IN 1753 the French cut a road through the forest from Presque Isle to Fort Le Bœuf and later extended it to the mouth of French Creek. For nearly fifty years this was the only road in Pennsylvania west of the Allegheny River; but it was not much used, forest growth soon reclaimed it, and thereafter freight destined for northwestern Pennsylvania had to be carried from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh by wagon and thence to Meadville and Waterford by canoe and batteau along the Allegheny River and French Creek.

One of the leading industries of the region for twenty years or more, beginning in 1800, was the transportation of salt from Salina, New York, to southern markets. The salt was hauled in wagons to Buffalo, then carried in boats to Erie, transferred again to wagons, and hauled over the old French road to Waterford, where it was loaded on flat-boats and floated down French Creek and the Allegheny River to Pittsburgh, supplying Meadville and other towns on the route. The customs-house records in Erie show the importation of 714 barrels in 1800 and 12,000 in 1809. This amount was greatly increased in later years.

The Crawford Weekly Messenger (Meadville) of December 12, 1805, reported that:

Eleven flat bottomed and six keel boats loaded with salt passed by this place during the last fresh in French creek—the former carrying on an average 170, and the latter 60 barrels each, making in the whole 2,230 barrels—this computed at $11 dollars per barrel at this place amounts to 24,530 dollars—the selling price in Pittsburg is now 13 dollars, which will make it amount to

1 Presented at meetings of the Crawford County Historical Society and the Literary Union, Meadville, in 1937. Mr. McClintock is a Meadville attorney and vice president of the Crawford County Historical Society. In addition to sources cited in the course of this article, he has drawn upon Samuel P. Bates, History of Crawford County, Pennsylvania (Chicago, 1885), and information derived from the Honorable John E. Reynolds of Meadville, and others. Ed.
28,990 dollars. During the preceding summer, spring and winter more than double the foregoing quantity has been brought across the carrying place between Erie and Waterford; which was either consumed in the country bordering on the Allegheny and Ohio rivers, or in this and the neighbouring counties, amounting in the whole to upwards of 80,000 dollars.

The issue of the same paper of January 1, 1807, reported:

During the late raise of French creek we had the pleasing sight of witnessing twenty two Kentucky boats, or arks, pass by this place loaded with salt for Pittsburg, carrying in the whole between four and five thousand barrels.

In its issue of November 23, 1809, it says:

There are at present at Waterford upwards of fourteen thousand barrels of salt, containing five bushel each, or seventy thousand bushels, waiting the raise of those waters in order to descend to Pittsburg, Wheelan, Marietta, &c.

By 1810 there were roads to all points south, east, and west. They were rough and muddy, however, and horseback riding was the favorite mode of travel. Settlers came in carrying their supplies and goods on horseback. From the direction of Pittsburgh the French Creek route continued to be used until after the second war with England. The supplies for Perry's fleet, including the cannon, were largely transported up French Creek to Waterford, and thence over the turnpike to Erie. Most of the roads in Crawford County were in poor condition as late as 1834. Consequently, shipping continued by water when possible.

The Crawford Messenger of December 4, 1828, had the following:

Cleared from (the port of) Meadville, the fast floating boat, "The Ann Eliza."

All the materials of which this boat was built were growing on the banks of French creek on the 27th ult. On the 28th she was launched, and piloted to this place before sunset, by her expert builders, Messrs. Mattocks and Towne. —Her cargo consisted, amongst other things, of 300 reams of crown, medium and royal patent Straw Paper, with patent book and pasteboards; and left this place early on the 30th ult. for Pittsburg, with about twenty passengers on board.

Truly this was quick work, to cut the trees and build the boat in two days, load her on the third, and sail early on the fourth.

