Erie Eats

May 15—Oct 31, 2021

Weighlock Gallery

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THE ERIE CANAL MUSEUM

Erie Eats

The Erie Canal Foodways Project

Welcome to *Erie Eats*, a look at the history of food and drink on and along the Erie Canal over the course of its 200 year history. Food is the most basic building block of human life. We all need it to survive and thrive. But where does our food come from? How does it get to where we can eat it? Who decides what products will be available to us to eat?

The answers to all of these questions, for people in Upstate New York and throughout the United States, were radically transformed by the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825 and continued to change dramatically over the next 200 years as the Canal itself changed. Agriculture, industry, social life, government, and culture were all tremendously impacted by the convergence of the Erie Canal with foodways, as they also influenced how the Canal and communities along its banks developed. We invite you to explore this fascinating story with us and perhaps think a bit more about what your own food history says.

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What Can ARTIFACTS Tells Us?

Artifacts can tell us many stories if we ask the right questions. For example, this simple shipping receipt for "1 Turkey Wild" tells us many things about the world that the Erie Canal helped shape. Let's ask a few questions and see what they tell us.

Where is it from?

This receipt was produced in Aurora, NY, on Cayuga Lake, which was linked to the New York Canal System by the Cayuga Seneca Canal. It was built shortly after the Erie's completion as a way to connect the Finger Lakes to the Erie. This single turkey was being shipped all the way to New York City, a distance of several hundred mile. This journey shows just how closely linked the Canal Corridor in Upstate New York had become to a broader trade network and how canals made it possible to quickly move goods over large distances.

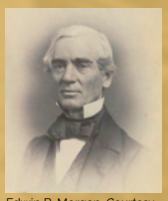
When is it from?

November 3rd, 1856. This date leads us to another question: Could the turkey have been for Thanksgiving dinner?

If versed in the history of Thanksgiving you might think no, as it didn't become a yearly national observance until 1863. However, New York's first official Thanksgiving was declared by DeWitt Clinton in 1817, celebrating the bounties of New York that were about to open. The Erie Canal began construction in July of that year. So, while we'll never know for sure what the exact purpose of this turkey was, it very well might have graced a New York City Thanksgiving table.

Who was involved in making this artifact?

This receipt is from the forwarding firm of Morgan and Mosher, founded by Allen Mosher and the brothers Henry and Edwin B. Morgan in 1856. One of the partners in this business, E.B. Morgan, eventually became the first President of Wells Fargo, as well as one of the original investors in The New York Times, an early director of American Express, and a trustee of Cornell University. He even served in Congress! Clearly, looking a little bit deeper into this object reveals the incredible social and economic mobility that the Erie Canal presented.



Edwin B. Morgan. *Courtesy of the Library of Congress*

The receipt is for delivery to E.E. Charles, who we know practically nothing about, other than his address in New York City. It is important to remember that artifacts cannot tell us everything and always beg for further research by future historians.

As you move through this exhibit, try to ask questions about the different artifacts you see.

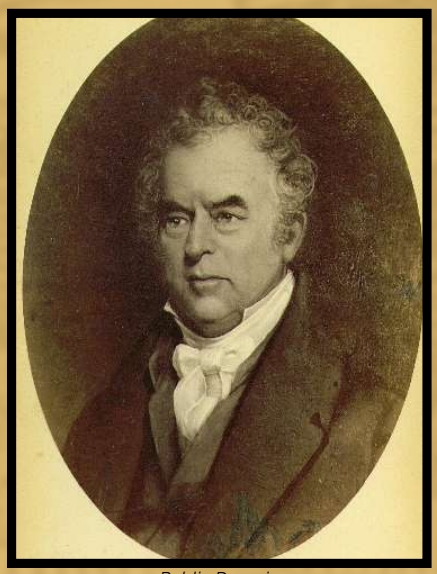
What are FOODWAYS?
Why the ERIE CANAL?

Foodways are the cultural, social, and economic practices relating to the production and consumption of food. Foodways often refer to the intersection of food in culture, traditions, and history.

Upstate New York has a long history with food dating back to the end of the last Ice Age, when the first people came here to hunt migrating caribou on the shores of an ancient glacial lake. More recently, the Haudenosaunee (also known as the Iroquois) built a vibrant confederacy encompassing much of Upstate with a rich food history. Few things transformed the foodways of Upstate New York, as well as the nation, as much as the construction of the Erie Canal, cutting across the state from Albany to Buffalo, between 1817 and 1825. This waterway, the first efficient transportation route across the Appalachian Mountains, radically transformed how everyone interacted with food. Some thrived while others had their lives totally upended to devastating effect. Over the last 200 years, this transformation has been an unceasing process that continues today. In this exhibit, you will learn about this saga and find that the topic of foodways on the Erie Canal is broad and exciting, with a national scope.

Jesse Hawley's Foodway Connection

The origins of the Erie Canal and foodways are closely linked in a number of ways. One of the most glaring examples of this can be seen in one of the earliest proposals for the Canal: Jesse Hawley's Hercules letters. These letters, written in 1807, are often credited with stirring the public to support a canal connecting the Hudson River and Lake Erie. Their author, Jesse Hawley, started a business to mill and sell flour in Geneva that unfortunately failed due to the difficulty and expense of transporting flour from Upstate to markets. As a result, he was forced into debtor's prison, where he wrote the Hercules letters as a solution to the transportation problems that had led him there.



Public Domain

Diversity in the Details

The scope of this project is enormous, as there are so many things we take for granted about how food gets onto our plates and how that process has changed over time. You will discover how unique and important the Canal Corridor is and has been in America's culinary history.

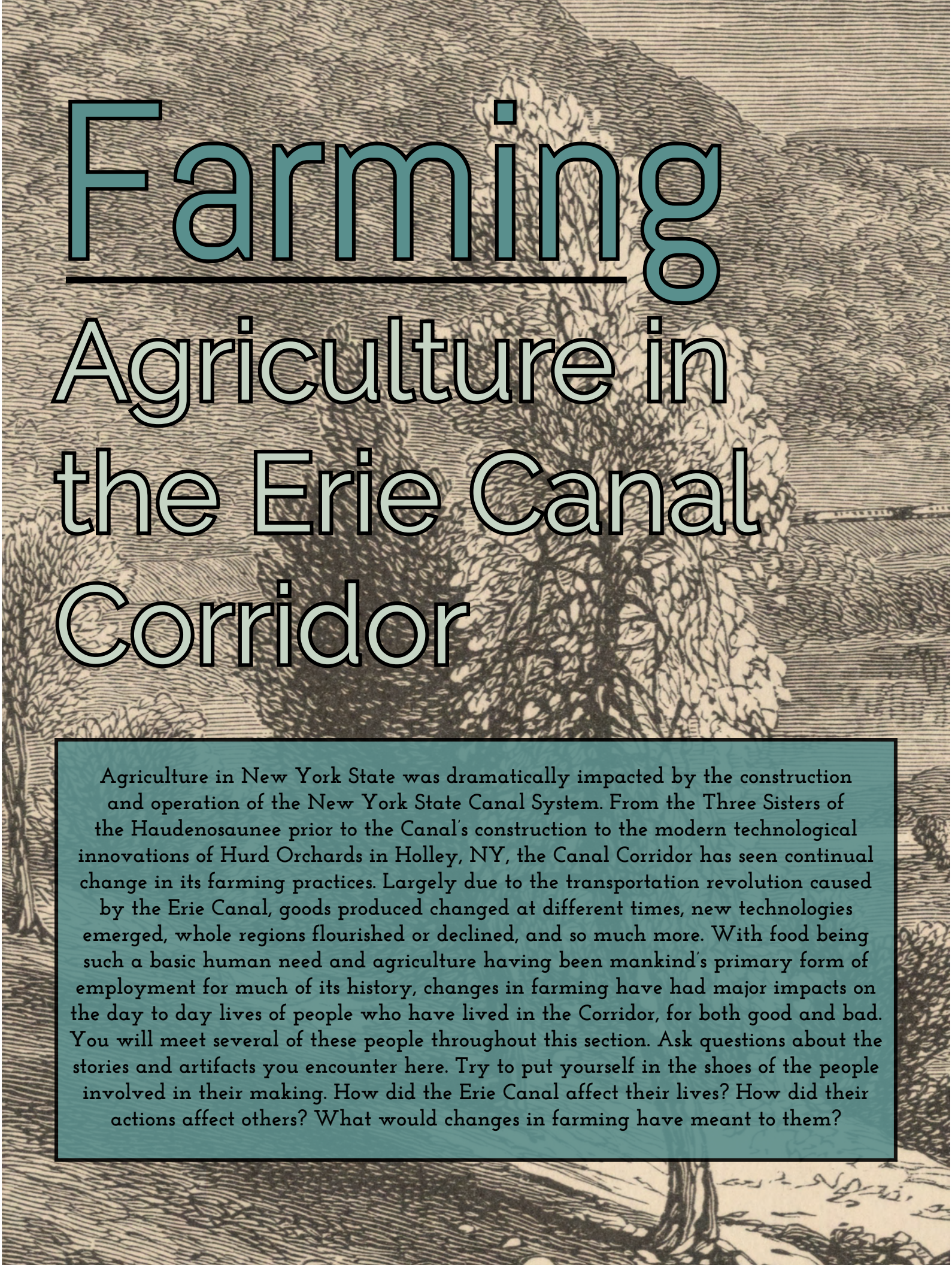
You'll meet people like:

