

THE HOCKING VALLY CANAL

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Remnants of the towpath can be seen along many stretches of the Hocking River. Although the canals are rapidly disappearing to modern improvements, the locks, culverts, and piers which once supported aqueducts remains quietly hidden among the trees and undergrowth like artifacts of an ancient civilization. There are two culverts in Hocking County. One is located at the Old Town Creek and the other is at the Haydenville Canal Park.

Stone quarries, slack water ponds, and old canal towns like Chauncey, Nelsonville, Haydenville, Logan, Sugar Grove, and Carroll reveal the importance of the Hocking Valley Canal in the growth and development of Athens County and Southeastern Ohio.

The Hocking Valley Canal opened southeastern Ohio to markets of the eastern United States. Agricultural commodities could be transported from Athens to Carroll where products could be moved north or south along the Ohio Erie Canal to the Great Lakes on the Ohio River. Products taken to Cleveland of the Ohio and Erie could then be shipped east to Buffalo to Albany, New York. Goods moved south to the Ohio River at Portsmouth were then transported north to Pittsburgh or south to New Orleans.

Eventually salt, coal, wood and many other commodities were transported along the Hocking Valley Canal. As commerce increased new products were brought into southeastern Ohio on canal boats.

Local history has it that Morgan's Raiders, moving through Athens County during the Civil War, made a stop in Nelsonville. Before they left, they burned a covered bridge crossing the Hocking River and eleven canal boats. One canal boat, which was home to a family, was spared while the others were torched to prevent them from being used to support the Union Effort.

The Hocking Valley Canal, dug by hand, had 22 locks and nine culverts made from sandstone cut from bedrock in the Hocking Valley. It took twelve years to build. Operating from 1842 until 1874, the canal played a pre-eminent role in the transportation, economic and cultural development of Athens.

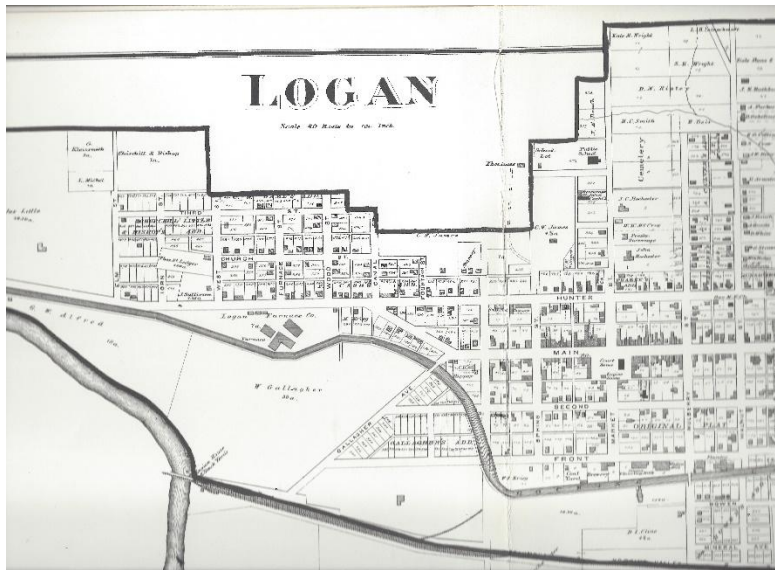
Severe damage to the lock and dams along the canal in the 1874 flood of the Hocking River closed the canal for the last time between Athens and Nelsonville.

Railroads rapidly replaced the canal because of the increased speed of transportation. A flood in 1894 resulted in extensive damage to remaining canal structures in the valley and marked the end for the remainder of the canal.

Today the slack water ponds and much of the canal bed has been reverted to wetlands and is home to waterfowl, beaver and numerous other species of animals and plants. The Hocking Valley Canal and many other abandoned canals in Ohio are a great untapped historic resource. It will be up to local residents to protect these relics of a bygone era and develop potential as hiking trails, corridor parks, wildlife habitat and educational resources

before they fall victim to urban sprawl, highway widening and river channelization projects that do not recognize their value.

Part of the canal route through Logan is marked with signs on Gallagher Avenue, near the Washboard Factory, on West Second Street and West Front Street, the canal then runs behind the houses on South Front Street running east through Logan.



Map photo from the 1876 Atlas of Hocking County.

60 Miles of the Hock-Hocking Canal built at a Cost of \$947,670 in 1839 – 43

This was the first public improvement which opened the resources of the Hocking Valley. The short lateral Canal or it was then called, “the side cut” provided so much value, that the Board of Public Works purchased it for the state and extended it down the Hocking Valley.

In 1823, an act passed by the legislature authorized the purchasing of the side cut by the commission. This was decided December 22, 1838, for \$61,000.

The first section, 16 ½ miles from Lancaster to Bowner’s Lock was completed in 1839 and the second portion from Bowner’s Lock to Nelsonville, another 16 ½ miles, was finished in 1840, in September of 1840 the first canal boat came out of the Hocking.

Early in 1841 the canal had reached the Monday Creek, and later that same year reached Athens. Boats then commenced running the entire length of the canal from Carroll to Athens, some 60 miles.

The canal was dug 40 feet wide at the top, 25 feet at the bottom and four feet deep. Locks were 90 feet long and 15 feet wide and could raise boats from 6 to 12 feet. Boats were limited by the locks to 14½ feet wide and 88 feet long.

The prime reason for the canal was to provide an easy access to the rich coal and salt lands centered in this area. This it did when completed in 1843, but the slow canal boats were soon supplanted by faster railroad cars.

By 1873, the townspeople of Athens wanted the plaque-breeding canal basin removed. The answer to their petition came that summer with the great flood of 1873, which was used for nearly another 20 years. Finally, in 1891, the remainder of the canal was abandoned.

The state boat used to dredge silt from the canal worked its last trip downstream from Carroll and was sold for scrap at Logan. One of the last boats, a stem propelled craft ran aground at Sugar Grove while on a trip to the natural rock bridge in Hocking County'.

Most of the beautifully cut stonework in the canal locks and aqueducts was sold to the highest bidder, to find its way into barn and house foundations or bridge abutments.

Canal activity also centered about Logan's Falls Mill, where Thomas Worthington, Ohio's first governor to endorse state-supported canals, built a pioneer grist mill that stood until the early part of this century. Built before 1820 at the Great Falls of the Hock-Hocking, a place where British fur traders frequently encamped, Worthington's mill witnessed the building of the canal, its heyday and its decline.

Spanning Oldtown Creek at the east entrance to Logan is the largest stone aqueduct that is still intact. A small aqueduct stands at the north end of Haydenville County Road 25 and St. Rt. 33.

Several of the original locks can be seen today. Along St. Rt. 33 just North of Nelsonville, Haydenville Lock, and Sheep Pen Lock are easy to find. Sheep Pen Lock lies along the old road south of Rockbridge.