

## Canal Script

Welcome to the site of the Wabash and Erie Canal.. The Nuck family came all the way from Germany on the Wabash and Erie Canal. This canal brought many German immigrants to Huntington County and all of Northern Indiana. It opened up this area for settlement by providing a way of transporting goods and people.

The Nuck family traveled by log canoe, down the Maumee River to Ft. Wayne. Since the canal had been opened between Ft. Wayne and Huntington on July 4th 1835, they finished their journey by canal. The canal was started on Washington's birthday in 1832. When it was opened there was a big celebration in Ft. Wayne. Many famous people came to see it's opening. Michigan's Gov. Cass spoke at the opening. As he stepped off the canal boat he fell into the canal. Rather a soggy beginning. Gov. Cass was a candidate for president at that time.

It was built mostly by Irishmen as there really was noone here yet who could help build the canal. The workers were rather a rowdy bunch. They were paid \$10 to \$15 per month or about 4 cents per hour. (Also each man got 6 jiggers of whisky a day. This was thought to be a deterrent for snake-bite and malaria.). They and the Germans brought their dislike for each other with them from the " Old Country". They would call each other names and get into many fights. The workers had to grub out this big ditch totally by hand by using wooden shovels, picks, buckets, augers, handdrills, gun powder, wheelbarrows, horses and wagons.. They used a giant wheel stump puller. There were about 6 deaths per mile of canal built caused by ague, cholera, fights and murder.

When they came to a river they built an aqueduct over it so as not to lose the water in the canal. It looked like a bridge of water over the river. There is an aqueduct where the canal had to pass over Silver Creek still evident 2 miles west of here. Because the land is not level, many locks were built to carry the Canal Boats either higher or lower in a box-like water filled, gated mechanism. The Forks of the Wabash Lock was located here. The boat would pull into the lock, the gates were closed. Water was pumped in to allow the boat to rise. The upper gate was then opened and the boat could continue having been lifted to a higher level and could proceed on towards Ft. Wayne. The procedure would then be reversed on the return trip to Lafayette.

The canal was 26 - 40 ft. wide and 4 - 6 ft. deep at the bottom. The boats were box-like in shape, 12-16 ft. across and 50 - 90 ft. long. There was a flat house-like structure in which passengers or freight were stowed on top. Many settlers and businessmen came by canal boat and settled in this area. The passenger boats or packets hauled about 20 - 40 passengers. The boat was pulled by 1 - 4 mules attended by a mule driver. A rope was tied to the boat from the mule team. The boat was pulled at the approximately speed of 5 miles per hour. A trip from Delphi to Ft. Wayne took 5 days. The scenery was beautiful as the boat slid gently along. Hugh native forests could be viewed on both sides. Travel in the winter was impossible as the canal froze. In the

summer the heat and humidity were intolerable, especially below deck and the mosquitoes were plentiful. Imagine trying to sleep in a closed cabin sweating profusely with mosquitoes buzzing and biting everywhere.

The passengers were served basic meals - nothing fancy. Greasy pork and fish were common. Some packets were beautifully furnished. A ladies lounge was provided for women passengers only. There was also a men's lounge. These doubled as sleeping rooms at night. There were 3 tiered bunks only 20 inches wide and 6ft. long for sleeping. Stops along the way were Huntington, Wabash, Peru, Logansport, and Delphi. Stores, inns, warehouses and taverns for drinking and eating grew up in these towns to service the canal boat passengers.

Freight boats shipped Indiana produce to market. In an average year the canal carried: 7 million pounds of bacon and lard, 2 million bushels of corn, one million bushels of wheat, 5 million feet of lumber plus considerable quantities of other products. Wagons were often lined up at the canal boat wharf for loading onto the boats to be sent to market in the east.

Items which were now available from the east were: cranberries, nails, furniture, salt, leather, sugar, salt, cotton yarn, iron castings, stoves, and many other items. Huntington businesses grew up around the canal.

As the boats passed through Huntington, there were 6 ten-ft. locks. People were used to hearing "Lock below", "Low bridge" (the bridges were built low and a passenger had to duck if sitting on top of the boat or find himself in the canal) and "Ste-a-dy, st-e-a-dy"! (a passenger could get quite a jolt if the boat bumped against the side of the canal)

In it's hay-day the canal was the scene of bustling activity. About 300 boats a season. The Wabash and Erie Canal was the longest Canal in the country. It ran 468 miles. The cost of sending products east went from 10 cents a ton mile to 1 cent a ton mile after the canal was built. The cost of the canal was \$125 million. The railroads which came in the 1850's put the canal out of business as it was faster and more dependable. Indiana went bankrupt and was not able to pay for the canal debt. As a result Indiana's new constitution of 1851 forbade us from going into debt. Indiana is the only state whose constitution forbids this.

Between 1840 and 1850 the counties adjacent to the Canal grew nearly 400% more than twice the growth of the rest of Indiana. Industry grew rapidly.

The Canal lasted from 1835 to 1876. Many mills for flour, paper, and wood were built because of the reliable eastern outlet.

Population growth of Huntington Co. was 1,579 in 1840 and in 1870 it was 19,036.

Look for the many signs of the canal here:

1. A wooden lock west of the visitors center
2. Clear Creek flood gate timbers on the plain below the Visitors Center
3. Coffe or Feeder Dam on the south side of Ehler Island (220 feet long)
4. Canal boat and lock exhibits in Visitors Center
5. Later the Interurban R.R. was built along the tow path ( an electric train connecting many cities in Indiana.)

Other Facts:

1. A total of 73 locks in Indiana raised or lowered the Canal a total of 550 ft. from the Ohio line to Evansville.
2. Many major aqueducts and smaller ones were built.
3. Many "weirs" or flood gates were built to control water in the rainy season..
4. Many feeder or Coffe Dams were built to keep water in the canals in dry season.