- The Hurd family, who settled in Holley, NY to set up a produce brokerage in anticipation of the Erie Canal opening and whose orchard still thrives today thanks to new innovations on the Canal
- Angela Ferguson, who, with the Onondaga Nation, is attempting to restore foodways devastated by the Canal
- Franklin D. Roosevelt, who ate a few meals on the canal
- Oliver Wendell Petrie, the teetotalling sailor
- FX Matt, the immigrant beer baron whose descendants still remain at the forefront of Upstate New York brewing
- And many others!

You'll see how Erie Canal foodways, along with several other factors:

- Created the nation's first boomtown
- Fed the nation's first tourists
- Contributed to the women's rights movement
- Allowed Upstate New York communities to continue to thrive 200 years after its opening
- And so much more!

Remember that this history continues everyday in what we all eat and drink. There has never been one single story, no grand narrative experienced exactly the same way by every person on and along the Canal, and there never will be. By learning and thinking about the foodways of the past we can hopefully gain a better understanding of where we are today and where we might go.



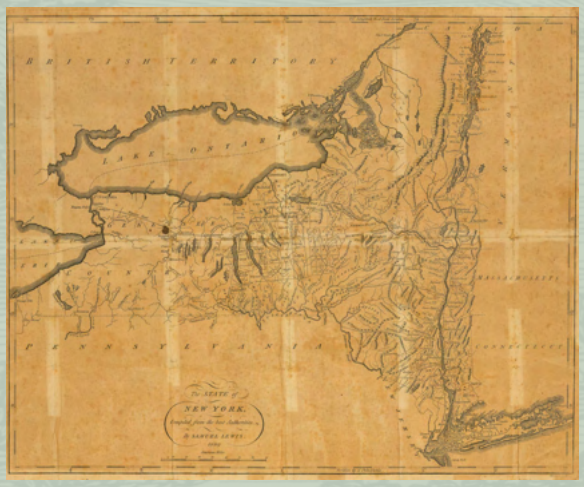
Farming

Agriculture in the Erie Canal Corridor

Agriculture in New York State was dramatically impacted by the construction and operation of the New York State Canal System. From the Three Sisters of the Haudenosaunee prior to the Canal's construction to the modern technological innovations of Hurd Orchards in Holley, NY, the Canal Corridor has seen continual change in its farming practices. Largely due to the transportation revolution caused by the Erie Canal, goods produced changed at different times, new technologies emerged, whole regions flourished or declined, and so much more. With food being such a basic human need and agriculture having been mankind's primary form of employment for much of its history, changes in farming have had major impacts on the day to day lives of people who have lived in the Corridor, for both good and bad. You will meet several of these people throughout this section. Ask questions about the stories and artifacts you encounter here. Try to put yourself in the shoes of the people involved in their making. How did the Erie Canal affect their lives? How did their actions affect others? What would changes in farming have meant to them?

Agriculture Before the Canal

Agriculture was practiced in Upstate New York long before the Erie Canal was built. The Haudenosaunee, the Indigenous people who have lived in much of what is now the Canal Corridor for centuries, have a long tradition of farming centered around the Three Sisters, which was greatly disrupted by the construction of the Erie Canal and the mass movement of settlers into the region afterwards. However, even before the Canal arrived, sections of the Canal Corridor were also being cultivated by European colonists and later, early American settlers, who themselves have an important history to understand in order to illustrate the transforming effects of the Erie Canal on food history.



Map of New York, 1809. Note the settlements along the Mohawk River and the Military Tracts carved out in Central New York. *Erie Canal Museum Collections*

European settlers began moving into what would become the Canal Corridor in the 17th century, establishing small farms over the next 150 years. The region's poor transportation caused early settlers to generally grow just enough to support their families. These farmers introduced European crops to the Mohawk Valley, notably wheat, as well as livestock. They also learned a great deal from the Haudenosaunee, including how to grow corn and how to use maple sap to make edible products. For much of the 18th century, European settlement did not extend much further west than Rome. This changed after the genocidal Sullivan Campaign in 1779 destroyed much of the Haudenosaunee homeland, leading to a wave of American settlers, whose demand for a more efficient route to market ultimately resulted in the Erie Canal.

The Haudenosaunee

At the core of Haudenosaunee farming are the Three Sisters: corn, beans, and squash, which are planted together in mounds. In the Onondaga language they are called 'Johehko,' which means "they sustain us." Traditionally, most agricultural work among the Haudenosaunee was done by women, with men clearing the land and hunting. In addition to the Three Sisters, the Haudenosaunee have grown many other crops including strawberries, sunflowers, and leeks, plus they make syrup and sugar from maple trees.

The Three Sisters: corn, beans, and squash. *Courtesy of the Ska-nonh Great Law of Peace Center*

Slavery was introduced to New York in 1626 and was only fully abolished in 1827. Enslaved labor played a prominent role in New York's early farming, with about 1/3 of rural households including at least one enslaved person as late as 1810. Thomas James was born into slavery in Canajoharie in 1804. He did farm work until 1821, when his labor rights were traded for farm equipment and livestock. Shortly afterwards, he followed the route of the Erie Canal, then under construction, to Canada and freedom. He returned to the Canal a few years later, working at a canalside warehouse in Rochester, before becoming a prominent abolitionist minister.

Thomas James. *Public Domain*

Farming Along Clinton's Ditch

Even before the Erie Canal fully opened in 1825, its ease of transportation began to radically transform New York State's agriculture, as well as the rest of the county's farming practices. New lands were easily accessed by settlers, as were markets to farmers. Quickly, the agricultural production of Upstate New York began to change, reflecting these trends.

Settlers flocked to the new Canal Corridor to farm. Here we see the Mohawk Valley several decades after the Canal's completion, covered with farmland but very few trees. *9.08*

The land and climate along the Canal was excellent for farming. People flocked to the region due to its agricultural possibilities, primarily growing wheat. Before the Canal's construction, a ton of wheat took nearly a month to reach New York City from Buffalo at the cost of $100. Following the Canal's completion, it only took one week and cost less than $10. The Genesee Valley soon became the nation's breadbasket, producing hundreds of thousands of bushels of wheat a year.

