back. He appears to be well acquainted with every person that comes along, and always has something smart to say. . . .

To-day is Sunday, and the people all seem to be fishing in the canal. We have passed hundreds of them sitting on the banks with poles in their hands and dangling their fishhooks in the water; but I have seen no fish caught. . . .

The most disagreeable part of this kind of traveling is, next after the sleeping, the eating. You know how I like good things to eat. . . . To get to it from the cabin I have to climb up a ladder through a hole to the top of the boat, then go down through another hole into a suffocating box. The table is horrid, so is the cooking. Pork and bread, bread and pork, then some greasy fish, mackerel, and bitter coffee lukewarm, three times each day. I am raving hungry all the time, and nothing fit to eat. It makes me violently angry to see Tom gorge like a pig and pretend that stewed beans and catfish are delicious.

. . . The public roads in many places run along close to the towpath of the canal, and I see people in wagons. They go faster than we do.

Based on Baudendistel, 18.



The packet boat *Swan* was owned by Augustus Boden, Sr. He brought the boat to Cincinnati in 1843. He later moved his operation to the Whitewater Canal. Baudendistel, 7. The packet boat was designed for passenger travel. It had better animals generally and moved faster than other boats. The cost of passage on a packet boat included meals and a “sleeping bunk” (Dunbar, 851, 861).

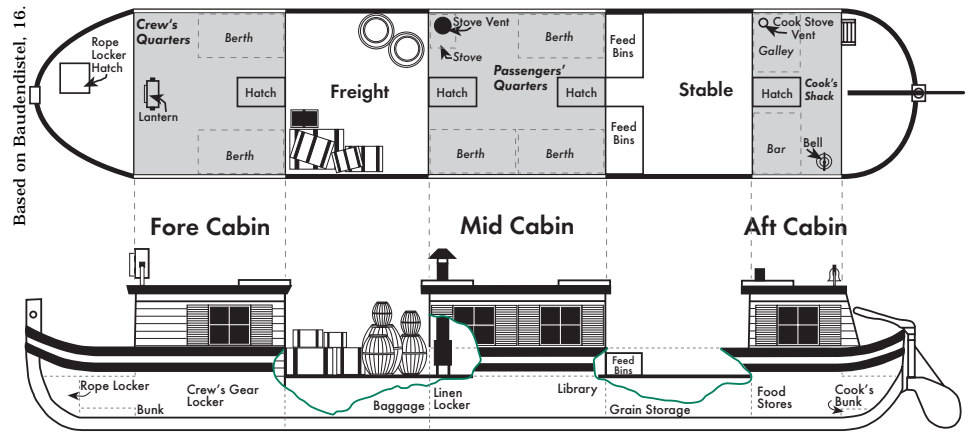
<p>Indiana territorial legislature charters Indiana Canal Company to build a canal around the Falls of the Ohio; Indiana General Assembly charters Ohio Canal Company in 1817; canal started but not finished. (Buley, 1:435-36)</p>	<p>Engraving of the <i>Clermont</i>.</p>	<p>Brookville platted. (Barnhart and Riker, 420)</p>	<p>Indiana Timeline</p>
<p>1805</p>		<p>1808</p>	<p>Other Events in History</p>
<p>1806</p>		<p>1807</p>	<p>1812</p>
<p>U.S. Congress provides for road from Cumberland, Maryland to Ohio; becomes known as Cumberland or National Road. (Buley, 1:446-48)</p>	<p>Robert Fulton's steamboat <i>Clermont</i> makes first voyage from New York to Albany. (Carruth, 80)</p>	<p>War of 1812 begins; ends in 1815. (Carruth, 86, 90-91)</p>	
<p>Bennet Woodcroft. <i>A Sketch of the Origin and Progress of Steam Navigation</i>, (London: Taylor, Walton, and Maberly, 1848), opposite p. 60.</p>			

# An English family on the Wabash and Erie Canal, 1851

J. Richard Beste came to the United States with his wife and eleven children. He became ill in Terre Haute, and his youngest daughter died there. Beste published a narrative of their trip as *The Wabash: or Adventures of an English Gentleman's Family in the Interior of America* (2 vols., London, 1855; reprint 1970). Journal entries by his children are placed throughout his account. Entries by two of his daughters are included in this excerpt from volume 2, pp. 191-213.

TUESDAY, 12TH AUGUST. At five o'clock in the afternoon, we stepped from the little quay at Terre Haute on board the Indiana canal boat. Three horses were harnessed to a rope, about fifty yards ahead of the boat; they started at a moderate trot; and the town . . . was soon lost to our sight. No other passengers were on board: and we wandered over the vessel, well pleased with the promise it gave us of tolerable accommodation. The captain, a very young man, was very civil and attentive to our wants: and told us that tea could be served at seven o'clock . . .

