

DELAWARE AND RARITAN CANAL HISTORIC MAP

Delaware and Raritan Canal Historic Map, State of New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Edited by John G. Krempner, 1976. Based on 1856 Geologic Map.

A Short History Of New Jersey's Oldest Major Man Made Water Resource Canal 1834-1932 Water Supply 1934- State Park 1974-



William Penn ordered a survey for inland navigation between the Raritan and the Delaware in 1676. Construction was recommended by Jefferson's Secretary of the Treasury in 1808 and by Governor Mathew Dickinson to the legislature in 1816.

The Camden-Amboy Railroad and Transportation Co. and the Delaware and Raritan Canal Co. were both chartered in 1830.

In order to finance and complete both the canal and the railroad, the so-called Marriage Act was passed in 1833 combining all revenues and expenditures. Construction by gangs of Irish laborers, using pick, shovel, and wheelbarrow probably supplemented by some mule-drawn scoops, began in 1830. The railroad from Bordertown to South Amboy was in operation by September 1833. While Asiatic cholera slowed canal construction, excavation of the canal was more difficult than preparing a railroad right of way. The Britons had to dig out more than 6,000,000 cu. yds. of dirt and rock. The canal was finally open to traffic in 1834.

Seven locks, each 24' wide by 110' long, raised boats to the summit level in Trenton, 50' above sea level. From Kingston to New Brunswick seven locks carried boats down to the Raritan. Only one change of level was required on the feeder between Bull's Island and Trenton.

Coal from the Reading, Pa., area delivered by the Schuylkill Navigation Canal, which formerly had to go by sea around N.J. to N.Y., was most of the early traffic. In 1847 a connection was made at Lambertville to permit boats to cross the Delaware River from the Delaware Division of the Pennsylvania Canal which greatly shortened the route to New York City for coal from Mauch Chunk on the Lehigh River.

The peak traffic year for the D & R, was 1871 with 2,960,095 tons of cargo, of which 2,326,925 was coal, traversed by a total of 15,862 steamboats, sailing vessels, canal boats and rafts.

In 1871 the Pennsylvania R.R. gained control of the D & R Canal by leasing the Camden-Amboy R.R. With control of both railroad and canal the P.R.R. refused shipments which originated on the Schuylkill from the coal mines controlled by the Reading R.R.

In 1850 the Canal Co. had an English firm build the tugboat, Robert F. Stockton, the first propeller driven ship operated commercially in American waters. This action opened the era of mechanically propelled barges on American canals.

One of the earliest commercial installations of the Morse telegraph was established in Kingston to enable the company to rapidly obtain information as to canal traffic at Trenton, Princeton, Griggstown, and New Brunswick. Not only could they check progress of particular barges, but they could also determine when the steamboats or tug were exceeding the legal speed limit of four miles per hour. Rough freight (coal, iron, lumber, etc.) was carried at 26 per ton miles; grain, flour, manufactured goods were 36.

The canal was operated 12 hours a day for about 250 days per year. New Brunswick to Bordertown was 42.69 miles. The Lambertville transfer from the Delaware Canal was 14.5 miles above Trenton, while Bull's Island was 21.6 miles.

Some Trenton residents secured a free winter supply of coal by presenting the measurable target of bottles on a fence.

A "sheer leg" bridge. The canal was crossed by over 600 bridges. A few were lift bridges, many were off-center swing bridges, and a number were the unusual "A frame" or "sheer leg" bridges.

The canal did not open for navigation in 1933 and was taken over by the State in 1934. Since 1934 the main canal from Coalport south to Lock #1 north of the Bordertown tide lock and all of the canal basins in Trenton have been obliterated. The U.S. 1 freeway was excavated from the canal south of Coalport. It runs on a cover over the canal, which is still used for water supply from Coalport eastward to the vicinity of Whitehead Road. The feeder northwards from Coalport to Caldwell Park has been found to prevent swimming, fishing, and canoeing. Locks have been converted to water supply spillways at Lambertville, at Kingston, and eastward.