This growth came at a cost though, as the demand for prime farmland led early settlers and the state government to repeatedly dishonor agreements with the Haudenosaunee and force them onto smaller and smaller reservations. Farming requires vast amounts of open land. When settlers began arriving in Upstate New York they found a land covered with trees. Settler dealt with this by girdling the trees, cutting off bark from the tree's trunk to kill it, or by cutting down trees. The wood could be used as a building material or heat source, or burnt to ashes then used as fertilizer. Money made this way helped farm families make it through the first few years of establishing a farm. The end result was environmentally disastrous though, with much of the Canal Corridor totally deforested by the 1850s.

The Canal's opening changed the agriculture of regions away from its banks as well. Farmers in New England, as well as New York's Southern Tier and St. Lawrence River Valley, could no longer compete with Canal Corridor farms, whose fertile soil and cheap transportation gave them a major advantage. The Hudson River Valley farmers, once important producers of wheat, transitioned to higher value goods like apples and dairy to remain competitive. Around the Great Lakes, the process of American settlement and Indigenous land dispossession began from Ohio to Minnesota as settlers looked to farm the Midwest's fertile soil, now connected to the East Coast by the Canal.

Abundant, cheap farmland along the Erie Canal attracted settlers from throughout America, causing major upheavals in not just New York's agriculture. *00.104*

Farming During the Enlarged Era

A decade after the Erie Canal's completion, traffic was so heavy that New York State authorized an expansion of the Canal to nearly double its size, allowing boats carrying almost 250 tons of goods to pass through the state. Farmers were able to move their products to market even more efficiently and cheaply as a result. Other states, especially around the Great Lakes, began building their own canals. None of those canals were as successful, but what happened along the Erie occurred in the Midwest, and that region soon became the nation's primary grain producing region. Like farmers in the Hudson River Valley when the Canal Corridor began to produce cheaper wheat, the rest of Upstate New York transitioned to produce more high value products, transforming New York into the most agriculturally productive and diverse state in the United States well into the 1870s.

Farmers transitioned to higher value products as American agriculture expanded. One such product was apples, now New York's state fruit, seen here ready for shipment on the Canal in Medina. *20.01*

Postcards from the turn of the 20th century help reveal just how diverse the Canal Corridor's agriculture was. *69.939.3, L81.18.21, 79.81.20*

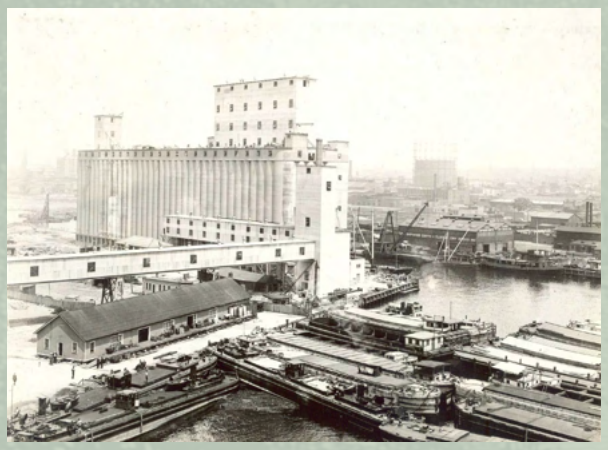
New York farmers in the mid-nineteenth century began to specialize in high value fruits, vegetables, dairy products, and even flowers. Communities throughout the state developed unique identities around the specific products. Farmers kept their prices competitive thanks to the efficient transportation offered by the Canal System as well as inexpensive immigrant labor, which flooded down the Canal Corridor. By 1850, 1/3 of Erie County's population was German by birth, with many new migrants working on farms. Several communities on or near the Canal adopted nicknames calling themselves the "_____ Capital of the World." Lyons was peppermint, Canastota celery and then onions, Little Falls was cheese, and Phelps sauerkraut. Rochester saw its nickname change from the "Flour City" to the "Flower City" as it transitioned from milling wheat to become home of some of the nation's largest plant nurseries.

Gardening became popular along the Canal, including at locks, where lock tenders planted gardens near locks to sell fresh produce and flowers to canallers. To the left, we see the grand garden of Victor A. Putman in Aurieville, as well as the canalside store where some of his produce was likely sold. *80.23.2*

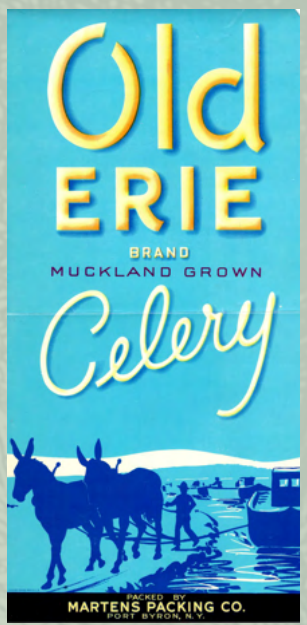
Decline & Renewal

As railroads and roadways outpaced canals in the early 20th century, the importance of canals, and also New York State, to agriculture diminished, due to improved transportation networks linking most corners of the nation together, including much more fertile lands. However, plenty of farms have survived and continue to thrive today, in part thanks to the Erie Canal. Recently, the Canal Corridor has seen a rebirth in agriculture as consumers began to think more about the source, health, and history of their food.

At the turn of the 20th century many in New York, including Governor Theodore Roosevelt, worried that if the Erie Canal was abandoned, which seemed like a very real possibility, railroads would have a monopoly on shipping goods, especially grain, to the mills and ports of New York. Rather than allowing this to happen, New York invested in constructing the large Barge Canal, today's New York Canal System. Evidence of the importance of grain to this project can be seen in the massive grain elevators built in Buffalo, Oswego, and Brooklyn to store this essential staple brought down the Canal. At its peak in 1931, the Barge Canal saw 1.2 million tons of grain move down its waters along with many other edible products like apples, onions, and even eels! Still, New York farmers found it hard to compete in the national market and farming declined in the state.



Massive grain elevators like the one built for the canal terminal at Gowanus Bay in Brooklyn offer proof of the importance agricultural products still played in the Barge Canal era.
Erie Canal Museum Collection



PC 2013.15.44

The 20th century saw many innovations in agriculture. Some of these innovations proved controversial, however, and by the end of the century a large body of consumers questioned just what and where their food came from. Additionally, consumers began to seek more unique and healthy options for their diets. This trend has proved a boon for many New York farmers,who have capitalized on the desire to eat local and eat healthy. Others, like Beardslee Water Buffalo Company in Little Falls, have focused on unique high value products. Agritourism has also boomed, with thousands flocking to farms to learn more about the food they eat and enjoy the simple pleasures of farm life.

The Erie Canal's construction severely disrupted Haudenosaunee foodways, causing untold amounts of damage. In recent decades the Indigenous food sovereignty movement has attempted to redress these historical issues and create independent food systems for Indigenous communities using traditional knowledge, values, and wisdom. At the Onondaga Nation Farm, Angela Ferguson is leading that community's attempt to reclaim their foodways. In 2019, as part of this effort, thousands of seeds were collected from ancient crop variants, including a 4,000 year old strain of corn, for future use and preservation.

Tina Hill Thomas of the Onondaga Nation, Eel Clan with Haudenosaunee White Corn.
Courtesy of the Ska-nonh Great Law of Peace Center

Innovation on the Canal

The Canal, with its efficiency, competition, easy communication, and spirit of optimism, transformed the Canal Corridor into a natural incubator for innovation, especially in its largest industry: agriculture.

