

Along the Erie Canal



With the Municipal Seals of the Cities,
Towns and Villages of New York

Erie Canal Bicentennial Edition

Compiled by Marvin W. Bubie



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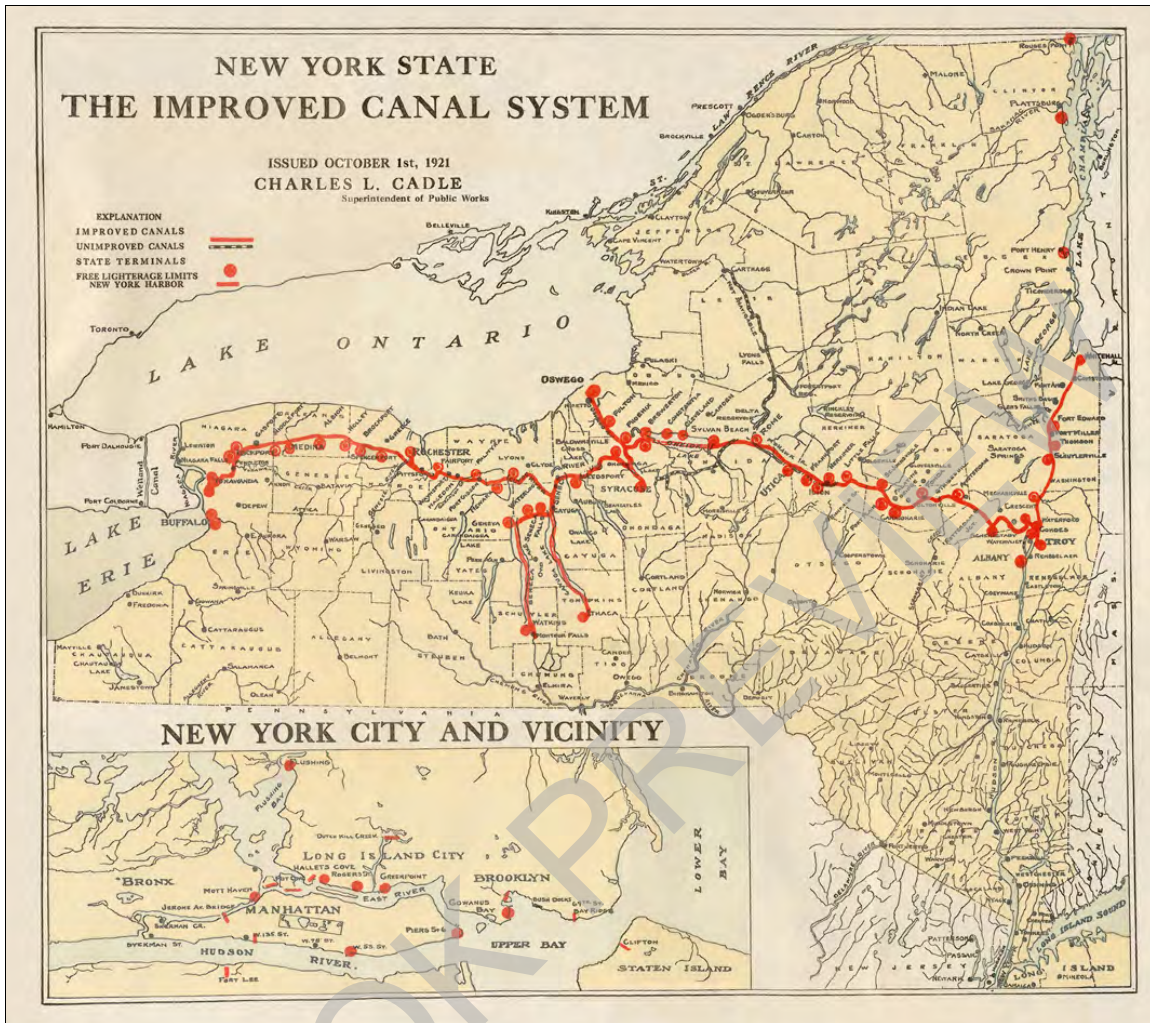
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This 1921 map of the Improved Barge Canal System shows the route of the Erie Canal from Buffalo to Albany and the cities, towns and villages along it, as well as the other, later canals extending north and south. However, it can be argued that from the opening of the canal in 1825, the city that was impacted the most was New York City.