---

This issue of the Messenger and others cited below are to be found in the files of the Crawford County Historical Society in the Meadville Public Library.
The Messenger of April 1, 1830, quoted the Erie Gazette as follows:

We are informed on good authority that between Waterford and Bemus' mills, on French creek, a distance of 22 miles, from 90 to 100 flat bottomed boats have started, or are about to start, for Pittsburg.—These boats are built principally by individual farmers, and are freighted with hay, oats, potatoes, and various other kinds of produce; also, salts, staves, bark, shingles, cherry and walnut lumber, &c. The average freight of these boats is twenty seven tons, and the average value of boat and cargo at Pittsburg, is estimated at $500—calculating the number of boats at 100, the total tonage would be 2700 tons, and the product at Pittsburg $50,000. From Bemus' mills to the mouth of French creek, the number of boats of the above description is equal, if not greater, exclusive of rafts, which make a very considerable item; so that the trade of French creek this season may be safely estimated at $100,000.

With roads lacking or in poor condition, with heavy shipping confined to times of freshets, and with an ever-increasing amount of transportation required, it is small wonder that attention was turned to canals. The suggestion of a canal from Lake Erie to Philadelphia was made as early as 1768, but the country was then too poor to undertake such a project. In 1791 a company was formed to construct a canal from the Schuylkill to the Susquehanna, and another in 1792 to build one along the Schuylkill to Philadelphia. These companies were consolidated in 1811 under the name of the "Union Canal Company" and authorized to extend to Lake Erie should it be deemed expedient. The canal and slack water along the Schuylkill were opened in 1818 and to the Susquehanna in 1827.

At its session of 1822–23 the legislature authorized a survey of possible canal routes connecting Lake Erie with the Ohio. Two routes were recommended, one by way of Le Beuf and French Creek, and the other along the Beaver and Shenango rivers. In 1834 the United States government ordered an exploration of routes to connect the Potomac at Washington with Lake Erie. The engineers, while making this survey, camped a few days near the Mercer Street bridge in Meadville. They reported on the feasibility of a canal from the Susquehanna to the Allegheny and thence to Lake Erie.

About this time internal improvement conventions were held. One held in Harrisburg in August, 1825, representing forty-six Penn-
The “Auxiliary Internal Improvement Society of Crawford County” was organized on April 22, 1826, with the principal object of encouraging the building of roads and canals in northwestern Pennsylvania. The first officers were: Hon. Henry Shippen, president; Rev. Daniel McLean, Hugh Brawley, William Wikoff, and Joseph T. Cummings, vice presidents; David Derickson, recording secretary; John B. Wallace, corresponding secretary; Stephen Barlow, treasurer; and H. J. Huidekoper, Thomas Atkinson, Joseph Morrison, John P. Davis, John Reynolds, William Foster, and John H. Work, “acting committee.” This society was extremely active in fostering and forwarding the canal scheme, and it undoubtedly had an influence in hastening the adoption of the plan.

Prior to this, on April 11, 1825, the legislature had passed a bill, which reads in part as follows:

Whereas, the establishment of a communication between the eastern and western waters of this state, and the lakes, by means of navigable streams and canals, would advance our agriculture, commerce, and manufactures—would unite in a common interest the great natural divisions of the state—and would in the end, be an important source of revenue to the commonwealth: And, whereas, the best interests of the state require that this great and important improvement should be the property of the commonwealth, and that the commonwealth ought to embark in it with that zeal and energy that is best calculated to carry it into effect:

1. [The governor to appoint five canal commissioners, a majority of whom shall be a quorum, to consider and adopt such measures as they shall think requisite and proper, preparatory to the establishment of a navigable communication between the eastern and western waters of the state, and Lake Erie.]

The act imposed upon the commissioners the duty of causing the grounds and streams along or contiguous to the probable courses and ranges of the proposed canals to be explored and examined for the pur-

pose of determining the most eligible and proper routes; of causing all necessary surveys to be made; of adopting and recommending proper plans for the construction of the canals; and of preparing and presenting a report to the governor within thirty days of the commencement of the next legislature.

On February 25, 1826, another bill was approved requiring the canal commissioners to construct, among other projects, a navigable feeder from French Creek to the summit level of Conneaut Lake, sufficient to convey at least 221 cubic feet per second, and to survey and locate the route of a canal from there to Lake Erie, due provision being made for the purchase or condemnation of land for this purpose.