Much has been done by New York State to encourage innovation in agriculture. One of the primary ways this was done was through fairs, where people from across the state could come together to see the latest practices in agriculture and share information with each other. When the Canal's Middle Section opened in July of 1820, a fair was held in Salina, just to the North of Syracuse, showcasing the produce of New York's western counties. In addition to his support of canals in New York, DeWitt Clinton was a major proponent of fairs, with the State Board of Agriculture founded during his governorship in 1819 to help stimulate county fairs. The New York State Agricultural Society, founded in 1832, hosted the first New York State Fair in Syracuse in 1841. The fair rotated throughout the state until 1889, when Syracuse was selected as the permanent location. The Great New York State Fair still exists today, now operated by the State and held annually on the shores of Onondaga Lake, and still prominently features the agricultural produce of the state.

View of the New York State Fair in Albany, 1859. *Erie Canal Museum Collection*

Illustration of prize winning poultry at 1850 New York State Fair in Utica. *Erie Canal Museum Collection*

Advertisement for flour demonstration at the New York State Fair in Syracuse. *00.1104*

Tractor demonstration at the New York State Fair in Syracuse. *68.142.2*

72.31.1

Following the Canal's opening, agricultural innovation boomed as people looked to make newly opened lands even more productive. One of the earliest inventions to sweep the Canal Corridor, indeed the whole country, was the cast-iron plow designed by Jethro Wood of Cayuga County in 1819. This invention revolutionized the industry, with the metal plow being much more effective and durable than previous versions. Plow production remained a major industry along the Canal Corridor, including at the Syracuse Chilled Plow Company, founded in 1876, as would the manufacture of other agricultural implements.

63.31.12

77.57.21A

Innovation was further fueled through the foundation of organizations like the New York State Grange Society and Cornell University, originally created to focus on "agriculture and the mechanical arts," which it has certainly accomplished, helping to develop a number of food related inventions, including the chicken nugget!

Reimagining the Canal

As the Erie Canal commemorates the bicentennial of its construction between 1817 and 1825, New York State has begun the Reimagine the Canals Initiative, which looks to keep the Erie Canal relevant for the next 200 years. Part of that initiative has looked at a number of ways in which New Yorkers grow and harvest their food to make more sustainable and profitable foodways along the Canal's banks.

Western New York Irrigation Project

In 1817, Luther Hurd settled in Holley to establish a fruit brokerage on the soon to be constructed Erie Canal. Since the early 20th century, New York State has issued permits for farmers to draw water out of the Barge Canal for irrigation. In 1927, Luther's descendants were issued just such a permit, which they have now utilized for nearly a century to irrigate their orchards. Irrigation systems like these have been a boon for those who use them. In 2017, a team led by Dr. Stephen Shaw of SUNY ESF identified that the Erie Canal's use in irrigation could be greatly expanded to help protect Western New York farmers from the projected impacts of global climate change and allow more farmers to produce high value crops. A project is now underway to do just that.

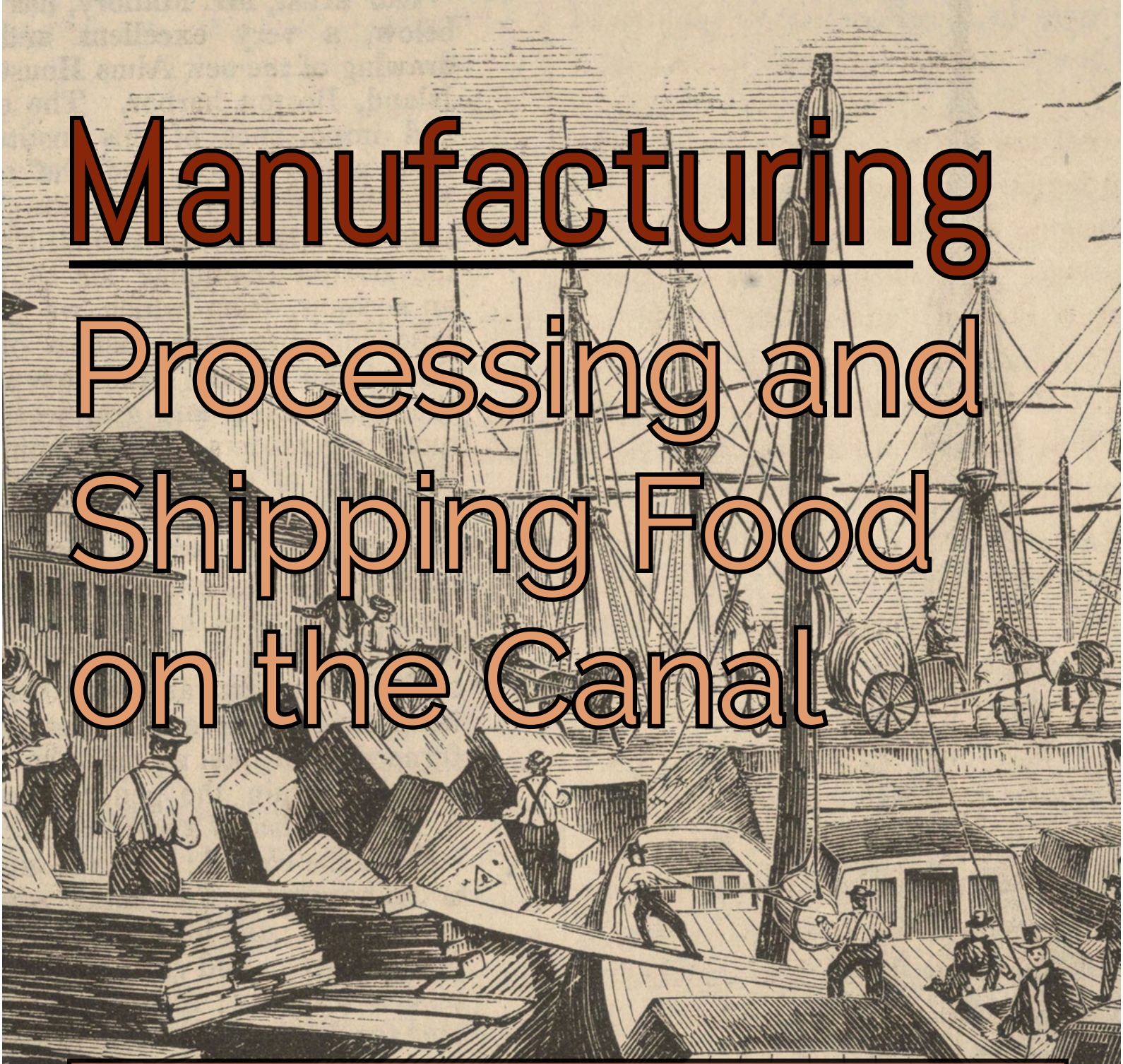
Courtesy of Lenny Pridatko and New York Power Authority

Courtesy of the New York Power Authority

Fishing has long been practiced along the Canal Corridor. Sturgeon was once so plentiful that it was referred to as "Albany beef." Water pollution and overfishing decimated New York's fish populations. Reforms in the late 20th century, like the Clean Water Act and Environmental Protection Act, have allowed the state's fisheries to rebound and responsible fishing has turned into a multi-billion dollar industry. In Western New York, the Erie Canal passes over many rich fishing streams, which see millions of fish swim upstream to breed. In cooperation with the New York State Department of Conservation, the New York State Canal Corporation has begun systematically releasing canal water into these streams in order to have the volume of water needed to extend the amount of time fish can live in them and therefore extend the time that anglers can enjoy the region's fishing.

