

The Past...

In the days before airplanes, automobiles, and even trains, the Erie canal was the main artery of transportation in New York State.

People were born, and lived their lives on the dozens of different types of canal boat that moved the raw materials, provisions and people along the canal's route. It was more than just a way of getting from one place to another - it was a way of life. A way of life that not only made New York the Empire State, but materially aided in the development of the entire Midwest.

In 1855, a canal boat building and repair business was established at Chittenango Landing, on the new and enlarged Erie Canal. It consisted of three dry-docks, a sawmill, stables, a warehouse/store, and woodworking shop. The business continued until the closing of the canal season in 1917. During its 62 years of operation, the company passed through the hands of many owners, building and repairing hundreds of canal boats.

After the closing of the canal, the dry-docks were filled, and the buildings demolished. The area went to weeds and scrub trees, and lay nearly forgotten for almost seventy years.

The Present...

This boat yard area with its filled in dry-docks passed into oblivion until 1985, when a small group of local people got together and decided to preserve this unique portion of Chittenango's canal history. They, and others, formed the Chittenango Landing Canal Boat Museum.

Permission to go ahead with their project, and a lease on the land were obtained from New York State, and through the efforts of elected state representatives, money was obtained to start work at the site. Through volunteer efforts, and with the funds received, the work of re-excavating the dry-docks began in 1986.

Since excavation began, the dry-docks have been opened, and many artifacts connected with the canal boat construction industry have been found. Archeological investigations of the area have been ongoing and are continuing even now.

In addition the museum volunteers have reconstructed two buildings, the store/warehouse and the sawmill/woodworking/blacksmith shops.

Already, this young museum is being used as an educational tool. Public tours are frequent, while archaeological programs and adult presentations have offered a variety of learning experiences to the people in this part of central New York.

The Future...

Efforts at Chittenango landing will not stop with just the opening and rebuilding of the dry-docks and replicating the structures. Here will be found not only the tools and machinery used in the canal boat building industry, but many scale models, artifacts, and dioramas, as well as other mementos of the boats that once navigated this Grand Erie Canal.

Eventually, it is anticipated, there will be full sized replicas of boats in each of the dry-docks, and a boat under construction on the site on which visitors, under supervision, can try their boat building skills, if they wish.

The work of building this museum will cover a span of many years, but the job is well begun. At present it is progressing as fast as time and money will allow. We see it as the combined efforts of many dedicated people.

Already we have accomplished much, and with your help we can do much more.

Come, visit the boat yard, see what we've done. Join us, and become a part of this unique community project.