The construction of the canal boat was—in miniature—much the same as that of the lake and river steamers. There was no hold or under-deck; but, on the deck at the stern, were raised the kitchen, steward's room, and offices; in the centre of the boat, was the large saloon—the sitting room of all by day, the sleeping room of male passengers by night; adjoining it was the ladies' saloon; beyond which again, was a small cabin containing only four berths. This cabin was separated by a doorway and curtain



This cutaway of a canal boat shows the layout of a typical Indiana canal boat. As you look carefully at the different compartments, equipment, supplies, and goods, remember that canal boats were generally smaller than fifteen feet wide and ninety feet long, the standard lock size.

from the ladies' saloon, and on the other side opened upon the bow of the vessel. In it, was a looking-glass, a hand bason, two towels, a comb and a brush, for the use of the ladies. It was a rule in the boats that no gentleman should go into the ladies' saloon without express invitation from the ladies; consequently, the third little room was sacred to the female sex unless entered from the bow . . .

A flat roof spread over the whole of the saloons; and on it was piled the luggage; and here passengers walked up and down or sat to enjoy the view.

Our children had wondered where they were to sleep, as there were no visible berths . . . The steward, however, soon solved their doubts by hooking up some shelves to the wall, and laying mattresses and sheets upon them.

. . . all complained bitterly of the bad tea and coffee, of the heavy hot corn bread, and of the raw beef steaks.

I then produced my brandy bottle.

Dr. Read had advised me to give a tablespoonful of brandy to each one of my children every night and morning, in the hope of keeping off the ague and fever of the canal: and I administered his prescription regularly as long as we were in the boats. . .

'After tea, we all began,' writes Agnes [Beste's daughter], 'a most murderous attack upon the mosquitoes that swarmed on the windows and inside our berths . . .

WEDNESDAY. 'What with turning about on account of the heat and trying to catch the musquitoes, who bit us dreadfully, we did not get much rest . . . After breakfast, which was much the same as the tea had been, papa began reading some of *The Corsair* aloud to us . . . The monotony of the day was only broken by the many locks that we had to pass through: although it was not agreeable to feel the boat strike suddenly against the wall or the floodgates with force enough to throw down those who were not on their guard. Then the violent rush of the waters from

Indiana Timeline	Indiana becomes nineteenth state. (Carruth, 92) 1816	Stage line begins from Vincennes to Louisville. (Esarey, 1:296) 1820
Other Events in History	1815 <i>Enterprise</i> is first steamboat to go to New Orleans and return upriver to its home port north of Pittsburgh. (Taylor, 63)	1816 First steamboat on Great Lakes, on Lake Ontario. (Taylor, 61)
	1817 New York begins construction of Erie Canal. (Carruth, 94)	1818 Illinois becomes twenty-first state. (Carruth, 95)

**NOTICE.**  
 THE public are hereby informed that stock in the *Affensville* OKIO CANAL COMPANY, may now be subscribed for at the Receiver's office in Vincennes, where the books are opened for that purpose.  
 B. PARKE, Agent.  
 N. EWING, } Deputy  
 J. DOTY, } Agents.  
 Vincennes, June 24, 1818. 30-15

Vincennes Western Sun, March 18, 1820.



above, while the boat was rising with them, rather made us imagine that we were in Noah's ark.'

... we arrived, in the evening, at La Fayette, where we were to move into another canal boat. ...

... Here I procured a fresh supply of whiskey, to mix with our canal water, which we were afraid of drinking alone ... . The bell soon summoned us to the boat which was to take us onwards; and which was so inconveniently drawn up that females could only enter it by passing through the windows, from the saloon of the one into that of the other. ...

'The berths were in tiers, [writes Lucy, Beste's daughter] three rows high; and, that we might not be intermingled with other people, we girls took ours one above the other. I was put in the top one; for Catherine was too modest to climb so high; Ellen and Agnes were too short; and Louie still suffered from her pain in her side ... . But the shelves or trays on which we lay, were so short, that I found my pillow constantly slipping down from under my head; and, if I put it lower down, my feet hung out at the other end; so that, although I was not very tall, I was obliged, at last, to curl myself up again and lie quite still, while the mosquitoes devoured, and the heat melted me. At last I went to sleep.

THURSDAY. '... mama soon announced that papa had left his room, so that we might pass into it, and to the basin and two towels. Every third person had to dip the jug into the canal for fresh water ... .

'Then came the breakfast ... the bread was hot and very heavy, and the beef steaks were dry, small and much underdone. ... Captain [G.] Davis looked very black if any one asked to be helped a second time.'

We passed through a great deal of beautiful country. ...

I never saw more magnificent timber than shaded the valleys through which we passed. ...

... At this little town [Fort Wayne], I went on shore again to replenish my brandy and whisky flasks; for there had been a large expenditure of the former on my third boy, who had been ill in the morning, and had, we feared, caught the ague and fever of the district. But some of the passengers advised me to give him frequent spoonfuls of burnt brandy; and it was curious to see how speedily and how completely this cut short what threatened to be a serious attack. ...

As we proceeded onwards, we had taken in a great number of passengers; many of whom only used the boat for short stages, from town to town: but many others now sought it as the only

conveyance to the Lakes and the more busy districts we were here approaching. ...

FRIDAY. We had passed from the valley of the Wabash, running to the south-west, to that of the Meaume river, which had a north-easterly current, and we had now cut off a little angle on the right and were at the place where our Wabash canal joined that from the Ohio at Cincinnati. Here we were to part with Frank and his next youngest brother, whom I had resolved to leave awhile in America. ...