The canal commissioners secured Major D. B. Douglass, of the United States Army, to make a survey of the proposed canal, and he submitted his report on the Conneaut Lake Reservoir and French Creek Feeder on January 1, 1827, from West Point.

His first consideration, of course, was the provisional location and graduation of the summit level. He organized a surveying party under W. E. Felton of Meadville and a leveling party under his own supervision, and proceeded to the summit ridge between Conneaut Lake and Lake Erie, which he found to be a range of moderately undulating upland ranging in height from thirty to ninety or one hundred feet above Conneaut Lake. He found three routes, by streams, for communication between the two lakes: one up the eastern branch of Beaver Dam Run, another more westerly, and a third more easterly, up the valley of Prairie Run (Brights Mill Stream). He also considered, from an engineering and practical standpoint, routes along the eastern and western shores of Conneaut Lake. If the route along the eastern shore were to be chosen, there was a possibility that the lake need not be raised. But for fear that future cutting of forests and cultivation of soil might decrease the normal flow of French Creek, he finally decided that the lake should be raised and used as a reservoir. He therefore recommended raising the lake eight feet, with provision for an additional two feet if needed, and using the west shore for exit through Beaver Dam Creek.

about a third of a mile above the lower end of the lake, thus connecting with the main line of the canal farther west.

The dam thereupon constructed raised the lake nine feet, but after the canal was completed it was found this was not sufficient, so the lake was raised two feet more, making eleven feet altogether.

Major Douglass then directed his attention to the feeder by way of the valley of the Conneaut Outlet to French Creek and then up that stream to the proposed source of the feeder. He reported that no difficulty would be experienced in the twelve miles from the lake to French Creek, except the slight one of crossing Watson Run. He continued:

On the arrival of the survey upon the western margin of French Creek, the question presented itself, whether its continuation should be carried up the eastern or western shore of that stream. In all the surveys and examinations made by the authority of the United States the western shore had been uniformly contemplated as affording the most eligible route, but as some degree of importance had been attached by the people of Meadville to the eastern side and as the objects of the present survey were presumed to have a more particular regard to local accommodation than that of the general government could have, it became necessary to bring the advantages and disadvantages of the eastern into a fair comparison with those of the western shore, it was expected also at that time that the results of the United States Survey on the western shore would have been communicated in answer to the application of the Board, and as the time allotted to this survey was extremely short it was hoped that both terms of the comparison would thus be placed within reach of the Engineer by the mere examination of the eastern shore; I did not hesitate therefore, in choosing that shore for the continuation of the line—After due examination of the ground for some distance up the creek the point of crossing was selected at a few hundred yards above the dwelling house of Ed. Herrington. The creek in that place approaches a very high bank on its eastern shore, while the bottom on the west is reduced to about 200 yards in width by a prominent point of upland running out from the general range of hills on that side. No other point between the mouth of the outlet and Meadville appears to present equal advantages for crossing, if the eastern shore should be taken.5

His examination showed that if the canal should be constructed on the east side of French Creek, the two miles above the crossing would

5 This and the following extracts from Major Douglass' report of January 1, 1827, are derived from a certified copy of the report in the possession of the author; the original is in the archives of the Pennsylvania Department of Internal Affairs.
present difficulties, but beyond this point construction would be easier. He continues:

It appears from the results of these surveys that the location of the line on either shore of French Creek, is attended with somewhat greater difficulty than that down the Conneaut valley. On the eastern side immediately on crossing the creek the steepness of the lateral declivity presents some inconvenience for a short distance, after which we come to a bold bank of the creek resting upon a substratum of blue clay and exposed to slips. Generally the ground for the first mile and a half after crossing the creek is broken and irregular and at one place near Shaws house will require a short deep cutting of about sixteen feet to avoid the circuit of a projecting head land. A mile and a half of favourable ground then occurs from Wentworths farm inclusive, except a slight extra cutting & embankment near Wm. Comptons.

