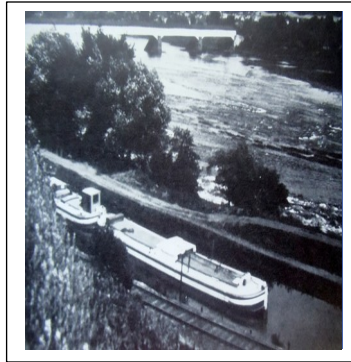


GETTING FROM HERE TO THERE

WHEN? 1824 to late 1890s

WHERE? Wyoming Valley and beyond

EVENT The canal system moved tons of goods alongside the Susquehanna until replaced by the railroads



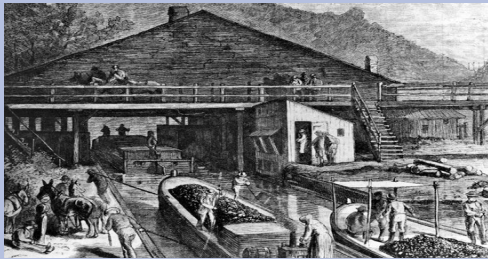
Canal boat and Market St. bridge

VOCABULARY

ark
canalers
canal packet boats
hoggee
towpath

Due to their currents, rivers usually could provide only one-way transport. Arks and rafts shipping goods downriver had to be dismantled and sold for lumber at their destination since there was no practical means of hauling the craft upriver for reuse. Canals, then, became the transportation of choice to move many goods through Pennsylvania and New York. Shippers did not have to be as concerned about floods, low water, or rapids. They were also used to connect two waterways.

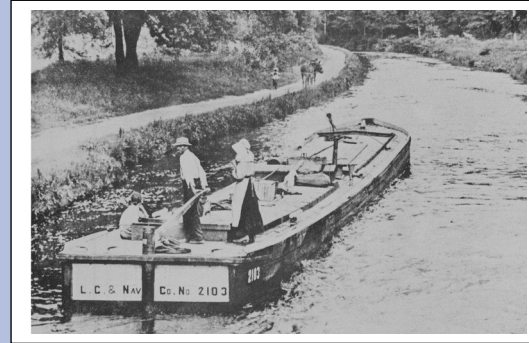
But the Canal Era meant the application of incredible ingenuity to the creation of an entire transportation system of large, water-filled ditches, with dams on rivers and creeks creating the water reserves that would keep the ditches full. Most canals were about 20 feet wide and five feet deep.¹ They were emptied during the winter so repairs could be made. Canal boats and arks had to go through numerous lock systems to raise and lower them to navigate successfully over the 1200 miles of state and privately-owned waterways. Some of the locks were 20 feet deep to accommodate the raising and lowering of the water.



The link between Wyoming Valley and the network of canals was called the North Branch Canal. Begun in 1828, the North Branch of the Susquehanna River extended from Northumberland to Wyoming Valley, reaching West Nanticoke in 1830. The Wyoming Division, connecting West Nanticoke with Pittston, was completed in 1834.² The northern coalfields, particularly Wyoming Valley's anthracite, could now have access to major markets in Philadelphia and Baltimore. By 1856, the North Branch Extension continued the waterway further north along the Susquehanna from Pittston to Athens. Eventually the canal reached a connection to Elmira, N.Y. Then the boats could be towed to Seneca Lake and then to Great Lakes or Atlantic Ocean by way of the Erie Canal. The cost of construction was over \$1.5 million.³

Even New York City's harbor could be reached from Wyoming Valley over gravity railroads in the Pittston-Scranton area and the Delaware and Hudson Canal. This canal went from Honesdale in Wayne County to Roundout, New York, on the upper Hudson River.

Canal boats were 85 to 90 feet long and could carry passengers and freight. Some of the arks used for coal carried 50 to 130 tons moving to markets in Philadelphia and beyond. Boys or girls as young as 9 or 10 called “hoggee” guided the horses or mules pulling the boat alongside the canal on what was called the towpath.

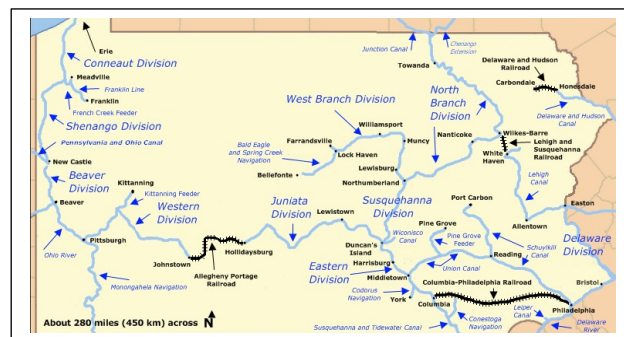


By the late 1890s canals were being replaced. Floods had wiped out portions of the system and the railroads could move more freight more quickly. With it have gone the packets, which could deliver passengers from Wilkes-Barre to Philadelphia (via Harrisburg and Reading) in only forty-eight hours. Gone are the 130-ton double-linked barges of coal that made the anthracite industry possible before the advent of railroads. Gone also are the canalers who lived aboard their boats and transported passengers and goods from April to November. Gone are the hoggee (pronounced ho-ge), boys or girls who walked the towpaths with the mules all day.⁴

The canal put Wilkes-Barre on the commercial and transportation map of America and made it part of the national transportation network. With its successor, the railroad, the Wyoming Valley became the world’s largest producer of anthracite by the time World War I began.

CHECK IT OUT ONLINE:

1. North Branch Canal
2. Canal pictures
3. Wyoming Canal marker
4. Ride on the Canal
5. Hoggee In Her Words



PRINT SOURCES

Petrillo, F. Charles. Anthracite and Slackwater: The North Branch Canal 1828-1901. Easton: Center for Canal History and Technology. 1986.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Using the map of PA Canals calculate the distances traveled from the NY border to Harrisburg. What route would be needed to travel to Philadelphia? Compare the travel times to today.
2. Learn about a hoggee and prepare a presentation about life on the towpath.

ENDNOTES

1. North Branch canal p. 2
2. North Branch canal p. 2
3. North Branch canal p. 3
4. Hoggee: In Her Own Words