At Junction, we had found the Cincinnati boat; and there was an interchange of many passengers as they drew up side by side in the wide basin of the two canals. I commended my two poor boys to the care and kindness of the captain of the southern vessel, who seemed to be a civil, good-tempered man. ...

Canal Society of Indiana.



This photograph of mule drivers, or hoggies, is believed to have been taken on the Whitewater Canal. The Canal Society dates the photograph after 1856 because of the telegraph lines. Note that there are passengers on the roof of the boat.

<p>Indiana General Assembly incorporates Whitewater Canal Company. (Laws, 1825-1826, pp. 29-36)</p> <p>1826</p>	<p>Engraving of a light packet on the Erie Canal.</p>	<p>U.S. Congress grants Indiana lands for building Wabash and Erie Canal; route of National Road in Indiana surveyed. (Fatout, 39; Esarey, 1:291)</p> <p>1827</p>	<p>Indiana General Assembly accepts land from Congress and elects canal commissioners. (Fatout, 41)</p> <p>1828</p>	<p>Stage coach service from Brookville to Cincinnati begins. (Esarey, 1:297)</p> <p>1831</p>	<p>Indiana Timeline</p>
<p>1825</p> <p>Canal construction begins on Kentucky side at Falls of the Ohio, killing canal project on Indiana side; completed 1831; New York's Erie Canal opens; Stockton and Darlington, world's first railroad for general transportation, begins in England. (Fatout, 20-21; Carruth, 103; Taylor, 75-76)</p>			<p>1828</p> <p>Baltimore and Ohio Railroad chartered. (Taylor, 77)</p>	<p>1829</p> <p>Welland Canal, New York, connecting Lake Erie with Lake Ontario, opens. (Taylor, 61)</p>	

# The promise of prosperity

The important economic impact of the Wabash and Erie Canal has been studied extensively. The 1912 work by Elbert Jay Benton is still cited by modern scholars. Benton noted the many towns that were founded because of the canal. He also noted that some died with the canal while

Other cities, more fortunate, grew up with it and with the coming of the railroads have continued to control the traffic of their respective localities. Ft. Wayne, Huntington, Wabash, Peru, Logansport, Delphi, Lafayette, Covington, and Attica are conspicuous. Benton, 101-102.

Benton cites two examples of trade at these canal centers where wagons waited

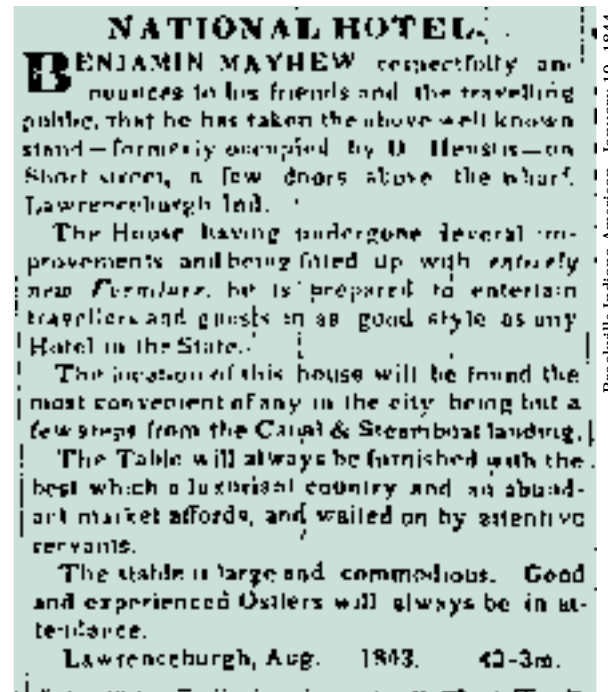
for their turns to unload the products of their farms, bound to the eastern markets. Four hundred wagons unloading in Lafayette during a single day of 1844 were counted by one of the pioneers. Another, speaking of the business at Wabash, says it was a common occurrence to see as many as four or five hundred teams in that place in a single day unloading grain to the canal. Benton, 101.

The Whitewater Canal has received less scholarly attention than the Wabash and Erie Canal. Shaw, a modern author, indicates that "the Whitewater Canal, which had wielded such political leverage, proved to be almost inoperable" (Shaw, 95).

The supporters of the Whitewater Canal, however, remained faithful to keeping the canal operable against the highest odds, especially flooding. The extension of the canal into downtown Cincinnati in 1843 brought the Whitewater Valley into the national trade network.

Various illustrations throughout this issue provide samples of the economic enterprises related to the Whitewater Canal. The canal lines, the builders of boats, the warehouses, the mills, the hotels, new and expanded towns, the various companies formed to build parts of the canal, and the workers who kept the canals running found at least short-term success as part of Indiana's canal era in the Whitewater Valley.