The general character of the topography on the western shore of French Creek is much more bold than that on the east; a considerable portion of its valley from the Conneaut Outlet to Bemus' Mill being bounded on that side by very high and steep hills—From the point north of Herringtons house where the two lines separate the first two miles present a surface of Broken and irregular ground, and particularly the 1st mile must be regarded as unfavourable on account of the extra cuttings which will be required in one or two instances.

He found the entire length of the feeder, from Bemus Mill to Conneaut Lake would be about twenty-two miles; that the required head of water at Bemus Mill, 13½ feet above the present surface of Conneaut Lake, would mean a dam 7¾ feet above the sill of the wheel gate at the mill.

His estimate of the cost of a dam at Bemus Mill, 375 yards long, including the fill, pilage, regulating lock, etc., was $13,690.75. His estimate of running the canal down the western shore of French Creek to a point where it would connect with the junction of the eastern and western routes at Herrington's farm was $103,482.92. His estimate of the cost along the eastern shore of French Creek to the same point, including the aqueduct, was $117,047.00, of which $32,169.00 would be required for the construction of the aqueduct. His estimate of the expense of a canal from French Creek to Conneaut Lake was $77,803.83, fencing, $5,280.00, and engineering and superintending, $18,000.00, making a total estimated cost of construction of the dam and canal down the eastern shore of French Creek and aqueduct to Conneaut Lake $231,-
His report indicates that the route along the eastern shore of French Creek would not only cost $13,564.00 more than along the western shore, but also the damages to pay would be greater because of the superior value and improvement of the land. On the other hand, he reported:

There are several considerations of no small weight in favour of the eastern location. In the first place passing through a more settled country and particularly through the village of Meadville it will more effectually accommodate the local interests of that vicinity than the route on the west side, a considerable portion of which passes along the slopes of high & steep hills having very little capacity for improvement; secondly from this character in its topography the route on the west side is more exposed to expensive contingencies both in the construction and maintenance of the canal, than on the east. Thirdly, the navigation of the upper parts of French Creek can be most conveniently and safely connected with the location on the east side; and it is believed that an improved navigation on the lower part of the same stream may also be advantageously combined with such a location. Under these circumstances the eastern shore notwithstanding the additional expense seems entitled to the preference.

Following the receipt of this report the legislature passed another act, approved April 9, 1827, authorizing and requiring the canal commissioners as speedily as might be to locate and contract for making a canal, locks, and other works necessary thereto, from the western section of the Pennsylvania Canal to a point on Lake Erie by the Allegheny River and French Creek at or near the borough of Erie, and from the city of Pittsburgh to the said point on Lake Erie by the route of Beaver and Shenango, and to commence operations on the feeder from French Creek to the summit level of Conneaut Lake. The act also provided for the payment of damages for the taking of land.

Ground was broken on August 27, 1827, with great ceremony. A procession of several hundred persons formed on the Diamond in Meadville, and at the booming of a cannon marched down Chestnut Street to Water, thence to a point opposite the residence of James White (later that of Major Huidekoper and now the Phi Delta Theta house), where a rostrum had been built. The Reverend Timothy Alden offered prayer and delivered an address, after which ground was broken by two aged pioneers, Robert Fitz Randolph, nearly ninety years of age, and Cornelius Van Horne, then eighty. Next came a team and plow fol-
allowed by laborers with wheelbarrows who carried away several loads of earth amid repeated cheers and thirteen rounds from the artillery. The procession again formed and proceeded to Samuel Lord’s spring (now on the grounds of the Honorable John E. Reynolds), where a cold col-
lation had been prepared and the head of a barrel of whiskey staved in. Merriment and glee were the order of the day.

The completion of the first section was celebrated on November 28, 1829. A boat of large size had been launched at Lord’s basin, just above Meadville, but as it was seen that this would not provide accommodation for all applicants, another boat fifty feet in length was built in two days’ time and launched at the Chestnut Street basin. William Dickson, marshall of the day, named the boats the “Enterprise” and the “William Lehman.” At noon, the “Enterprise,” drawn by two fine horses, and followed by the “William Lehman” propelled by three beautiful bays, proceeded through Meadville and down the canal about four miles, where a luncheon was served, and on the return trip an address was de-
levered by the Reverend Timothy Alden.