Manufacturing

Processing and Shipping Food on the Canal



The Erie Canal was truly revolutionary for New York and the United States, ushering in an era of transportation, communication, and industrial revolutions. Upstate New York, where the Canal passed through, as well as the Great Lakes Basin and New York City, the two ultimate destinations of the Canal, all saw explosions of growth following the canal's opening. Spurred by the easy transportation provided by the Erie's waters, the Canal became known as the "Mother of Cities," as places like Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, and Utica boomed. Also contributing to this growth was the formation of new industry in these communities, often centered around the production of processed food products or related goods.

Mills

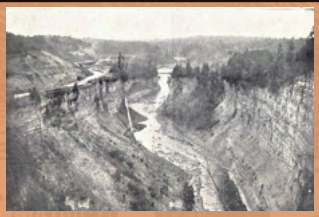
New York is home to many natural waterways, which generate significant amounts of natural energy. Once the Erie Canal came through, communities began to take advantage of this power by building mills. One of the first and most important industries to spring up along the Canal was flour milling - the process of turning grain into flour. Rochester, on the Genesee River's High Falls, became the nation's first boomtown when the Canal opened in 1823. Becoming known as the Flour City, Rochester ground about 25,000 bushels of wheat everyday during its peak in the 1850s. Many other communities along the Canal also developed large flour mills, including Syracuse, which was home to the large Empire State Mills.

The Falls of the Genesee made Rochester the center of the nation's flour milling industry. *10.01*

In addition to the power from natural waterways, excess Erie Canal water was also used to power mills, though millers needed special permission from the State. In Lockport, where the canal overcomes the 70 ft high Niagara Escarpment, Lyman Spalding recognized the potential offered by this massive change in elevation and established a successful flour mill. However, he found that this water source was more unreliable than expected, as a court ruled that his neighbors had rights to the water instead of him and periodic drainings of the Canal forced him to economic ruin multiple times.

Excess water from locks, like those at Lockport, could provide significant power for mills. *PC 88112.33*

To feed the increasing demand of flour mills, the state constructed one of its most ambitious canals: the Genesee Valley Canal. This canal was intended to improve the connection between the Flour City of Rochester and the fertile Upper Genesee Valley. Passing at one point along the rim of what is now Letchworth State Park's famous gorge, the canal was an engineering marvel, but also an economic failure by the time it was fully operational in 1862. To feed this canal with water, large reservoirs had to be constructed. One of these reservoirs was Cuba Lake, which illegally submerged hundreds of acres of one of the three remaining Seneca reservations.



The Genesee Valley Canal winds along the Genesee Valley Gorge. *PC 88112.33*

As grain production in the United States shifted farther west, the Canal Corridor still played an essential role in milling flour. Like the grain production itself, the milling industry also moved west, with Buffalo, more easily accessible to Great Lakes grain boats, overtaking Rochester as the Canal's primary mill town. By 1900, Buffalo was considered the "Queen City of the Great Lakes," as the ninth largest city in America and home to massive operations by companies like Gold Medal Flour and General Mills.

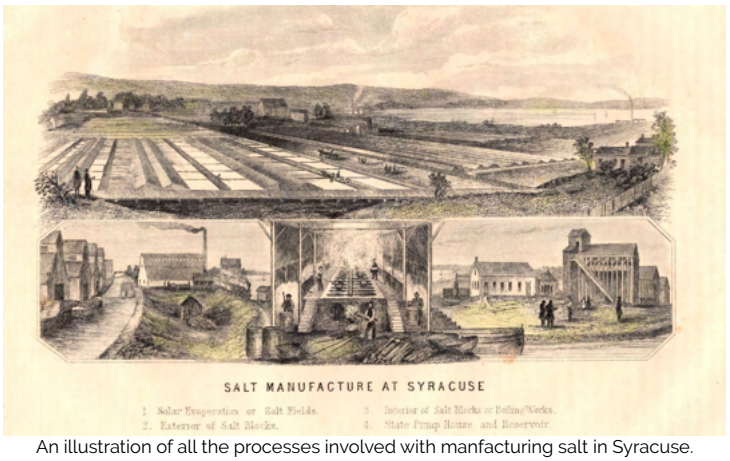
Buffalo's location on the Great Lakes made it a major grain hub as the 19th century progressed. *73.77.8*

Salt

Salt has been used for centuries to preserve food and is essential for life. Therefore, salt has played an immensely important role in the history of food and foodways. The Erie Canal's history is no exception to this, and salt was vital to the Canal's operation and success. It is especially relevant to the Erie Canal Museum's hometown, Syracuse, which became known the world over as the Salt City.

An inland sea once existed where Central New York is located. Its drying created massive underground salt deposits around Onondaga Lake, which came to the surface in natural springs. These springs were well known for centuries and after the Revolution settlers began moving to the "Salt Lake" to make salt. Many of these early salt producers, like James Geddes and Comfort Tyler, also became early supporters of the Erie Canal and played critical roles in its engineering and operation.

As soon as the Canal partially opened in 1820, the salt industry boomed. Taxes in salt were essential for the Canal's construction and maintenance. Approximately one third of the Canal's initial $7 million dollar price tag was paid for by salt taxes and, as the salt industry grew to eventually produce 90% of the nation's salt, millions more dollars were generated in tolls to pay for the Canal System's maintenance.



An illustration of all the processes involved with manfacturing salt in Syracuse.
00.2342

Salt brine around Onondaga Lake was originally boiled to separate the salt from the water. As firewood became scarce, Syracuse salt work began using solar evaporation. Salt brine was put into large pans that water evaporated from when left in the sun. Salt was essential for the production of food products like cheese, ham, sauerkraut, and pickles. Syracuse's salt industry also created one of the Canal Corridor's most famous dishes, salt potatoes, which were first created when German and Irish immigrants working the salt blocks tossed potatoes into the boiling salt vats to cook. The result was the salt encrusted treat many Central New Yorkers still enjoy today.

Canning & Food Processing

The glass mason jar and the tin can were both new inventions in the nineteenth century that dramatically changed how Americans interacted with food, allowing them to be transported over greater distances without the need of salt or ice. Many canneries sprang up along the banks of the Canal to utilize this new technology and the easy transportation offered by the Canal.

Lewis Merrill and Oscar Soule began a cannery in Syracuse processing vegetables in 1868. This operation eventually grew to include 26 different canning factories, several of them located on the Erie Canal, including in Chittenango. The company became especially famous for its brand of condensed mince meat "None Such," which was made in Syracuse until 1981. It also produced an early condensed milk, called Klim, and made several innovations in canning vegetables like corn and pumpkins.

None Such Mince Meat advertisements proudly proclaimed the product's Syracuse roots. *00.318.18*