The remnants of the Whitewater Canal are reminders of the many people who succeeded and failed with the canal. Here, too, with the coming of the railroad, some towns and businesses

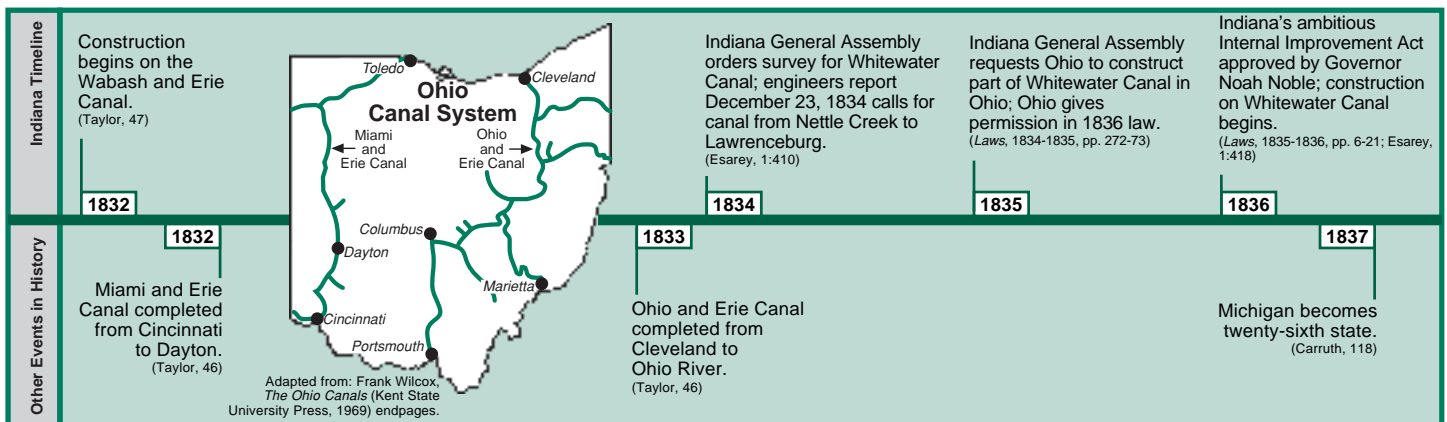


Brookville Indiana American, January 19, 1844.

This hotel was close to both canal and steamboat landings and clearly was expecting the patronage of a better class of travelers. What early accommodations existed for travelers in your area?

were able to adapt. As George S. Cottman put it,

This was a promise of commercial prosperity and a new lease of life to the Whitewater region. . . . Towns sprang up along the proposed route and lay in wait, and as the canal, crawling northward, reached them successively, making one and then another the head of navigation, each flourished and had its day. *Indiana Magazine of History*, 1:4 (1905), 207.



**WHITE WATER CANAL**  
*Exports from Brookville by the Canal from*  
*December 20th to January 20th.*

825	bbls. of Lard,
2017	kegs of Lard,
827	bbls. of Flour,
811	bushels of Wheat,
1750	bbls. of Pork
457	head of live hogs,
112	bushels of Barley,
68	bushels of Rye.
4340	lbs. of Cotton Yarn,
157	bbls. of Beef,
37	coops of chickens,
52	lard kegs,
681	pick bbls.,
7	bbls. of Tallow,
10	Roan Skins,
17	bbls. dried apples,
74	Tierces of Hams,
133	bbls. of green apples,
12000	feet of Lumber,
2000	Staves,
400	hour poles,
3	bushels of grass seed,
100	doz. brooms,
325	lbs. of hides,
182	bushels of flax-seed,
18530	lbs. of Sundries.

The White Water Canal is now open to Cincinnati, and there are now about 15 boats on the Canal, which are kept employed.

This article lists the amount of goods shipped from Brookville in approximately one month in 1844. Newspapers of the day regularly listed the amounts of goods shipped in and out of various cities. Newspapers copied the figures from each other, thereby monitoring business in other areas. Note that bbls. refers to barrels, a common way to ship certain products.

Examine the many items listed here. If there are any with which you are not familiar, research to find out what they are. Are there any items no longer used today? What does this list tell you about agriculture in the Whitewater Valley?

**FARMER'S & MERCHANT'S DAILY LINE**  
**From Cincinnati to Laurel.**  
 The proprietors of the new and substantial Canal Route, *Nutley, South of West and Cambridge City, Ind.* have united for the purpose of running a Daily Line for freight and passengers, from Cincinnati to LAUREL. One of the Boats will leave Cincinnati every day (Sundays excepted) at 7 o'clock, P. M., and arrive at Laurel, next day at 6 o'clock, P. M.—Leave Laurel every day (Sundays excepted) at 7 o'clock, A. M., and arrive at Cincinnati at 5 o'clock next morning.

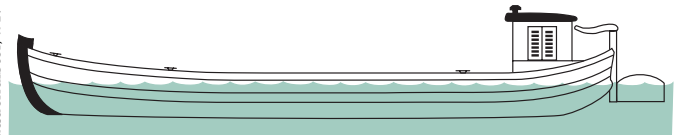
The proprietors having incurred a heavy expense to render the facilities for freight and travel as rapid and as possible, hope from their experience and attention to business, to merit a share of public approbation.

N. B. We have a Warehouse at Cincinnati, and at Laurel, where all freight for the line will be received and forwarded with care and despatch.

Our charges will be moderate.

