
Until about 1790, Philadelphia was the leading United States seaport on the North Atlantic. Baltimore, the eastern terminus of the toll-free “National Road” completed in 1820, was putting in its bid for the rapidly growing Northwest trade. The City of New York became the country’s leading seaport in the early 1800’s due to the completion of the Erie Canal.

Born of rivalry and fear, many of them never a financial success, Pennsylvania’s canals had an extremely important influence on the state’s development. Turnpikes had proven inadequate. The railroad age had not dawned. Canals were the answer, in these early times, for moving larger amounts of freight more quickly at less cost.

This book is an excellent, concise history of canals and canal days in Pennsylvania. The illustrations are superb. There are fifty-eight pictures, four of them in color, three maps and two drawings. The book begins with a discussion of the development of canals in America. Following is a discussion of all Pennsylvania canals publicly and privately owned.

Discussion of the publicly owned canals begins with the Union Canal. This is followed by the “Main Line” Canal System, divided into the following topics: the Eastern Division, the Western Division, the Juniata Division, the Allegheny Portage Railroad, the Columbia and Philadelphia Railroad and the “Main Line” Portable Boats.

Other publicly owned canals discussed are: the Susquehanna Division, the North Branch Division, the Delaware Division, the Beaver and Erie Division and the Wisconisco Division.

The author then turns his attention to the privately owned canals. He discusses the Lehigh Canal, the Susquehanna and Tidewater Canal, the Conestoga Navigation Company, the Codorus Navigation Company and the Monongahela Navigation Company.

The author states, “There will never again be a period in the travel history of this country quite as colorful or as unique as the canal-boat era, which reached its peak in the 1850’s and continued on a diminishing scale until about 1900.” In the section of his book, “Life on the Canals,” he describes this era well, with assistance from such famous writers as Harriet Beecher Stowe and Charles Dickens, whom he quotes on the happenings on the canal as described by them.

Of additional interest is the fact that the author, William H. Shank, is also Secretary and Treasurer of the recently formed Penn-
sylvania Canal Society, a non-profit historical organization whose objectives are the preservation of canal records, information, materials and remaining canal sites. Interested parties are invited to write the author at his home address: 809 Rathton Road, York, Pennsylvania 17403, for further information.

West View, Pennsylvania

Julius W. Murphy


This is a book that bears reading and rereading, for into its compass is crowded a mass of information carefully researched and documented with primary materials.

After the brief introductory chapters revealing the necessities that produced the adoption of the Constitution, the book is a roll call of the twelve states which participated in the constitutional convention, with a capsule biography and character portrait of each delegate who had a part, great or small, in the making of the Constitution. But it is much more than this. A chapter is devoted to each state delegation, and each chapter has its own integrity as a unified story in which the author has skillfully interwoven with the biographical sketches insights into the social and political climate of the state. There are fifty-five biographies included. If at times the reader feels bewilderingly as if he is reading the generations of the Old Testament with its recurring "begats," a patient persistence will prove rewarding. Out of this recital of life experiences, one thing stands out clearly — all the delegates, even those young in years, had achieved a maturity in practical experience in the political life of the state, and many had taken part in the councils of the Confederation. Likewise evident is the provincialism and fear of distant government that challenged the ideal of a stronger union.

This book is a tapestried masterpiece that portrays the ideal of a Federal union against the backdrop of Franklin's rising sun, but it is an ideal rooted in pragmatism. Like all tapestries its chief beauty rests upon the meticulous detail woven into the fabric. Its chief shortcoming rests in the author's faithfulness to the muted tones of the tapestry. For all her careful research she has failed to provide any