THE PENNSYLVANIA CANAL

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The Pennsylvania Canal, built with pick and shovel more than a hundred years ago, was actually in use from 1828 until 1900. Extending from Nanticoke, the loading place for the North Branch of the canal, which ran through Wilkes-Barre, and on to Buffalo by way of Seneca Lake to Havre de Grace, Maryland, and traversing the community known as Lime Ridge, it was composed of four divisions: the first from Nanticoke to Northumberland, the second from Shamokin Dam to Clarks Ferry, the third from Clarks Ferry across the river to Harrisburg and thence to Columbia, and the fourth to Havre de Grace and by way of the Chesapeake Bay to Baltimore and Delaware City. The first of these four sections is the one of primary concern in this paper.

The canal was from seven to eight feet in depth and about thirty feet in width. Along its bank was a towpath on which the mules walked while pulling the boats. Two mules were used for single boats and from four to five (hitched tandem style) for double, depending upon the load. The mules were driven by boys usually from twelve to sixteen years of age.

At Nanticoke and other places along the canal, locks maintained an adequate water level for operation, and aqueducts, built of logs, stones, and slabs, such as that across Fishing Creek near Rupert carried the water over creeks and rivers.

Water was drained from the canal in the late fall in order to protect the banks of the canal from deterioration due to freezing and thawing. Each boatman took care of his own boat throughout the winter; he frequently sold his worn-out mules or traded them for better ones in anticipation of the opening of the canal the following spring.
A fleet of boats, each of which carried the complete name of the company on the front and sides, was owned by the Pennsylvania Canal Company. H. J. Boone, of Lime Ridge, who is still living, operated a number of these boats during his early manhood. Privately owned boats were as a general rule operated by the owners or by trusted employees, but those belonging to large companies were operated by crews, each consisting of a captain, a boatman, a bowsman, and one or two laborers.

Boats were limited in size by the width of the canal and the length of the locks. Built of oak and pine lumber on a large scale, especially at Espy, they were both double and single. The double boats consisted simply of two single boats chained together. While used chiefly for freighting coal, pig iron, grain, and fertilizer, they carried passengers also. Some of the coal shipped over the canal was burned in an iron furnace at Bloomsburg that produced pig iron, which was in turn transported by the same boats to Nanticoke and other urban communities.

Cargoes were weighed at Beach Haven at the dry dock. Boats were guided into a lock and slowly lowered to a pair of scales as the water was drained out. After the weighing was done, water was turned into the lock until it reached the proper level, whereupon the gates were opened and the boat continued on its journey.

When boats were not in use, they were drawn into basins along the sides of the canal. These basins corresponded roughly to railroad sidings, and the one at Espy made no charge for storage. The average canal boat made about seventy-two trips each year from Nanticoke to Northumberland.

The wages of the people employed on the canal were comparatively small. Captains were paid a fifty-cent fare from Nanticoke to New York, a sixteen-cent fare from Nanticoke to Berwick, and a nineteen-cent fare from Nanticoke to Lime Ridge. Some of the men received ten dollars a month as wages; bowsmen were paid five dollars. A number of the larger boats had cooks; the crews sometimes slept in bunks aboard but more often stopped at taverns along the way. Food was cheap. Potatoes could be bought for five cents a bushel, eggs for eight cents a dozen, molasses for five cents a quart, and beefsteak for ten cents a pound. Clothing too was inexpensive; overalls, for instance, cost twenty-five cents a pair.
Some of the men who served as captains on boats from Lime Ridge to distant points were Harry Pressler, Jonas Hughes, H. J. Boone, Henry Boone, Charles Boone, Henry Heintzelman, and Thomas Cain.

FILMING "HISTORIC ALLENTOWN"

By Melville J. Boyer

Sponsor of Allentown High School Historical Society and Secretary of Lehigh County Historical Society

In the city of Allentown much publicity came from an idea which originated five years ago at a meeting of the local high-school historical society. At the suggestion of the sponsor of the group a committee was appointed to study the important episodes in the founding and growth of the city which might lend themselves to convenient moving-picture filming for a story entitled "Historic Allentown."

After a month of study on the part of the society’s committee the members presented the sponsor, who was to assume the role of photographer, a card-index system of suggested scenes arranged chronologically. At a meeting of the society the committee’s report was accepted unanimously. A standing invitation was issued to all members to call on the photographer after school hours any clear day suitable for camera work and accompany him either in his car or on foot to the particular scene or scenes to be recorded. Many club sessions for editing film and revising sequences were held. The time consumed by the project was far greater than had been expected; several school years were required to complete the job. It was only during the school year of 1942-1943 that the pupils agreed for the first time that they had a film which could be shown publicly.

The extent of field interest and the variety of subject matter are evident in the range covered. Included are comparative views of the city today with colored lithographs of the city of one hundred years ago, the latter of which were borrowed from the Lehigh County Historical Society archives; the surrounding geography which attracted the founder, William Allen; the adjacent streams inhabited by many trout which suggested to James Allen, the son of William Allen, a name for his new home, Trout
Fall, built in 1770, now the home of the Lehigh County Historical Society; Hunters' Cabin in the Parkway, built in 1711, now restored by the park department; and early street plans with the original names in honor of members of the William Allen family in place of the numerical names of today. The military contribution of Allentown is presented in this technicolor film by means of the Revolutionary War monuments as well as Hessian prison site, Civil War, and Spanish-American War markers.

The photographer and the pupils were fortunate to have access to the six rare Wilt oil paintings of Allentown views in the early 1860's. These were only recently presented to the local historical society by the eighty-year-old artist. Views of the colonial courthouse and its architectural details are very colorful.

A very appealing part of the film is that which shows the canal, still in a fair state of preservation, including lock machinery, within the city limits. Color photography lends such scenes of canal operation a romantic touch. It is impossible to review all the interesting "shots." When the film was exhibited to several thousand of the student body in the high school, the final scene with a very rare color portrait of the founder, Judge William Allen, from the Copley portrait, and the narrator's concluding statement, "This is your historic Allentown," brought applause which attested to the success of the project.

The narration should not be overlooked. Since the film had to be "silent," the narrator's amplified voice was necessary to dispense with too many titles. The problem of setting up the script for the narrator was equally as fascinating to the members of the student society as that of assembling the pictures, for it required many meetings, many viewings of the film, and much reference to historical material for accuracy. Without the narration, ably performed by a senior boy, the film would have lost much of its effectiveness.

The length of the film is four hundred feet of Kodachrome. It could readily be extended to several times that length. In fact, the younger members of the society, next year's seniors, plan to add to it unless wartime activities interfere. The Allentown High School Historical Society members of the Pennsylvania Federation of Junior Historians have not only renewed their faith in a precious historical background but also established justifiable pride in what their community means to them.