S. COFFIN, Proprietor of Nutley,  
 T. H. BARWISE, Pres. of Squirrel,  
 G. G. SMITH, Pres. of Bell of West,  
 D. COLLINS, Pres. of Cambridge City  
 April 18th, 1845.

Based on Baudendistel, 21.



The *Harkaway* was a freight barge which hauled lumber. It was owned by Rufus Webb and traveled between Laurel and Cincinnati. Baudendistel, 28.

**WATER POWER**  
**THE** White Water Valley Canal Company are now prepared to rent their valuable Water power at Lawrenceburg, and in fact any other place on the line of the Canal.—Proposals will be received at the Secretary's office in Cincinnati, Indiana, and be held before the Board of Directors, at their meetings from time to time, when they will be awarded to the highest and best bidder, until all is disposed of.

The next meeting of the Board will be on the 21st of October 1842.

L. O. TUPPER,  
 Secy. W. W. V. Canal Co.  
 Cincinnati Office and Lawrenceburg, Ind.  
 Can be procured on application to the W. W. V. C. Co.

The canal provided a water highway to transport goods and people. That water could also be used to supply power for mills, which, in turn, supplied goods to the town and beyond. How does this use of a resource compare to our modern utilities today?

Canal completed between Brookville and Lawrenceburg; state orders work stopped on most internal improvement projects. (Esarey, 1:418-19; Fatout, 98)

White Water Valley Canal Company resumes work on canal. (Fatout, 108-9)

1839

1842

**WHITE WATER VALLEY CANAL, STOCK NOTICE.**  
**NOTICE** is hereby given that on Monday the 4th day of April next, Books will be opened, and kept open ten days, for receiving subscriptions of Capital Stock of "THE WHITE WATER VALLEY CANAL COMPANY," under the provisions of the Charter, at the following places in the State of Indiana, to-wit:

Brookville Indiana American, March 11, 1842.

Whitewater Canal completed to Laurel. (Fatout, 109)

1843

1845

Miami and Erie Canal from Cincinnati to Toledo completed. (Taylor, 46)

Indiana Timeline

Other Events in History

# A canal boat captain on the Whitewater Canal

Captain Joseph M'Cafferty was a canal boat captain on the Whitewater Canal during the 1840s. According to Reifel, "Some years before his death he [M'Cafferty] talked reminiscently" concerning his canal days. This excerpt is from August J. Reifel, *History of Franklin County, Indiana . . .* (Indianapolis: B.F. Bowen & Company, Inc., 1915), 254-56.

Captains and their canal boats were an important part of the economy. They generally were independent and paid tolls to use the canals for passenger and

merchandise transportation. Note that some of the people and incidents M'Cafferty mentions are also referred to in illustrations on pages 12-13.

'The first boat was the 'Ben Franklin.' She had been running on the Miami canal for a number of years, and it was decided to bring her over here. She was dropped down from the Miami canal to the Ohio river and floated to Lawrenceburg and put into the White Water canal. I bought her and changed the name to 'Henry Clay' . . . . I built a number of boats to sell, and always got good prices for them. The first boat built at Cedar Grove was called the 'Native,' and when she started on her first trip there was a good deal of excitement all along the canal. The 'Native' was a passenger and freight boat and was fitted up in a manner that was gorgeous for those days. There were two cabins and large state rooms ranged on the side, the same as is now seen on passenger steamers. Stephen Coffin was the builder and captain . . . .

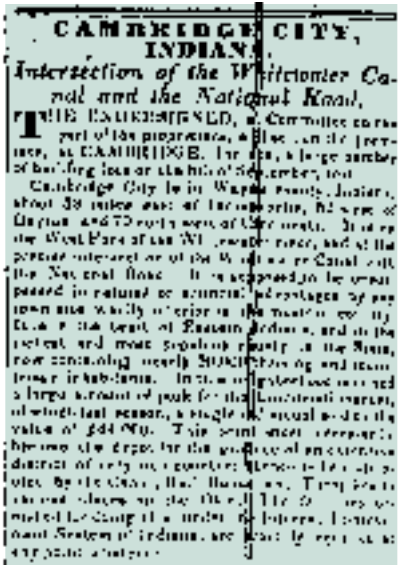
'Finally I built a boat called the 'Belle of Indiana,' and there was nothing on the canal that touched her anywhere. The

swan line of packets was put on about that time. They did not carry anything but light freight and passengers, and it was expected then they would make a fortune for their owners. But they did not pay, and after a season or two they were withdrawn. I carried passengers on the 'Belle of Indiana' . . . .

' . . . There was an intense rivalry between the boats, and the way they used to race was a caution, and when one boat tried to pass another it was about sure to end in a fight. The crew of a boat was the captain, two steersmen, cook and driver, and sometimes they all got into it.

