

# PANNEBAKKER FAMILY NEWS



NEWSLETTER OF THE PANNEBAKKER FAMILY ASSOCIATION

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## Thank the Erie Canal for Spreading People, Ideas and Germs Across America

By Lorraine Boissoneault [smithsonian.com](http://smithsonian.com)

Two hundred years ago, it took two weeks to travel from Albany to Buffalo. Terrain was rough, shipping costs were high, and merchants had to contend with ox-drawn wagons. But on July 4, 1817, construction began on something that would change that long trip—and American commerce—forever. When the Erie Canal opened eight years later, it took only five days to travel between the two cities, and freight rates fell 90 percent.

The project was a brainchild of DeWitt Clinton, who served as mayor of New York City (where he established the public school system) and governor of the state. It was in this second role that Clinton secured funding for the canal, since the federal government repeatedly refused. The canal was seen as an absurd, expensive gamble, derisively called “Clinton’s ditch.” In fact, Thomas Jefferson said, “Talk of making a canal 350 miles through wilderness is little short of madness.”

But thanks to the New York legislature, the \$7 million project (over \$140 billion today) was funded—and was repaid within a decade by tolls.



The new waterway was dug 4 feet deep and 40 feet wide through forests and fields, rocks and swamps. A series of 83 locks helped level terrain that had once been passable only to slow-moving wagons. After eight long years of construction, the Erie Canal stretched 363 miles across the interior of New York, connecting the Great Lakes to the Hudson River—the longest artificial waterway ever completed in North America.

Even after Clinton got money for the Erie Canal, he lacked the basics, including professional engineers and construction materials. But the ad-hoc project brought out the best in frontiersmen. People invented hydraulic cement that hardened underwater; stump-pullers that allowed a team of men and horses to remove 30 to 40 tree stumps a day; and an endless screw device that made it possible for one man to fell a tree. Given the lack of basic supplies, the canal’s completion in just eight years is even more impressive.

Before the construction of the Erie Canal, New York wasn’t the city we know today. Ports like Philadelphia, New Orleans and Baltimore all ranked higher than NYC when it came to trade and traffic. But thanks to the Erie Canal, shipping between the Midwest and New York made the Empire City a commercial hub. Politician Elisha Williams even described the canal as “a river of gold [that will] flow into [New York’s] lap.” And he was right.

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Consumer goods and produce weren't the only things moving from the Midwest to the East Coast on the Erie Canal—consumers themselves went for rides, too. In the canal's first year, more than 40,000 people rode packet boats. The vessels were 60 to 80 feet long and 14 feet wide, with central cabins that served as dining room, kitchen, sleeping room and lounge. Before steam engines became the source of travel for the boats, the packets were pulled by mules. Passengers often sat on the roof of the boat, ducking their heads when they traveled beneath low bridges.

Plenty of immigrants, many from Ireland, came to the interior of the country through their work on the canal. But travelers from Europe, Asia and Canada also made their way west on the completed waterway. The Erie Canal moved more immigrants westward than any other trans-Appalachian canal, making Buffalo (its western hub) a major port of immigration. By the early 20th century, English language schools were created in waterway communities for Italian immigrants and others moving into the country from abroad.

The canal transformed the lives of Native Americans in the state of New York. Its construction occurred during a period of intense "Indian removal" policies, and the canal itself ran through territory traditionally occupied by the Haudenosaunee (better known as the Iroquois Confederacy), forcing many of them to move. When Clinton was New York's mayor, he claimed that "before the passing away of the present generation, not a single Iroquois will be seen in this state."

But his prediction was a bit premature. Today there are more members of the Six Nations than there were at the end of the Revolutionary War—though many of them live in communities far from their ancestral homeland.

The canal was as effective at transporting new ideas as people and goods. Mormonism, abolitionism, feminism—all disrupted the status quo and took root or had significant moments along the Erie Canal. "The completion of the Erie Canal accelerated the collapse of the old social order... after the completion of the canal, the integration of social classes and of economic and domestic activities broke down dramatically," writes historian David G. Hackett in *The Rude Hand of Innovation*. Take Mormonism, for example. Palmyra, a canal town, was home to Joseph Smith—the prophet who originated the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Just 25 miles south of Palmyra is Seneca Falls, which hosted a convention of women in 1848 that spurred the suffragist movement. There were plenty more besides: Seventh Day Adventists began practicing their beliefs in canal towns, as did the utopian Oneida Community.

When lots of people are using the same form of transportation, they may host invisible stowaways—germs. The first cholera epidemic in North America came from immigrants on clipper ships in 1832, and spread rapidly along the Erie Canal and into the rest of the country. During the outbreak, people were so afraid of migrants coming down the waterway that they kept boat passengers from disembarking. Smallpox and other contagious diseases spread over the canal, too.

Unlike the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal, another influential 19th-century waterway, the Erie Canal is still used for commercial shipping. Everything from Navy sonar equipment to giant beer cans have chugged their way across the water. The state expects more than 200,000 tons of goods will be shipped on the Erie Canal in 2017, a higher amount than any year in the past two decades. But that's still a dramatic decrease from the 19th century, when millions of tons of goods were transported.

