

Looking Back – Macedon and the Erie Canal

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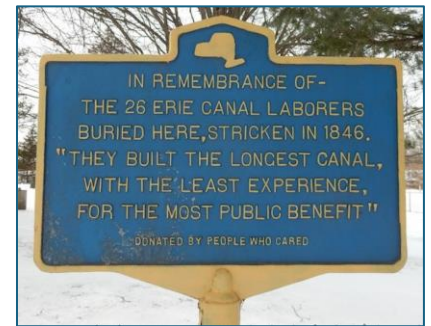


What's in a name? On older maps you'll see the names Macedon Locks, Lockville and Macedonville directly linking our community of Macedon to the Erie Canal. This year will be the 200th anniversary of the Erie Canal. Like these names, Macedon has gone through many changes these past 200 years. Officially founded in 1823, Macedon preceded the official opening of the Erie Canal by three years.

Transportation was essential to the growth of any community. Now we frequently see trucks of all types traveling Route 31 and trains north of the canal heading east and west through town. Routes 350, 8 and 28 headed north and south serving the same purposes.

The Erie Canal, at times known as "Clinton's Ditch" or "Clinton's Folly," named after Governor Dewitt Clinton quickly brought local businesses a new way to transport and receive goods. It also became a convenient way to travel. The cost of transporting goods decreased from a high of \$125/ton of cargo between Buffalo and New York City to \$4 per ton in 1835. Traffic became so busy that an enlargement was begun soon after it had opened. Macedon benefitted from this enlargement.

Building the canal was not easy. Most of the work was done by hand. *"The project provided practical schooling for a new generation of American engineers and builders, and led to the founding of the nation's first civil engineering school, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI) in Troy, New York, in 1824.*



Erie Canal engineers devised new equipment to uproot trees and stumps and developed a cement that could set and harden underwater." <https://www.history.com/topics/landmarks/erie-canal> The men that helped to build the canal, some Irish immigrants, took eight years to finish the project. Several of these workers didn't survive and are buried at the Wayneport Rd. Cemetery.

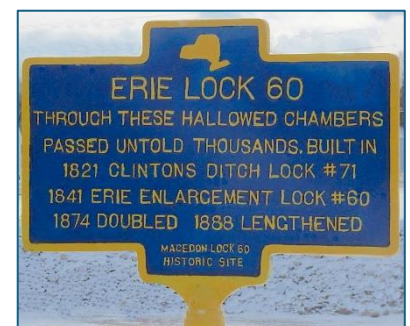
The original canal was 4' deep and 40' wide. Boats and barges were pulled by mules/horses on towpaths. The second Erie Canal, begun in 1836, was referred to as the *Enlarged Canal*. It was enlarged from four feet to seven feet deep and from 40 to 70 feet wide. <https://considerthesourcenyc.org/using-primary-sources/erie-canal-time-machine>

Completed in 1864 the "Enlarged Canal" was intended to improve and straighten the canal, to allow for increased traffic. One of the improvements was the creation of double locks. The canal was very busy and it became necessary to create areas where the locks could allow people to travel both east and west at the same time. Macedon became home to two sets of double locks 60 and 61.

Locks 60 and 61 were built as part of the Enlarged Canal system.

Lock 60 is located along Quaker Road between O'Neil and Walworth Roads. The remains of this lock are maintained as a historic site and presents an excellent opportunity to study the construction of a lock built from stone. It can be accessed from the trail head on the south side of the O'Neil Rd bridge.

<https://waynehistorians.org/Places/site.php?site=973>



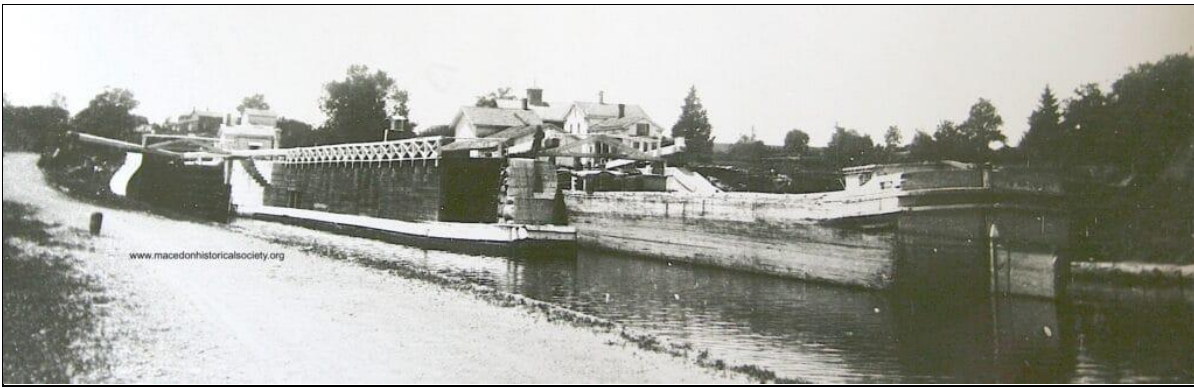


Figure 1 Erie Canal Lock 60 looking west



Figure 2 Erie Canal side at Lock 60, south side 2000 Quaker Rd, the Meehan home.

Lock 61 of the enlarged Erie Canal was located just east of the present Route 350, across from the entrance to the Canal Park at Lock 30. A short section of the Erie and the remains of this lock are being used as part of the spillway around Lock 30.