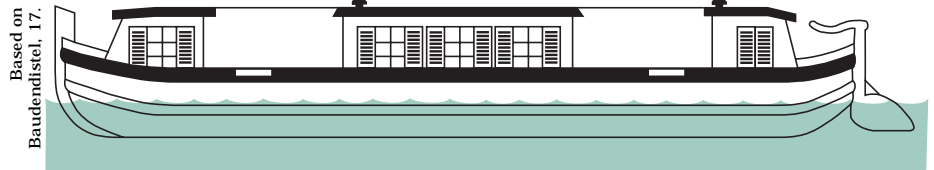
' . . . the greatest time was when they opened the canal to Cambridge City. We knew for a long time that the canal was to be opened up to that place, but we did not know just when it would be, so we all laid away as much as possible and waited for the word. . . . At last the word came that the water was in the canal at Cambridge City, and we started.

'There were twenty boats, and every one tried to get by the other, and when we had to make the locks I tell you there was some tall swearing and not a little fighting,



Brookville Indiana American, September 2, 1836.

Cambridge City with this advertisement (excerpted here) immediately jumped on the bandwagon of Indiana's 1836 internal improvements system. What is the purpose of the advertisement? What can you learn from it about the city and the area?



Based on Baudendistel, 17.

The *Belle of the West* was a line boat which transported both passengers and freight. It was involved in the opening of the canal to Cambridge City in October 1845 with John Lemon as captain. See M'Cafferty's reminiscence and the article "Postscript" from the Brookville *Indiana American*, October 10, 1845 on page 13. "The cost of passage on a line-boat . . . provided neither sleeping accommodations nor food for its patrons, and the boat generally moved more slowly than a packet" (Dunbar, 861, 851).

Indiana Timeline	<p><b>RAILROAD LETTING.</b> On Monday, the 4th May next, sealed proposals will be received by the undersigned, at Indianapolis, for grubbing, Clearing, Grading and Draining thirty one miles of Road, from Hagerstown to Indianapolis, in sections, laid out by the Engineer. The work will be completed by the first of November, 1846. The Company will make payment with the usual deductions as the work progresses, to wit, six per cent. monthly at Connersville, and principal ten per cent on one third cash, and two balance in bonds, which to be agreed on; and each proposition is expected to state the price of the work in the usual mode of payment proposed.</p> <p>Brookville <i>Indiana American</i>, May 2, 1845.</p>	<p>Whitewater Canal completed to Connersville in June and to Cambridge City in October. (Fatout, 117)</p>	<p>Floods cause \$100,000 damage to Whitewater Canal and repairs from flood in 1848 are \$80,000; Hagerstown Canal Company completes Whitewater Canal from Cambridge City to Hagerstown; Madison and Indianapolis Railroad completed. (Esarey, 1:520-21; Garman, 133; Taylor, 91)</p>	<p>Indiana's new Constitution adopted. (Esarey, 1:520-21)</p>
	Other Events in History	<p>1845</p> <p>1846</p> <p>U.S. declares war on Mexico; war ends in 1848. (Carruth, 132, 135)</p>	<p>1847</p> <p>1848</p> <p>Wisconsin becomes thirtieth state. (Carruth, 135)</p>	<p>1851</p> <p>International cholera epidemic reaches Midwest. (Carruth, 140)</p>

but no one was hurt. My boat and all the other packets were crowded with passengers. I had the 'Belle of Indiana' then, and there was such a crowd on the deck that I had to separate them so the steersman could see the bow of the boat. When we got in sight of Milton it seemed as if the whole United States was there. There were two or three cannons fired and the people were shouting and yelling like Indians. John Lemon was the captain of the 'Belle of the West,' and I was pushing him mighty hard, for he was in the lead. But the water was not deep enough for a good race and he beat me into Cambridge City; but I was right behind him.

Frederick Polley, Indianapolis Star, January 19, 1941.



The White Water Valley Canal Company was incorporated in 1842 by the Indiana General Assembly to complete the canal to the National Road, at Cambridge City. The Canal House headquarters in Connersville remains as a reminder of the grand days of the canal era in Indiana. The Canal House was placed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1973.

... There were cannons, more bands, the state officers were there and every one had a great jubilee. ... there is a big difference now and then. Why, we went through the stretches of woods four and five miles long then to get to Cambridge, and it would be hard to find a stretch now half a mile long. Those were great days, though, and everybody made money, but mighty few kept it. It was come easy and go easy.

'Of course, I was around the canal about all my life, but I ran a boat about seven years, and good years they were, too. But I saw that the business on the canal was falling off and so I sold all my boats, closed out my business, bought a farm and have been a farmer ever since. ... I guess that I am about the only one of the boys who used to run on the canal that is left, and it won't be very long until I tie up forever.'

Cambridge City started using its canal potential for business in 1836 according to the advertisement on page 12. The canal did not reach there until October 1845. The oral history by Captain M'Cafferty on this page gives his version of the race to be the first boat to arrive at Cambridge City. Is this article correct when compared to M'Cafferty's version.


This article indicates that "the White Water Canal is in ruins." The Whitewater Canal suffered much damage from floods. Its supporters over and over spent great sums of money to repair it. Another disastrous flood in 1852 finally brought transportation uses of the canal to a close (Fatout, 154).