While the canal still transports commercial goods, it also caters to history buffs and pleasure cruisers. But the decrease in shipping means it's no longer profitable. In 2014, the canal system brought in \$1.5 million in tolls and permits—but took \$55 million to operate and maintain, reports NPR.

## **Colonial Philadelphia**

The legacy of early Dutch settlement was obviously apparent by the time William Penn(1644-1718) received a charter for the Province of Philadelphia in 1681, even though the English had controlled the region for almost two decades. Penn arrived in North America in October 1682 through New Castle (formerly New Amstel ), Delaware, and the city, with its Dutch urban planning and mixed Dutch, Swedish, and English population, served as Penn's capital until the founding of Philadelphia. Penn located his new city between the Delaware River and the Schuylkill, a Dutch name meaning "hidden creek." Penn also had personal connections to the Dutch and the Netherlands. While scholars disagree as to whether Penn's mother Margaret Jasper (?-1682) came from a Dutch family or if her Irish-Protestant father was merely a merchant based in Rotterdam, her first husband, Nicasius van der Schure (? -before 1643) was a Dutchman. Penn also traveled to the Netherlands twice between 1671 and 1677 to spread Quaker teachings and recruit migrants to his new colony.

Penn's recruiting proved successful, drawing several hundred Dutch Quakers to Pennsylvania in the 1680s and 1690s despite otherwise minimal emigration from the Netherlands to British colonial America. In 1683, approximately two hundred of these migrants founded the borough of Germantown. Understandably thought of as a German settlement, Germantown was in fact Dutch through the early eighteenth century.

As Philadelphia developed into a major Atlantic seaport, the Dutch emerged as an important, if illicit, trading partner. While British mercantilist policies officially limited most trade to within the empire, colonial American merchants regularly subverted these protectionist rules and widely participated in Atlantic smuggling networks. As committed free traders, Dutch merchants played a prominent role in facilitating this unsanctioned trade. Philadelphia based merchants and their Dutch colleagues exchanged a variety of goods in the colonial period, from molasses to gunpowder. The lead-up to the American Revolution was a particularly lucrative period for American-Dutch illicit trade, in response to colonists' boycotts of British goods, thousands of chests of Dutch tea were smuggled through Philadelphia and sold throughout North America.

During and after the Revolutionary War, the relationship between Philadelphia, the capital of the nascent United States until 1800, and the Netherlands continued to strengthen. Despite pressure from Britain and an official Dutch position of neutrality, thousands of barrels of gunpowder were shipped to the revolutionaries through the Dutch-Caribbean island of St. Eustatius. After independence, the Netherlands became the first nation to recognize and salute the American flag and was the second foreign power to establish diplomatic relations with the United States.

It is in this "Germantown Township" that Hendrick Pannebecker and Eve Umstat married in 1699, a small settlement of a few hundred new arrivals to the shores of America.

I live approximately ten miles from the Germantown settlement. Each time I drive the area or walk the streets, I'm walking in the footsteps of our brave ancestors.

Have a safe and prosperous New Year.  
Ron Pennypacker

## **Family Reunion**

Efforts are under way for a family reunion during the summer of 2019. Several weeks ago, those of you who receive the newsletter by email, were sent a questionnaire listing possible options for the reunion. Those of you who receive the newsletter by USPS are probably hearing about this for the first time. It's been almost 20 years since our last reunion, so it's about time!

It looks like the wonderful folks at Pennypacker Mills are interested in hosting the reunion once again. If you haven't already responded, please do so. This is what we need to know to move forward:

1. Are you interested in attending a reunion?
2. Are you willing to help with the planning, and/or, other aspects of the reunion? Would you be willing to be a presenter on a topic of family interest?
3. What are your ideas about the types of activities we could offer? At the last reunion, we offered trips to various sites of interest related to the family, sessions on family genealogy, help for members wishing to join either SAR or DAR, presentations on noted family members, both past and present, and discussion groups on various topics, to name a few.
4. Do you have skills or experience in event planning?
5. Picnic, formal dinner, or both? The last reunion was a multi-day affair with a picnic at Pennypacker Mills one day and a dinner at the host hotel another.
6. Any other comments or questions you might have.

A family reunion is a good time to get some of the younger folks interested, and this would also be a great time to speak with those family members who have not joined the association yet, and to spread the word about the Association and the reunion.

Please send your response and ideas to Bruce Pennypacker at the address or email on the next page of this newsletter.

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# *Pannebakker Family Association*



The Pannebakker Family Association is an outgrowth of the family reunion held at Pennypacker Mills, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania on July 2-4, 1999. The reunion celebrated the 300th year wedding anniversary of Hendrick Pannebecker and Eve Umstat, in Germantown, Pennsylvania in the year 1699. In the words of the Steering Committee of the reunion, "We hope that the 1999 Pfannebecker-Umstat Reunion will lead to the growth of a family association, which will provide a forum for conversation, collection and preservation of information, and a sense of lasting community among the heirs of this rich cultural heritage."