Figure 3 Erie Canal Lock 61 looking west

The Barge Canal: The first shovel-full of dirt was dug in 1905, and improvements were completed on May 15, 1918. Approximately 340 miles in length, the canal is 12 feet deep and 120 feet wide. By this time, steam shovels were in use. This improved the speed in which the construction could be completed. The canal is officially called the *New York State Canal System*. It includes the original Erie Canal along with the Champlain, Oswego and Cayuga-Seneca canals. <https://www.canals.ny.gov/About/History>



<https://www.waynecountytourism.com/events/morning-paddle-lock-30/>

Canal Park at Lock 30 and the Butterfly Trail: Macedon is blessed with many places to relax and enjoy the outdoors. The Canal Park at Lock 30 is one of those places. Enjoy the area for picnicking, fishing, boating, biking and hiking. It even has a new launch site for canoes, kayaks and boats. You can walk right up to the lock to learn and see how it works. The lock tenders are always happy to share information about the lock.

The geography of the area is a peninsula with the old canal on the south side, and the newer canal and Lock 30 on the north side. When you hike to the west you have the opportunity to walk the Butterfly Trail. This fully accessible trail allows visitors to enjoy the peacefulness of the water, the birds, butterflies and nature in general. When you reach the western end you can actually see the original Erie Canal, the Enlarged Erie and the Barge – Erie Canal. If you travel along the canal portion you will also see one of the only “Storybook Trails,” complete with a display of a children’s story. Along the way you will see small flower gardens maintained by local school children and organizations, including the Towpath Volunteer Fife and Drum Corp. The trail includes species of flowers and bushes native to the area. The whole stroll is about ½ mile. <https://trailworks.org/butterfly-nature-trail/>

Since 2022 we have celebrated our community at a special festival at the canal park. Come join us on August 16, 2025 as we celebrate the Macedon Heritage Festival at Lock 30 (12-9pm). The festival will include music, food, craft vendors, service organizations, history related activities, a kid's zone and fireworks!

<https://www.facebook.com/macedonbicentennial/>



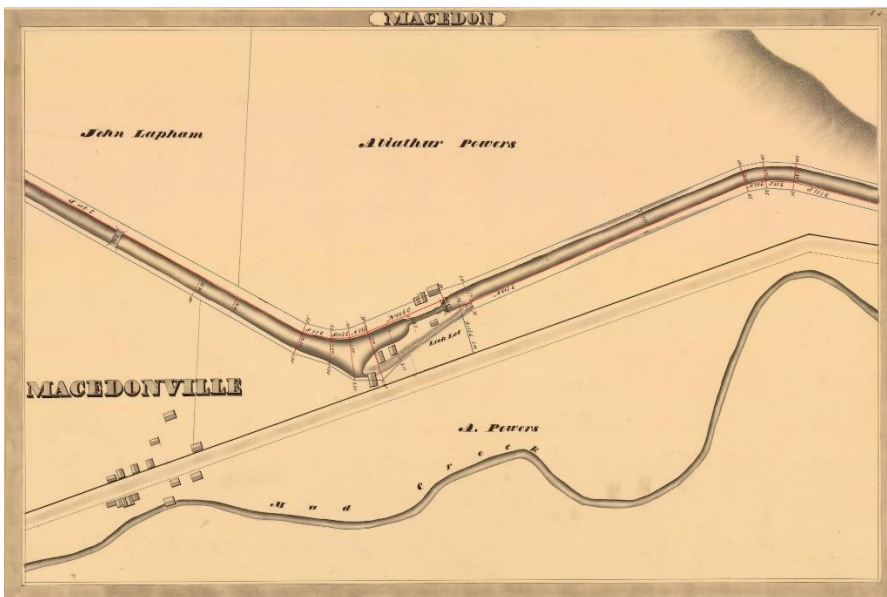


Current view of old lock 61

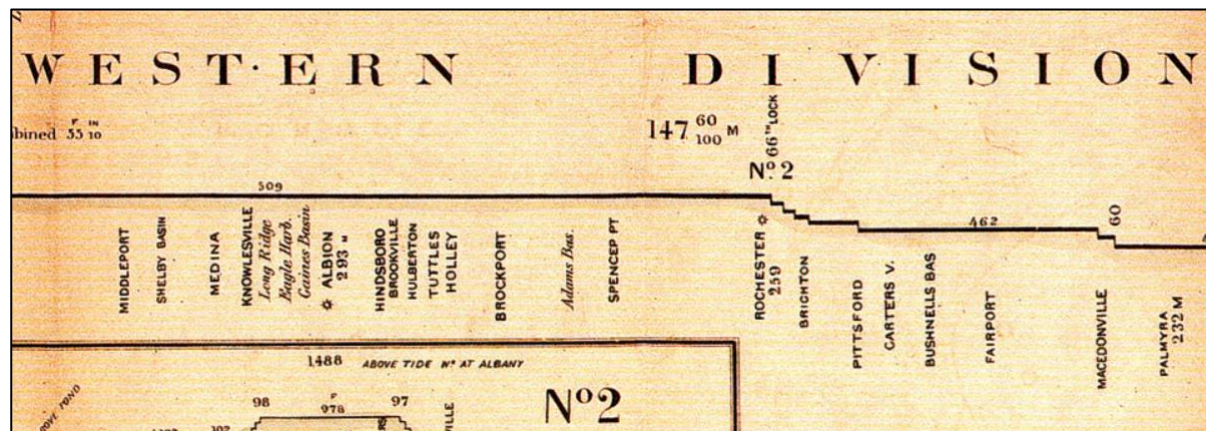


<https://www.macedonhistoricalsociety.org/maps/>

1834 Map



Erie Canal Map <https://www.eriecanal.org/maps/NYS-1858map.jpg> 1858: Enlargement with Macedon in the Western Division. Lock 61 – 12' lift, Lock 62 8' lift



1874 Map



1904 Map: This map shows the combination of rail, canal and roads intersecting our community.