**POSTSCRIPT.**  
**CAMBRIDGE CITY, October 10th, 1845.**  
**Arrival of Boats**  
 We have the pleasure of announcing to our friends, the arrival of boats at this place, from Cincinnati. The "Bell of Indiana," arrived on Monday evening last; Capt. Lawson, her master, deserves great credit for his untiring exertions, and indomitable perseverance in surmounting the obstacles which have so long prevented navigation to this point.  
 The Springfield, (to be named the "Star of Cambridge City,") arrived yesterday evening, freighted with salt for this place. Both these boats are of fine proportion and large dimensions, and will have their full share of business from this point.  
 Cambridge City Herald.

Brookville Indiana American, October 10, 1845.

**DESTRUCTIVE FLOOD.**  
 Jan. 1st 1847, will be a day long remembered in the White Water Valley. ... And many years will elapse before the situation of the Valley will be in as prosperous circumstances as they were on that morning.  
 It is not easy to record the most disastrous flood, that has ever swept along the White Waters. It had rained for two days previous to New-year's day, and the water began to rise in our rivers on the morning of that day with fearful rapidity, and before midnight it swept almost every thing within reach of the river. It was higher by 10 or 11 feet than it has been for thirty three years, and about three feet higher than it was at the memorable flood of 1813. It is almost useless to enumerate individual losses. Every farm on the river is directed of fences, and in many cases the soil. Mills and all dams are either ruined or seriously damaged. Roads are torn up, filled up with drift, or deep and impassible pits of water. And the White Water Canal is in ruins. The most important of Brookville, between the base of the river, suffered most seriously.

Brookville Indiana American, January 8, 1847.

<p>Wabash and Erie Canal completed to Evansville. (Taylor, 48)</p> <p>Central Canal sold for \$2,425. (Esarey, 1:426)</p>	<p>White Water Valley Canal Company property sold to president of Indianapolis and Cincinnati Railroad; towpath later becomes roadbed for White Water Railroad Company. (Fatout, 155-156)</p>	<p>Wabash and Erie Canal sold for \$96,260 to repay bondholders. (Esarey, 1:445)</p>	Indiana Timeline
<p>1853</p> <p>1859</p> <p>1861</p> <p>U.S. Civil War begins; war ends in 1865. (Carruth, 157, 166)</p>	 <p>Indiana State Library, Indiana Division Manuscripts.</p>	<p>1865</p> <p>1872</p> <p>1876</p> <p>Yellowstone National Park Reserve established. (Carruth, 179)</p>	Other Events in History

# Behind the Scenes

"Behind the Scenes" presents some aspect of how the Bureau staff produces each issue of the magazine. The focus may be, for example, the research process, an interpretation problem, etc. It also enables us to thank our partners and demonstrate that research is a collaboration with often unexpected twists and turns.

## "respect our own back yard"

Paul Baudendistel lives in Metamora. After talking a few minutes with him, his passion for the Whitewater Canal is obvious. For the past thirty years he has immersed himself in its rich history: researching, writing, and preserving the heritage of his adopted town. He has worked with the Canal Society of Indiana and has published various items related to the Whitewater Canal. His sketches of Whitewater Canal boats have been rendered on computer for use throughout this issue.

Baudendistel lives on the upper floor of a building built in 1848 as a dry goods store. Walking through his front door is like walking into a small museum. Books, old photographs, and maps, blend with the eclectic artifacts that fill the living room. From the front windows, one can look directly down on the restored canal.

What brought him to Metamora? What stirred such passion and dedication to an era long gone? Baudendistel shared his beliefs in this short written interview.

Mary, my first wife, died of [e]ukemia cancer in the summer of 1966. She was 21. The 'importance of the individual' was suddenly painfully clear. With pencils and sketch pad . . . I went on a quest . . . soul searching. In the Eric Sloane tradition.

- Don't push the river -

I came to Metamora to sketch old buildings . . . and got caught up in the canal. I was 25 and thought I knew so much about life.

The canal waters were so powerful at the mill falls . . . so peaceful as they flowed down Main St. of this little village . . . so timeless. There was something missing in my sketches . . . people.

My knowledge of Indiana History was text book. This was real. I thought that I was the first person to discover living history. At the Mill Falls I really got into the canal.

In the fall of 1967 I bought an old dry goods store on the canal in Metamora, Ind. Opened an antique shop for men dealing in primitive tools . . . . I moved upstairs above my store and here I am. . . .

My antique shop may have been a financial failure . . . not unlike canals in Indiana . . . but I got a wealth of information. Maintaining what you've got is worthwhile. Indiana . . . at that time . . . seemed embarrassed about her canal era . . . like it was a mistake that should be covered up. Not much was said about canals in my school years. I went out to explore and map canal ruins. What a wealth of monuments we had . . . and to this day we still do not respect them as 'Historic Landmarks.'

We go to Europe to see a 300 year old pub . . . to China to try to grasp a 3000 year old temple. It's time to seriously respect our own back yard. This land is sacred too.

I want to share that with people. Those in the future who want to be open to it . . . We should give them more space to feel canal water.

I am very grateful to 'the few people' who . . . struggled so long to save a piece of the Whitewater Canal. I owe for this space. I want to do what I can.

I'm still exploring my county, hunting its treasures, seeing my world as a visitor.



Paul Baudendistel on the deck of *Native Son*.