The aqueduct over French Creek was not completed until the latter part of 1830, and four more years passed before communication was opened from Bemus Mill to Conneaut Lake, but from that time until its abandonment the canal was in continuous use, except that in 1837 the dam at Bemus Mill was broken. In 1840 a contract was let to Cullum and Barlow to rebuild the dam, and this work was completed before the main line of the canal was put into operation.

The aqueducts over French Creek and Watson Run, as well as the waste weirs and guard gates, had been poorly constructed and were later rebuilt in a substantial manner, but operation was not interrupted thereby.

By 1843, 973⁄4 miles had been completed on the line from Rochester to Conneaut Lake and 493⁄4 from there to Erie, leaving 381⁄2 miles unfinished. Up to that point four million dollars had been spent, and two hundred and ten thousand dollars more, it was estimated, would be required to complete the canal.

In 1843, the legislature created the Erie Canal Company and ceded to it the work already done on condition that it would finish and operate
the canal. The first boats to reach Erie were the "Queen of the West," a packet boat crowded with passengers, and the "R. S. Reed," loaded with coal from Mercer County, both coming in on December 5, 1844. Navigation officially opened in the spring of 1845.

The canal continued to flourish until the completion of the Erie and Pittsburgh Railroad, which cut into its patronage, and in 1872 it was abandoned.

After the abandonment of the canal and the lowering of Conneaut Lake, water still flowed through the canal to a point near the west end of Spring Street in Meadville, where the water escaped through waste gates into the old channel. For about a year some water continued down to the location of the "Red Mill," which stood just north of the entrances to Island Park, later called Athletic Park, and it was used for power for this mill. Also, for several years water was taken from the canal to operate the pump for the waterworks, in pumping water from French Creek to the reservoir.

During the time between the abandonment of the canal and the final break of the Bemustown Dam, due to ice gorges in French Creek in the spring of 1906, Matt Miller ran a boat livery and a launch at Race Street, and the canal was used to a considerable extent between this point and Bemustown Dam for pleasure parties. There was a considerable extent of slack water above the dam and the banks and woods near-by were very popular for picnics.

In 1876 the property of the Erie Canal Company, real, personal, and mixed, including the canal-bed, banks, towing paths, slopes, dams, pools, reservoirs, aqueducts, ponds, and the lands covered by the waters thereof, was seized in execution by the sheriff and sold to John S. Richards.

During the year 1872, after the abandonment of the canal, some of the farmers whose lands bordered on Conneaut Lake, feeling that if the lake should be lowered to its former level they would increase their land acreage, had met one night and removed a portion of the embankment at the outlet, thus restoring the former level. A contest ensued as to the title to the lands thus exposed, and this question was tested in the case of Barr vs. Foust, in the court of common pleas of Crawford County.

Briefly, the facts of this case are these. Michael Foust, at the time of
the raising of the lake, owned land bordering thereon that was partly covered by the rise of the water level, and he collected damages therefor to the amount of $650.00. After the abandonment of the canal and lowering of the lake his son and heir, Adam Foust, claimed title to the land thus uncovered.

By various transfers the title acquired by Richards at the sheriff's sale became vested in the Conneaut Lake Ice Company, and the latter leased to one Lafayette Barr, for a term of 999 years, 6 acres and 147 perches of the land formerly a part of the Foust farm.

Foust had taken possession and Barr brought an action of ejectment therefor at No. 54 May Term, 1881.

The case was tried before Judge Pierson Church and in his charge to the jury he expressed his views, which differed from former rulings of the supreme court. He told the jury that if the supreme court had not already held differently he would hold that by virtue of the abandonment of the canal the land thus uncovered would revert to the original owner. However, governed by former decisions, he could not so hold, and therefore he instructed the jury to find for Barr. The jury so found, an appeal was taken, and the supreme court upheld the verdict.