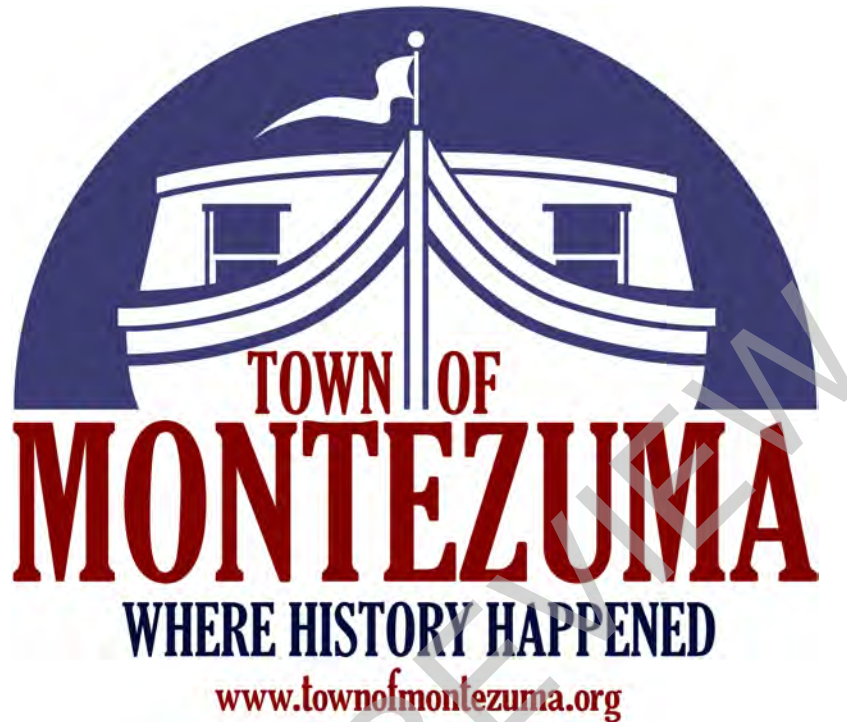


City of Buffalo

The Village of Buffalo was originally surveyed in 1804 and incorporated in 1822. It was burned by the British during the War of 1812. The conflict delayed the start of the Erie Canal, and from 1819 until 1822, Buffalo competed with Black Rock to become the western terminus. The completion of the canal ensured Buffalo's future as the "Gateway to the West." The City of Buffalo was granted a charter in 1832. The lighthouse was built in 1833.

From the City Code (*Chapter 44 SEAL/5.44-1. Adoption; description*):

The Seal of the City of Buffalo heretofore used for that purpose is hereby officially adopted as the City Seal and is described as follows: to the left center, lighthouse on pier; to the right of the lighthouse, ship with three (3) masts showing sails; to the lower right, canal boat drawn by two (2) draft animals proceeding in direction leading toward or past the pier: the above shall be all surrounded by a double circle and between said circles appearing the words "SEAL OF THE CITY OF BUFFALO."



Town of Montezuma

The Town of Montezuma is located at the great bend in the Seneca River in Cayuga County. It is believed that Montezuma was named for the Aztec chief-tain. The new seal depicts a packet boat.

Montezuma became the western terminus when the first section of the Erie Canal opened in 1820. Work on the “middle section” of the canal between Utica and Montezuma began after breaking ground in Rome in 1817. The Cayuga-Seneca Canal connected here to the Erie Canal in 1828, opening up 80 miles of navigation to the two largest Finger Lakes (see page 70).

The old seal illustrated the second longest aqueduct on the Enlarged Erie Canal of 1849, carrying canal waters over the Seneca River. It spanned 894 feet, with 31 magnificent arches. Today, the impressive remains of the Richmond Aqueduct are on the east side of the Seneca River, located in the Montezuma Heritage Park. The park also features several walking and nature trails with the historic remains of the three canals, locks, a dry dock and a paper mill.



