

Ohio Canal Stirs Dover



Ted Findley of 113 Commercial Ave. SE, New Philadelphia, president of the Canal Society, is pointing out a few of the locks on the old Ohio and Erie Canal.

By Sandy McCauley
Daily Reporter Staff Writer

"On July 4, 1825, Ohio began one of the greatest pick and shovel projects the State has ever known—the digging of the Ohio Canal," stats Ted Findley of New Philadelphia, noted historian and president of the Canal Society.

In all probability no other happening since the coming of the white man to the land between Lake Erie and the Ohio River is so surrounded with romance or so intertwined with the economic development of Ohio as the building and operation of her great inland waterway system.

The era of the canals stretched over three-quarters of a century that saw Ohio grow from a thinly-populated wilderness to one of the most productive states in the Union.

The prodigious construction project formally began July 4, 1825, at Licking Summit near Newark and less than 80 miles from Dover, then called Canal Dover.

In addition to the incalculable benefit the canals brought to Ohio farmers in providing a may be said that the industries means of reaching markets, it which sprang up all along the waterway became the foundation for the Buckeye states economic empire.

Dover, which early became an important stop-over on the Ohio and Erie Canal system, shared liberally in these benefits during and after canal days.

"Canalers," as the people who worked on the transportation and delivery of goods and travelers, were called in the canal days, contributed to the advancement and culture of the state through their ingenuity and hard work.

These Canalers were industrious and intelligent people with the ability to provide better transportation for their goods and passengers as stated in an excerpt from a report of the Canal Commissioners dated Jan. 22, 1829.

"The aqueduct over the Tuscarawas River near the south line of Stark County has been completed. It is in every respect a very substantial and complete structure, and does great credit to the skill and fidelity of the contractor by whom it was erected. The masonry of which the abutments and piers are composed is believed to be equal in strength and beauty to any work of the kind in the United States".

The boat that first sailed the Ohio and Erie Canal from Akron to Cleveland was named the State of Ohio. The first boat to sail out of Dover 3 years later was named the Union. It was built in Dover by the founder of the town, Christian Dear-dorff.

The only aqueduct of the Ohio and Erie Canal in Tuscarawas County was at the Tuscarawas River bend above Bolivar. The aqueduct was of wood on stone piers. Remains of the piers still remain. The wooden structure that rested on the stone piers and carried the canal across the river had a towpath for the horses with a railing on the river side.

But even the Bolivar aqueduct was not always safe in flood time and more than one canal boat was swept into the river and down the turbulent stream past Dover to Tuscarawas where, by means of the state dam and feeder, it could re-enter the canal.

If the boat crew cut the tow-ropes in time, the horses were saved and could resume their toting at Tuscarawas. But it must have been an exciting ride, steering the canal boat in flood water past islands and trees and under bridges and avoiding floating debris all the way to Tuscarawas.

Digging the canal also entailed construction of numberless bridges and culverts and the conveying of small streams under the canal. One such stream that was conveyed under the canal and underground all the way to the Tuscarawas River was the Moser-Graef Run from Black Snake Hill valley which followed this course under the canal to the river on Route 8 east of Dover until in recent years when its artificial underground route clogged up.

Stone Creek is another stream that ran under the canal into the river below New Philadelphia.

The Ohio Canal cost \$4,244,530 to build. The total cost of Ohio's canals was about \$16,000,000 for 788 miles. The system brought a great increase in population, about 68 per cent between 1830 and 1840.

This made Ohio third in the Union in population. The greatest gains were in cities along the canal. In 1851 the Ohio Canal yielded the state treasury \$432,711 and the Miami and Erie \$351,897.

Another July 4, 3 years later, is also a notable date in the history of Ohio transportation. On Independence Day, 1828, in faraway Maryland, there was a ceremony that was to doom the canals. Charles Carroll of Carrollton, then the only living signer of the Declaration of Independence, laid the cornerstone of the office of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad.

It was not until 1854 that the first railroads reached Tuscarawas County but after they did, the decline of the canals was rapid.

The Ohio Canal struggled along under the impact of the railroads in the 1870's and 1880's and was still limping through the 1890's but badly in need of repairs.

There were canal repair bills pending in the legislature when the disastrous flood of 1913 ruined the waterway completely. It even swept away the Dover toll collector's office, the only one in Tuscarawas County, on the towpath east of the Tuscarawas Ave. (then called Factory St.) bridge.

The canal can still easily be traced through Tuscarawas County and ruins of its locks, some used now for basements, and of the viaduct foundations at Bolivar can be seen.

Much of the old roadbed is under the control of the State Highway Department and some of it has been used for state highways. At Canal Fulton and at some other spots a park has been made by reconstructing a part of the canal.



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