The supreme court had decided this question in 1876 in the case of Wyoming Coal and Transportation Company *vs.* Price, and had held, among other things, that:

1. Whenever the Commonwealth took lands for permanent use under the internal improvement Acts of April 11th 1825, February 26th 1826, April 9th 1827, March 24th 1828, and similar acts, and constructed and operated a canal upon it, she acquired an estate in such land in perpetuity and may dispose of the same in fee.

2. All the improvement acts were part of the same system, are in *pari materia* and are to be construed in connection with each other.⁶

After this case was decided the right of the ice company to the land surrounding the lake was not again questioned, and until 1906 the ice company leased the lands bordering on the lake; imposed restrictions, under pain of forfeiture, against pollution and against removal of ice except for use on the land leased; and even granted to the Conneaut

⁶ Pennsylvania, *State Reports* (Smith's), 81:156.
Lake Navigation Company a monopoly in the operation of steam and naptha boats in passenger and freight service on the lake.

In the summer of 1906 it was rumored that the ice company or the navigation company was about to require the payment of a license fee for the privilege of operating small boats on the lake. Also no boats for the carrying of passengers and freight for hire were permitted other than those of the navigation company.

Amos Quigley and H. E. Rhoads caused a passenger boat, called the "Anita," to be built and shipped to Linesville, hauled it overland by night, launched it on the lake, and announced themselves ready to carry passengers. The navigation company seized the boat, beached it, and then applied for an injunction, to test the questions whether the lake itself was private or public property and whether the public could be deprived of the free use of it.

In 1798 the legislature had passed an act declaring that:

The river Ohio, from the western boundary of the state up to the mouth of the Monongahela, Big Beaver creek, from the mouth up to the first fork in the seventh district of donation land, the Allegheny river, from the mouth to the north boundary of the state, French creek to the town of Le Bœuf, and Conewango creek, from the mouth thereof to the state line, Causawago creek, from the mouth up to the main forks, Little Coniate creek, from the mouth up to the inlet of the Little Coniate Lake... be, and the same are hereby declared to be, public streams and highways, for the passage of boats and rafts; and it shall and may be lawful for the inhabitants or others, desirous of using the navigation of the said river and branches thereof, to remove all natural obstructions in the said river, and branches aforesaid.7

In Major Douglass' report to the canal commissioners he refers to the Big Conneaut, apparently the stream entering Lake Erie at Conneaut, Ohio, but nowhere is there a big Conneaut Lake mentioned. An attempt was made to show that the lake at Edinboro was the Little Conneaut, but the court did not agree, and held that the legislature had declared the lake navigable in law as it was in fact and refused to make the injunction permanent. The supreme court affirmed the lower court.

At the time the canal was built an extension was built below the aqueduct at Herrington's to Franklin. This extension used the natural chan-

nel of French Creek where possible, but where the water was too shallow, too rough, or the presence of rocks made it dangerous, canals were built around these places. This Franklin line was twenty-five and a half miles long. There were nineteen cut-stone locks, eighteen feet wide and ninety feet long; eleven dams; fifteen towpath bridges; and three canal bridges. As the standard locks to accommodate the regular canal boats were twenty feet wide this line was very little used and was practically abandoned a year after it was completed. One dam was carried out by a flood, and another one, at Sugar Creek, was removed by the board because of farmers' complaints that their lands were flooded. This line was a failure.

The French Creek Feeder did not prove to be a paying investment for those who held stock in the canal company. Neither did the tolls collected by the commonwealth before the transfer to the company provide any revenue to the state. However, the canal undoubtedly contributed greatly to the settlement and development of the country, afforded an easy and cheap system of transportation, and was a great benefit to farmers, merchants, and the people generally. From the standpoint of direct return to stockholders it was a failure, but from the standpoint of community enterprise and indirect benefit to the state and its citizens it was a great success. We owe much of our growth and prosperity to the foresight and perseverance of the public-spirited citizens who were instrumental in securing the construction and operation of this internal improvement, and in seeing that it was kept in operation until the railroads made its further use unnecessary.