Village of Chittenango

The Village of Chittenango was incorporated in 1842. *Chittenango* is an Indian word meaning “where the waters run north.” Gypsum was discovered in the hills near Chittenango. John B. Yates built a plaster mill and manufactured water lime or hydraulic cement (see pages 73 and 79), which was used in building the Erie Canal. The Erie Canal reached this area in 1820 and by that time a lateral canal was planned and built to the middle of the village. The Enlarged Canal with its dry dock opened about 1855 and helped the village to prosper.

Chittenango was the home of Frank Baum who wrote The Wizard of Oz. His characters and the rainbow along with yellow brick road are included on the seal. The seal also illustrates a canal boat with a mule on the towpath, and the abundant wildlife in the area. Chittenango Falls, in the top center, drops 167 feet down a nearly-even cascade of Onondaga Limestone stairs. The formal building with columns was used as the Chittenango Bank, the First National Bank of Chittenango, the post office (1913) and finally as a library.



Town of Waterford

The Town of Waterford is situated at the junction of the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers, and the junction of the Erie and Champlain Canals. It is the home of the “Waterford Flight,” the highest set of lift locks in the world. The seal shows Lock 2.

In 1816 the old precinct of *Halve Maan* (Halfmoon) was divided into two separate towns, Halfmoon and Waterford. The Village of Waterford is located in the town and is the oldest continuously incorporated village in the nation.

The Champlain Canal opened on September 10, 1823. Construction of the Waterford Flight in 1915 as part of the Barge Canal System assured Waterford’s role in canal transport through the twentieth century. Waterford became a major gateway to the canal system which provided a route west to Buffalo and the Great Lakes and north to Whitehall, Lake Champlain, and Canada. With the presence of water for both power and transportation, the Hudson-Mohawk region became one of the birthplaces of the American Industrial Revolution.

The Waterford waterfront annually plays host to hundreds of boaters exploring the canals and rivers, as well as canal and tugboat festivals.

Appendix 1:

Other Canals in New York State

The Erie Canal was so successful that every other state began building canals to compete. New York State also began to build more canals—“lateral” or “feeder” canals—to take advantage of the Grand Canal. Many communities lobbied for a canal or a connection to the Erie.

Other canals that were constructed in New York include:

- Black River canal, from Rome to Carthage
- Cayuga & Seneca Canal, from Montezuma to Geneva
- Champlain Canal, from Waterford to Whitehall
- Chemung Canal, from Montour Falls to Elmira
- Crooked Lake Canal, from Dresden to Penn Yann
- Genesee Canal, from Rochester to Olean
- Oneida Lake Canal, from Higginsville to Sylvan Beach
- Oswego Canal, from Syracuse to Oswego.

But at the present day, the towns along these secondary canals and feeder canals have chosen other symbols to represent their heritage rather than symbols that represent canals. For example, the Champlain Canal overlays the earlier history of the Revolutionary War and the Battle of Saratoga, themes which are evident in several municipal seals.

One town that has included a canal boat and a mule is the Town of Big Flats in the Southern Tier of New York near the Pennsylvania border. The town was on the Feeder Canal which had been built from Gibson through Big Flats and joined the Chemung Canal at Horseheads, a sixteen-mile waterway. This opened in 1833, bringing an immense amount of traffic through Big Flats. By 1850, an estimated one-eighth of all tonnage of coal, grain and lumber to or from Albany passed through the feeder canal.