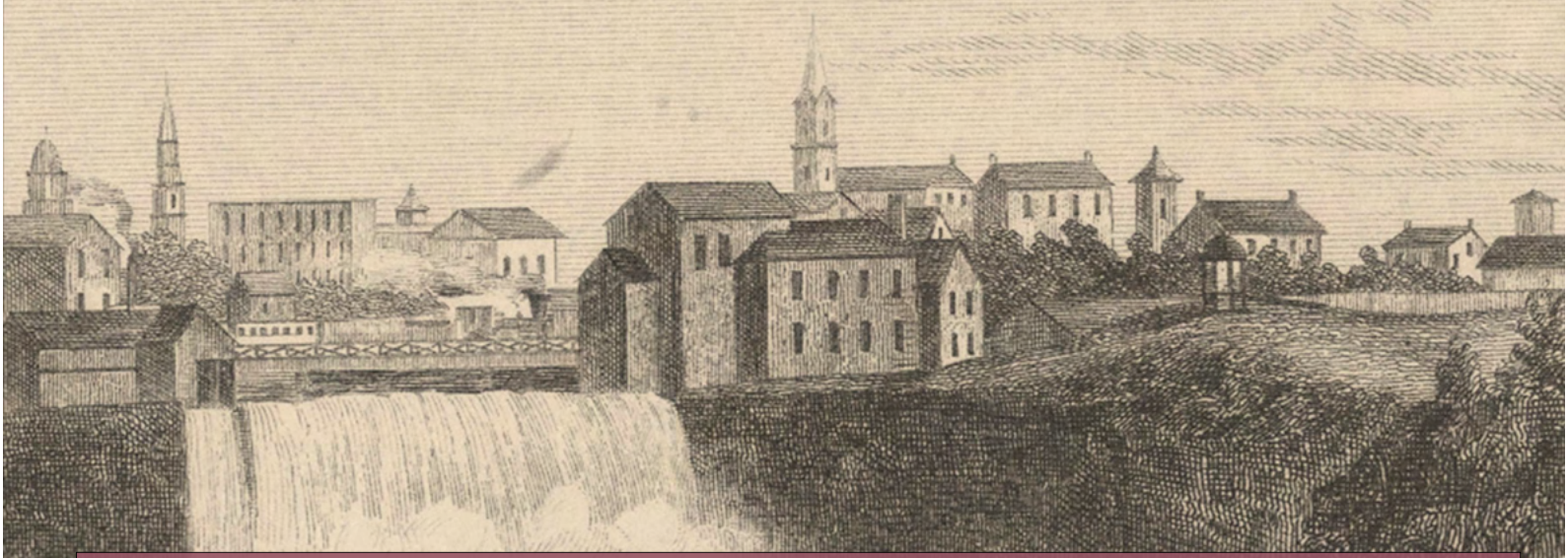
Beech Nut's massive canalside plant in Canajoharie, was a major employer in the Mohawk Valley for a century. *79.52.829*

One of the largest canneries on the Erie Canal was the Beech-Nut factory in Canajoharie, where it was founded as the Imperial Packing Company in 1891. This company patented one of the the first ever vacuum sealed jars in order to store bacon. This product was an almost immediate success, and it was followed by many other successful lines, including Beech-Nut Chewing Gum, and a line of baby food products that continues to be successful today.

Meat processing and packing was a massive industry along the Canal. It was so prominent, especially the production of ham, that songs were even written about the ubiquitous nature of meat along the Canal, with "Black Rock Pork" suggesting it was all the crew had to eat between Buffalo and Albany. Several large meat packing operations formed in Canal communities, often founded by German immigrants. This was the case with Syracuse's famous Hofmann Sausage Company, founded in 1879 by Frank Hofmann, originally of Bromberg, which continues to operate right here in Syracuse.

Hofmann's exhibition at the New York State Fair showing the variety of products produced by this one Canal Corridor meat packer. *Courtesy of Hofmann Sausage Co.*

Alcohol and the Canal



One industry that exemplifies the changes wrought by the Erie Canal and that itself has affected the Corridor's development is the alcohol industry, especially the production of beer.

Early settlers in Upstate New York quickly discovered that the region had the perfect climate for the production of many products necessary for making different types of alcohol. The Genesee and Mohawk Valley, had the fertile soils and easy access to water needed to grow barley and corn for whiskey. The Fingers Lakes create a microclimate that is perfect for grape growing and therefore wine making. Lake Ontario's climate lent itself to fruit cultivation, which could be turned into cider, and the hills of Central New York proved ideal for hops, essential for beer. Once the Canal provided easy access to larger markets, the region was poised to become a major alcohol producing region.

The Alcohol Boom

When the Erie Canal opened in 1825, agricultural production skyrocketed from the Hudson River to the westernmost Great Lakes, with farmers flocking to these regions in order to produce for the market economy. However, goods like corn, barley, and fruit were still perishable and sold at relatively low prices. Turning these products into alcoholic beverages largely eliminated the chance of spoilage and those beverages could be sold at higher prices. Thus, the alcohol industry in Canal Era New York boomed. Additional influxes of European immigrants, especially from Ireland and Germany, fueled this growth by bringing new tastes and brewing skills with them from their homelands.

Canal digging at Lockport. *74.8.1*

Alcohol played a major role in the construction of the Erie Canal, as many of the workers who dug the Canal were paid partially in liquor. For contractors, whiskey was much easier to acquire on the frontier than cash, plus it made workers more malleable and willing to do the difficult labor required in canal digging, while also fostered a dependency in the workers for the contractor. During the work day, canal builders were often rationed 12-20 ounces of liquor a day, often issued by a special position called a "jigger boss," and were sometimes compelled to work harder with the promise of additional liquor rations if they reached a specified goal. As can be expected, this amount of alcohol consumed during the working day resulted in many workplace accidents and damaged workers' health.

While in the early 19th century Americans overall drank far more alcohol than today, canallers had a notorious reputation for drinking. In 1835 it was estimated that there were 1500 establishments selling alcohol on the Canal. These establishments often concentrated where boats stopped, in cities and around locks. In Buffalo's waterfront taverns, one of the Canal Corridor's most iconic meals was invented: beef on weck. The sandwich was devised by German tavern keepers who hoped the salty roast beef and extra salty kummelweck rolls would cause patrons to purchase even more alcohol to wash it down.

Illustration of Buffalo waterfront from a German language newspaper. *L83.2.2*

Between 1840-1900 New York grew more hops and brewed more beer than anywhere else in the country, with the number of breweries peaking in 1876 at 393. This was especially concentrated in Central New York, with Oneida, Madison, Otsego, and Onondaga Counties producing 80% of America's hops and 40 breweries operating in Syracuse alone. One of the largest of these was breweries was Greenway's, founded in 1858 by English immigrant John Greenway directly on the banks of the Canal in Syracuse. The Greenway's brewery was enormous, and it produced several types of beer, most famously ale, reflecting Greenway's English tastes. On the city's North Side, many German breweries sprung up, often producing the beer favored by Germans: lager. Directly across the Erie from Greenway's, the Germania Brewing Company opened in 1886, later to become Bartel's, while farther to the north Benedict Haberle established the Haberle Brewing Company in 1857, which became a fierce rival to Greenway's, resulting in the the Lager-Ale "War" of the 1890s.

Hops poured out Central New York to feed gigantic canalside breweries like Greenways. *72.31.1*

Temperance

Alcohol long held a place along the Canal in politics. In 1840, supporters of William Henry Harrison in Syracuse constructed a log cabin, one of the symbols of Harrison's campaign, from which to dispense his other primary symbol: hard cider. However, it was the attempt to ban alcohol, either partially or totally, along the Canal Corridor that had some of the most profound effects on the state and the nation.

The Temperance Movement was a product of the Second Great Awakening, a religious movement that swept over the Canal. It resulted in the growth of many movements that aimed to right the moral wrongs of society, notably abolition, women's rights, and temperance. Along the Canal, temperance reformers tried several methods to eradicate alcohol, forming temperance societies, establishing temperance hotels for abstaining travelers, direct preaching to canallers, and lobbying for new laws. Temperance and women's rights became especially connected, as alcohol and alcoholism were often blamed for a number of issues that impacted women, including domestic abuse and financial ruin.

Onondaga Temperance House, one block north of the Canal in Syracuse. *Courtesy of Library of Congress*

The 18th Amendment and Prohibition were death blows to many breweries, which were already struggling by the early 20th century. This massive canalside brewery in Albany had already closed by the law's implementation. *80.50.1*

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Frances Willard, all of whom spent time as young women within the Canal Corridor, became some of the foremost advocates for both of these reforms. In 1919 both the 18th Amendment, prohibiting the production and sale of alcohol, and the 19th Amendment, giving women the right to vote, were passed, further signaling the interrelationship between these two reforms. Prohibition, which existed until the 18th Amendment's repeal in 1933, proved a death blow to much of New York's alcohol industry. During the era of Prohibition though, the Barge Canal was used extensively for bootlegging operations.