Photograph by Bob Schmidt, Canal Society of Indiana.

## The Metamora Whitewater Canal site

In the 1940s, the Whitewater Canal Association of Indiana, a group of people dedicated to saving the canal around Metamora, worked together to assure its restoration and preservation. The Association's activities are included in issues of the *Indiana History Bulletin* during that time. In 1945, the Indiana General Assembly created a state memorial from the Whitewater Canal System property donated by the Whitewater Canal Association. *Laws, 1944, pp. 142-44*. Today, the Whitewater Canal State Historic Site is in the Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites division of the Department of Natural Resources. Contact: 317-647-6512.

Photograph by Bob Schmidt, Canal Society of Indiana.



Paul Baudendistel's *Native Son*, a twelve foot by fifty foot full scale reproduction canal boat he built and uses as a museum in Metamora, Indiana.

# Selected Resources

## Bibliography

• Barnhart, John D., and Dorothy L. Riker. *Indiana to 1816: The Colonial Period*. Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau and Indiana Historical Society, 1971.

A standard reference for this period.

• Baudendistel, R. Paul. *The Whitewater Canal Boat Log: Notebook No. 1*. Metamora, IN: R. Paul Baudendistel, 1995.

Booklet contains excerpts from many sources about canal boats on the canal, as well as drawings by the author.

• Benton, Elbert Jay. *The Wabash Trade Route in the Development of the Old Northwest*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1903; reprint [1958].

Standard source for the history of the Wabash and Erie Canal, reprinted by the Public Library of Fort Wayne and Allen County.

• Buley, R. Carlyle. *The Old Northwest: Pioneer Period, 1815-1840*. 2 vols. Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1950; reprint, 1983.

Pulitzer Prize winning book is excellent source for overview of Indiana's canal history in context of Old Northwest; reprinted by the Society and Indiana University Press.

• Carruth, Gorton. *What Happened When: A Chronology of Life and Events in America*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1989.

A handy, abridged edition of *The Encyclopedia of American Facts & Dates*.

• Dunbar, Seymour. *A History of Travel in America*. 4 vols. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1915.

Canals are discussed in Volume 3; informative and readable.

• Esarey, Logan. *A History of Indiana: From Its Exploration to 1850*. 2 vols. Fort Wayne: The Hoosier Press, 1924 (third edition).

A standard resource originally published in 1918; page numbers differ in the various editions.

• Fatout, Paul. *Indiana Canals*. West Lafayette: Purdue University Studies, 1972.

Valuable source; easy-to-read history of canals in Indiana.

• Garman, Harry O. "Whitewater Canal, Cambridge City to the Ohio River." *Indiana History Bulletin*, 39:9 (September 1962), 127-38.

A useful article for an overview.

• Gray, Ralph D. "The Canal Era in Indiana." *Transportation and the Early Nation*. Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1982, pp. 113-34.

A paper presented at an Indiana American Revolution Bicentennial Symposium in 1981, it provides a more positive approach to the history of Indiana's canal era.

• Madison, James H. *The Indiana Way: A State History*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press and Indiana Historical Society, 1986.

Good general work from prehistory to late twentieth century.

• Shaw, Ronald E. "The Canal Era in the Old Northwest." *Transportation and the Early Nation*. Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1982, pp. 89-112.

Provides useful context for studying Indiana's canals. See Gray preceding.

• Taylor, George Rogers. *The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860*. White Plains, NY: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1951.

Detailed, well-researched history of the many forms of transportation and their social and economic impact upon American society.

## Additional resources

• Barnhart, John D., and Donald F. Carmony. *Indiana: From Frontier to Industrial Commonwealth*. 4 vols. New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1954, re-

print 1979.

Volume 1 is a valuable source for information on Indiana's internal improvements from 1816 to 1836.

• McCord, Shirley S., compiler. *Travel Accounts of Indiana, 1679-1961*. Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1970.

First-hand observations, comments, and adventures of early Indiana travelers.

## Suggested student resources

• Boyer, Edward. *River and Canal*. New York: Holiday House, 1986.

Design, construction, and operation of imaginary canal presented in text and line drawings; for any age group.

• McNeese, Tim. *America's Early Canals*. New York: Crestwood House, 1993.

Readable history of the development of canals; for intermediate and advanced readers; includes glossary, resources, and index.

• Nirgiotis, Nicholas. *Erie Canal: Gateway to the West*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1993.

Beginning history of building the Erie Canal and its impact on America; for elementary and middle school readers; includes references, glossary, and index.

• Oxlade, Chris. *Canals and Waterways*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1994.

Craft and science demonstrations with brief text; for example, how a lock system works; for elementary and middle school readers.

• Stein, R. Conrad. *The Story of the Erie Canal*. Chicago: Childrens Press, 1985.

Readable account with several illustrations useful to student understanding; for elementary and middle school readers.



## Indiana Historical Bureau

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Photograph by M83; Indiana Historical Society Library (Negative No. C7163).

The Whitewater Canal at Metamora. The canal was closed as a transportation route in 1853. The canal property was purchased in 1865; White Water Railroad Company track was later laid on the canal towpath (Fatout, 155-56).