Appendix 2: Notable Men of the Erie Canal

Jessie Hawley (1773 - 1842)



Jessie Hawley was a flour merchant who was unable to ship his flour profitably by overland routes and who eventually went bankrupt and was put into debtors' prison. While there, he wrote several articles advocating for an inland canal route as early as 1805. They included economic projections based on the success of canals in Europe that eventually interested DeWitt Clinton. Upon completion of the Erie Canal in 1825, Clinton gave credit to Hawley for the concept of the Erie Canal. He accompanied Clinton on the inaugural trip from Buffalo to New York City. He later went on to become a well-respected treasurer of the Village of Lockport. *(Portrait artist unknown. Image source: <https://www.findagrave.com>.)*

DeWitt Clinton (1769 - 1828)

DeWitt Clinton was a politician who served in the New State Legislature, became a U.S. Senator, Mayor of New York City and Governor of New York State. As governor, he is generally credited with getting the Erie Canal built. The sheer scope of the project led many to believe it could not be accomplished and ridiculed it as "Clinton's Ditch." It required a champion to promote an unprecedented project over an extended period with tremendous costs and an uncertain outcome. But despite opposition, he persisted in his vision of the canal and proved equal to the task. He is rightly remembered as the "Father of the Erie Canal." *(Portrait by Rembrandt Peale. Image source: Wikimedia Commons.)*



Appendix 4: The Erie Canal as Subject for Works of Art

There have been many works of art that depict the hard work it took to build the canal, the romance of travel, or scenes of canal life. Paintings were always a popular medium, as well as large murals inside buildings. A more recent trend, an offshoot of the tourism trade and recreational boating on today's canal, is the creation of large murals at ports and other locations of interest along the canal. The images below show some of this artwork.



“Tailing On” by Carlo J. Raineri. This painting depicts the Erie Canal in Durhamville. Between shifts, teams of draft animals were “tailed on” and “tailed off,” meaning that workers held them by the tail as they were led on and off the canal boat. The original painting hangs in the Canastota Village Hall.

Appendix 6: Erie Canal Envy in the U.S.

The effect of the Erie Canal was among the most significant events in the country's history and astounded the nation. It was immediately recognized by everyone as the "Eighth Wonder of the World." All obstacles had been overcome by sheer brute determination and ingenuity. It seemed as if the young country could achieve anything it set its mind to.

Other states immediately saw the benefits to New York State and New York City and were determined not to be left behind. Several states began to build their own canals in a frenzy of expensive development. Pennsylvanians, aware that it cost more to transport goods 150 miles within their state than it did for New Yorkers to ship goods 750 miles between New York City and Ohio, spent \$10 million to build a canal between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, as well as a number of other canals throughout the state.

The states of Illinois, Indiana and Ohio launched projects to connect the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers to the Great Lakes. Illinois began the Illinois & Michigan Canal. Indiana began the Wabash & Erie Canal. Ohio began both the Ohio & Erie Canal as well as the Miami & Erie Canal. New Jersey, Maryland, and Connecticut all started building canals. By 1840, 3,326 miles of canals had been dug and completed without machinery, at a cost of \$125 million. The Wabash & Erie Canal in Indiana was in fact 100 miles longer than the Erie Canal and the longest ever built in North America.

Some canals never even made it farther than paper planning, and although none were as successful as the Erie Canal, some were primarily responsible for the growth of other cities, such as Cleveland and Chicago. Most were soon eclipsed by the railroads, but several cities and towns were defined by the canals and, to some degree, still celebrate their canal heritage. Many have local museums dedicated to preserving that heritage through exhibits, photographs and canal boat rides. The National Canal Museum is located in Easton, Pennsylvania.

Shown on the following pages are the seals of the municipalities along the canals outside of New York State that have chosen to emphasize their canal heritage. Unfortunately, like some municipalities along the Erie Canal, a suitable image of the seal was not obtainable, and so not all have been included here.



About the Author

Marvin Bubie was born and raised in the Capital District, graduating from Averill Park High School and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. He is retired from General Electric and has lived in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Georgia, and Virginia. In addition, he served eighteen months in Germany with the U.S. Army in the 14th Armored Cavalry, and has returned to Europe many times visiting Switzerland, Italy, Austria, and Germany. Over the years he has collected the seals of various cities, towns, counties, boroughs, and villages in this country, as well as those in Europe. He has published two similar books, *On the Trail of Henry Hudson and Our Dutch Heritage Through the Municipal Seals in New York*, and *Celebrating the American Revolution: Municipal Symbols of a Free Country*, and is at work on another book of seals related to railroading heritage.

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