Alcohol's Revival

By the close of the 19th century, new inventions caused the brewing industry to be dominated by enormous breweries, pushing smaller breweries out of business. The hops industry in New York also experienced a severe decline as cheaper hops from the Pacific Northwest, with a superior climate for hops production, flooded the market once improved transportation technology made it viable. An epidemic of downy mildew further decimated the hops industry along the Canal Corridor, effectively killing the industry for the next century.

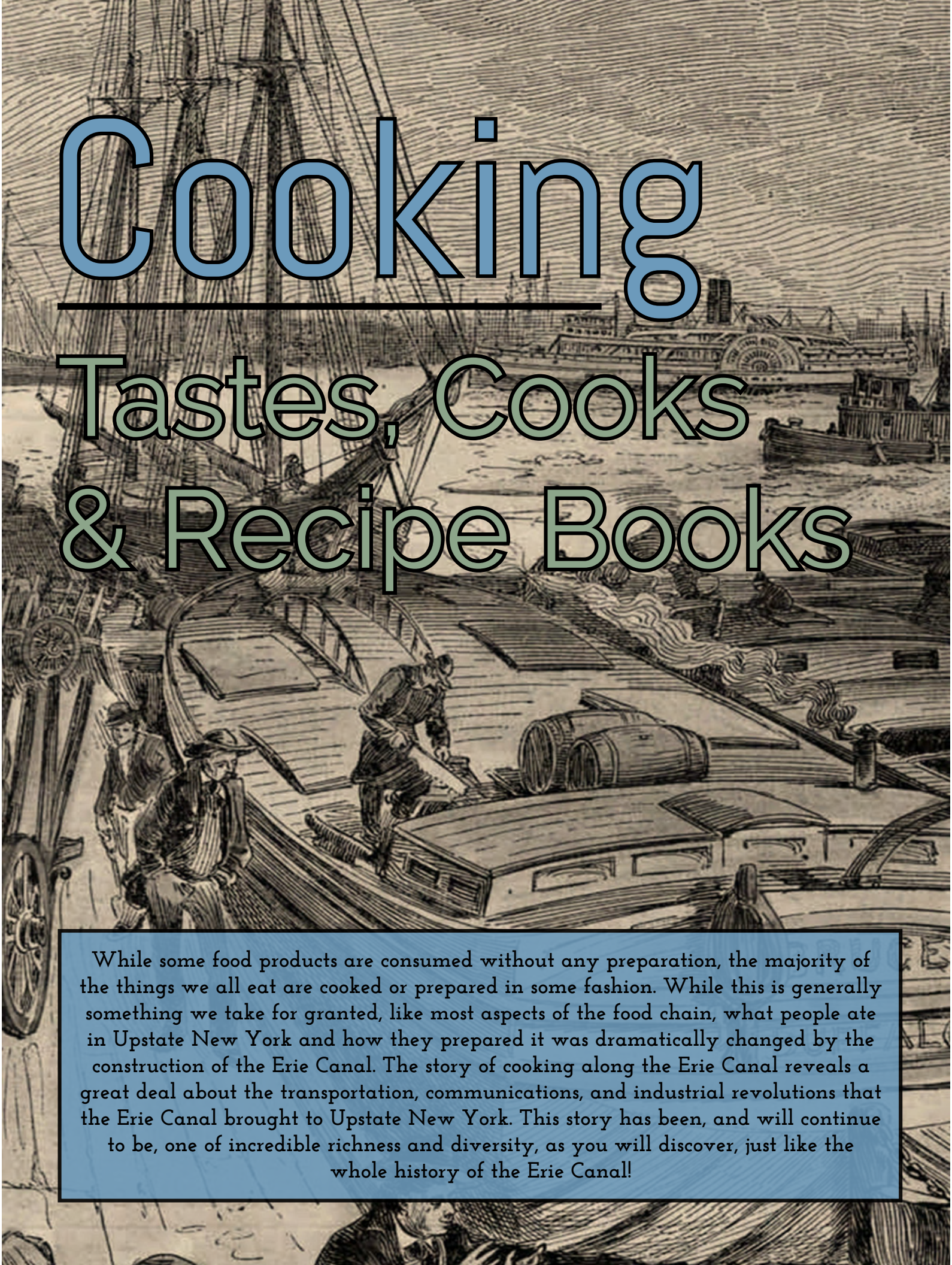
While many breweries were ruined by prohibition some managed to survive by producing alternate items. In the case of Utica's West End Brewing Company, they began making a line of soft drinks known as Utica Club. Following Prohibition's repeal, West End's owner, German immigrant F.X. Matt, quickly transitioned back to producing beer and Utica Club holds the distinction of being the first beer licensed after Prohibition. Other breweries to survive prohibition included Genesee Brewing in Rochester and both Greenway's and Haberle's in Syracuse. Greenway and Haberle closed mid-century, while F.X. Matt and Genesee hung on as popular regional beers, adapting to changes in consumers tastes in the 60s and 70s with cream ales and light beers.

F.X. Matt's (above) and Genesee (below): Two Canal Corridor brewries that survived Prohibition and continue to innovate today!
Courtesy of Library of Congress

Late in the 20th century, some consumers began demanding higher quality and locally produced alcohol. The first industry to adjust in New York was the wine industry, as the Finger Lakes became a major wine destination. To stimulate this industry, the state passed the Farm Winery Act in 1976, allowing wineries to sell their own wines at their facilities. The next industry to make a comeback was brewing, led by the descendants of F.X. Matt. In the mid 1980s the Utica brewery reinvented itself with a new brand of craft beer: Saranac. Saranac is now a major, nationally recognized brand, still operated by the Matt family in Utica. Many more breweries, plus distilleries, followed Saranac's example, especially since the 2012 Farm Brewery Act and 2007 Farm Distillery Act. Today, New York has over 1000 licensed breweries and over one million barrels of beer are produced in the state. This explosion in alcohol production along the Canal Corridor has contributed greatly to the regional tourism industry.

In 2017, Rochester's Genesee Brewing Company, the state's oldest brewery, began expanding and modernizing their facility. Twelve massive tanks required as part of this process were too large to transport by truck or train so they were loaded onto four Erie Canal barges, making the 225 mile journey over the course of ten days. Today, those tanks produce eight million gallons of beer at a time, as Genesee has followed the example of so many other breweries and begun production of a robust line of craft beers.

Since 2017, Genesee has produced many new beers including the popular Ruby Red Kolsch. *Genesee Brewing Company*



Cooking

Tastes, Cooks & Recipe Books

While some food products are consumed without any preparation, the majority of the things we all eat are cooked or prepared in some fashion. While this is generally something we take for granted, like most aspects of the food chain, what people ate in Upstate New York and how they prepared it was dramatically changed by the construction of the Erie Canal. The story of cooking along the Erie Canal reveals a great deal about the transportation, communications, and industrial revolutions that the Erie Canal brought to Upstate New York. This story has been, and will continue to be, one of incredible richness and diversity, as you will discover, just like the whole history of the Erie Canal!

Early Cooking in Upstate New York

Indigenous Cooking

Haudenosaunee cooking, like agriculture, is largely based around the Three Sisters; corn, beans, and squash. One of the primary forms of meals produced by the Haudenosaunee are stews and soups, of which there are a number of varieties, including succotash. Additionally, various dishes are produced out of wild game, especially venison, and foodstuffs gathered by foraging. Traditionally, most Haudenosaunee meals were cooked by boiling ingredients either together or separately.

Cooking with Settlers

Early Upstate New York settlers generally ate simple diets consisting mostly of what they could produce on their own farmsteads, as they could not easily acquire objects much farther away. Due to the technology of the time, these meals were almost all cooked over a fire, leading to a diet of stews, oatmeal, porridge, boiled meats and vegetables, and pancakes.

