Erie Canal

Research Guide

SCOPE

This guide is intended to assist in identifying the types of materials and information available in the Rochester Public Library’s Local History Division regarding the Erie Canal. In addition to these examples the department houses similar Erie Canal materials not listed here.

The Local History Division's materials are not available for circulation. They may be viewed at their 2nd floor location at the above address. Note: Restrictions may apply to some forms of use of some of these materials. Many may be copied. For more information or assistance ask at the Division's reference desk.

Other divisions of the Rochester Public Library may have additional materials on the Erie Canal for viewing or checkout.

INTRODUCTION

New Yorkers wanted a less expensive way to transport raw materials and finished goods to and from the interior of the continent, and they wanted an easier travel pathway to the western parts of our new nation. The Erie Canal provided a key to our nation's economic and geographic development. This canal was the most successful 19th century undertaking of its kind in the United States.

Construction of the Erie Canal began on July 4, 1817 with the first shovelful of dirt thrown at Rome, New York. After more than 8 years of labor and a cost of more than 7 million dollars it officially opened on October 26, 1825. Upon completion, a westward surge ensued. Small outposts along the path of the new canal soon became booming cities facilitating transport of the great volume of products between the Great Lakes and New York City. The Erie Canal was the reason New York State became the Empire State. The heyday of the Erie has long since past, but this 524 mile long step back into history has remained a wonderful recreational attraction.


Murphy, Dan, *The Erie Canal: The Ditch That Opened a Nation*. Buffalo, Western New York Wares, 2001
Rinker, Harry L., *The Old Raging Erie... There Have Been Several Changes, A Postcard History of the Erie and Other New York State Canals (1895-1915).* Berkley Heights, New Jersey: Canal Captain’s Press, 1984


*The Edward Backus Method for Propelling Canal Boats by Steam.* Rochester N.Y.: Curtis and Morey & Co, 1868


### Agency and Government Publications on the Erie Canal

Canal Society of New York State, *The Canals of Western Onondaga County, Field Trip Guide,* October 1-3, 1999


Canal Society Of New York State, *Erie Canal Buffalo to Lockport, Field Trip, October 3, 1987*


New York State Canal Recreationway Commission, *New York State Canal Recreationway Plan, 1995*


The Erie Canal is shown on many maps in the Local History Division's map collection. Check the map case index, under your subject heading, in the Local History Division to see all available maps.

Some original maps have become brittle and fragile and require librarian assistance - ask at the Division's reference desk.

Several of the Division's maps have been digitized and are available online. [https://roccitylibrary.org/](https://roccitylibrary.org/)

1. Select ‘Local History’ tab
2. Select ‘Rochester Images’
3. Select ‘Search for Images’
4. Type “Erie Canal Map” in the search box

**MEMORABILIA**

L/H Document Case
Case 10 shelf 6

Consignment of Merchandise Record Book 1825-1826

L/H Document Case
Case 13 shelf 1

Report of Canal Board; Petition of Paul Knight, building sawmill would be injurious to aqueduct.

Please ask at the reference desk for access to these materials.

**MICROFILM**

L/H Rr386.4809
H976e
Microfilm

Erie Canal from a Survey by Holmes Hutchinson. 1834

L/H Rr627.1309
N532n

New York State Canal Construction. 23 reels of microfilm

**NEWSPAPER ARTICLES AND CLIPPINGS**

Local Newspaper Index: 1818-1850 (C) Canal


Local Newspaper Index: 1818-1850 (E) Erie Canal

Local Newspaper Index: 1851-1897 (E) Erie Canal

http://www.libraryweb.org/~digitized/newsindex/1851-1897/Index24ENT-FIL.pdf

**ONLINE RESOURCES**

The online resources for the Monroe County Library System are available through this website. [https://roccitylibrary.org/](https://roccitylibrary.org/) Select the blue tab “Local History” and then select what you wish to view. Hint…’Digital Collections’ then “browse all collections” is a great place to start.

*Rochester History* is a long-running journal that covers the history of Rochester and western New York. This link will take you to the index starting with the letter E. Scroll down to find Erie Canal [http://www.libraryweb.org/~rochhist/indexe.htm](http://www.libraryweb.org/~rochhist/indexe.htm)

Local History Link -- History of the Erie Canal -- includes links to the official New York State Canal System site and to other canal sites [http://www.history.rochester.edu/canal/index.htm](http://www.history.rochester.edu/canal/index.htm)

**PAMPHLETS**

Pamphlets are located in these three boxes. Ask a librarian for assistance.

- RVF2 Canals - Erie and Barge (2 folders)
- RVF2 Canals – Genesee Valley
- RVF2 Canals – New York State System

**PERIODICALS**

*Rochester History* is a newsletter published by the Rochester City Historian. Many articles containing information about the Erie Canal are from as early as 1939. These newsletters are available for viewing in the Local History Division.

These newsletters are also available online at [http://www.libraryweb.org/~rochhist/indexe.htm](http://www.libraryweb.org/~rochhist/indexe.htm)

This index can be used to locate other subjects alphabetically, such as: A-Aqueduct, C-Canal, B-Barge Canal System.

Also see the Newspapers section in this guide.
PHOTOGRAPHS

Early original photographs and copies of photographs showing scenes of the Erie Canal are available in the folders listed below. Ask a librarian for assistance.

- RPF1  Canal – Erie - General
- RPF1  Canals – Erie – Aqueduct
- RPF2  Canals – Erie – General
- RPF2  Canals – Erie – Aqueduct (Folders 1 and 2)
- RPF2  Canals – Erie – Locks
- RPF2  Canal – Genesee Valley
- RFP1  Floods - Folder (Folders 1, 2 and 3)

POSTCARDS

Postcards are available in the Postcard File. Ask a librarian for assistance.

- Canals, Barge
- Canals, Erie-Aqueduct
- Canals, Erie General

SUBJECT HEADINGS

The library has sorted materials into the following specific subject headings. You may want to use these phrases when reviewing indexes (or conducting searches).

- Erie Canal
- Barge Canal
- Erie Aqueduct
- Aqueduct
- Genesee Valley
- Floods
- Boats, Ships, Canal Boats