Contact between settlers and the Haudenosaunee saw an exchange of knowledge regarding ingredients, equipment, and recipes that has been reflected over the next several hundred years of cooking in the Canal Corridor.

Dining options for travelers in Upstate New York before the Erie Canal was constructed were limited. A traveler could either pack his or her own food or attempt to rely on the sporadic inns scattered around the frontier. On an 1810 tour of the proposed canal route, DeWitt Clinton described one such inn's food:

"The swarms of flies which assailed the food, were very disgusting; and custards which were brought on the table, mal apropos exhibited the marks of that insect as a substitute for the grating of nutmeg."

Workers constructing the Erie Canal, were often paid in part with meals by the contractors who hired them. This often required contractors to hire a cook. One such cook was Christine Davis, the descendant of German immigrants, who found work cooking for Canal builders in the 1820s. She would have cooked meals for canal workers over a fire in the 17 inch wide brass kettle on display here. Following the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825, Davis followed the course of America's "Canal Fever" and took her kettle with her to the Ohio and Erie Canal, where she also worked as a cook.

Cooking on Clinton's Ditch

The Erie Canal opened up for New Yorkers a world of products that had been virtually impossible to acquire and allowed them to add greatly to their diets. Notably, luxury items like sugar, coffee, and tea were able to be transported much more easily and affordably. In 1823, one Brockport farmer toasted at a celebration of the newly opened Canal to "pork and flour coming down, tea and sugar going up." Perhaps the biggest culinary phenomenon in the Canal's early days were oysters, which would previously have rotted on the month long voyage but became incredibly popular along the Canal Corridor following its opening.

An illustration of offloading oyster boats in New York harbor. The Canal allowed these mollusks to be served in Upstate New York for the first time. *79.52.691*

On freight boats, the fare was simple, with meals consisting of stews and roasts. As they became more available, stoves replaced open fires as the primary way to cook food on board boats and along the Canal's banks. *88.1.12*

With the opening of the Erie Canal, more people needed or wanted to travel through Upstate New York, either for business or pleasure. Packet boats, built specifically to carry passengers, quickly arose to accommodate this need. These boats offered one of the first forms of all inclusive travel, with meals and accomidations included in the price of travel. The interior of packet boats typically consisted of a large chamber where a table could be set up in the middle for meals then removed to allow beds to be dropped down from the walls for guests to sleep.

Interior view of a packet boat. *24.03*

Packet boat operators aimed to offer their customers a luxurious trip in order to stand out against competition, and this often centered around meals. Natahnial Hawthorne, who traveled the Canal in 1835, said that his time eating supper on a packet boat was "the pleasantest I had spent on the canal," while Thomas Woodcock in 1836 commented on his packet boat's use of silver plates. An example of the fine service used on board packet boats can be seen in this exhibit, which was owned by packet boat cook Kate Lavender. Kate was an English immigrant who eventually lived at Hurd Orchards in Holley, where she gave some of her service to Betty Hurd as a wedding present. Kate was known for her quick wit as well as unorthodox food preparation methods including having a cat lay on bread to have it rise faster and baking cherry pies without removing the pits.

Barge Canal Cooking

As the years progressed, the Canal Corridor changed and the Canal's importance diminished. Railroads began to replace canal boats for passenger travel. Robert Pullman credited packet boats with the inspiration for his opulent Pullman cars. The New York State Canal System still persisted though as a cheap and relatively quick way to transport goods in competition with the railroads. However, as railroad technology continued to advance, even the Enlarged Canal with its mule powered boats became obsolete. At the turn of the 20th century, New York, led by Governor Theodore Roosevelt, expanded its canals again, building the Barge Canal to accommodate much larger, self propelled vessels. This change in the Canal System was one of many that occurred at the turn of the 20th century and other changes could be seen in the cooking and dining that occurred on its waters.

Oliver Petrie

Oliver Wendell Holmes Petrie was born on November 18, 1899 in Oswego. His bibliophile mother gave him his unique name while an absent father led him to drop out of high school and abstain from alcohol his entire life. Little else is known about his early life, but in 1937 Oliver signed on as a cook with the Federal Motorship Company, which operated oil barges using the New York Canals to travel between New York City and the Great Lakes. His recipe book, compiled over his three years on the water, tells us much about how cooking had both changed and remained the same. Cooking for a crew of six to seven men, there are many recipes that would have looked familiar to canallers one hundred years earlier, like English crown stew. Others reflect the profound effects of immigration on America's cuisine, with recipes including chili con carne, chop suey, and Hungarian goulash. Evidence of new technology is also evident in Petrie's recipe book, as all his ingredients were purchased in New York and many would have required relatively modern inventions like tin cans and refrigeration to remain edible.

Photograph of Oliver Petrie from his maritime discharge book. *PC 2013.16.03*

Oliver Petrie's Chili Con Carne

Let 1 Tbsp butter or beef drippings heat in pan

Add 1 lb. hamburger,
- 1 can red kidney beans,
- 1 can tomatoes,
- 1 ½ tsp chili powder,
- 1 ½ tsp black pepper,
- 1 ½ tsp salt

Chop 2 onions and 1 garlic
Fry in 1 Tbsp butter,
Add 1 green pepper,
Add to meat
Cook for 45 min.

Crush 1 ½ tsp caraway seeds in cloth, sprinkle over 1 ½ tsp flour, brown in oven, add to meat before it is done.

Franklin D. Roosevelt, like his distant cousin Theodore, also took a special interest in the Canal System. During his governorship, FDR took annual tours of the Canal System on board the official New York State yacht, the Inspector, which was also used regularly by other state officials and canal employees for more routine inspections. On board the Inspector, passengers were served meals on tableware produced by the Syracuse China Company, originally founded by W.H. Farrar in 1841 as the Onondaga Pottery Company on the banks of the Erie Canal in order to utilize the smooth transportation offered by the Canal.

Onondaga Pottery/Syracuse China has proven of high enough quality for New York's governors and its finest museums. *ECM Collections*

Modern Canal Cooking

Today the New York State Canal System is largely used for recreational purposes and the cooking that occurs on it reflects that. While people still cook on canal boats, as has been the case throughout the Canal's history, these meals are typically simple and easy to cook. The meals offered along the Canal and in its communities reflect the diversity, values, and industry of the Canal today. The Erie Canal Museum's hometown of Syracuse offers an excellent lens to view these trends through.

The Phoenix Block, downtown Syracuse's oldest building and home to the Evergreen.
Erie Canal Museum

In 1834, a fire destroyed much of the fledgling community of Syracuse. Out of the ashes quickly rose a building of brick. The Phoenix Block is an early example of a "double-ender," or a building that had two fronts, one for passersby on Water Street and another directly on the canal for loading and unloading boats. Today, the bottom floor of this building, the oldest in downtown Syracuse, is home to the Evergreen, a restaurant centered around serving its customers locally produced, healthy ingredients as well as offering a wide array of craft beverages. Its menu reflects the farm to table movement, as well as consumers' increased concern about what they put into their bodies, reflected in the many vegan, vorganic, and gluten free items they offer.

Several blocks south of Erie Boulevard, the former route of the Erie Canal, is one of the newest and most innovative culinary experiences in Syracuse: the Salt City Market. Influenced by similar venues like Buffalo's Westside Market, the Salt City Market showcases the incredible diversity of this modern canal community with a number of restaurants specializing in various cuisines that include Vietnamese, Thai, Burmese, Jamaican, Middle Eastern, and soul food dishes. Each restaurant has its own unique story that reflects the changes that have occurred along the Corridor over the last several decades. For instance, Firecracker Thai Kitchen was founded by Sara Tong-Ngork, the daughter of Thai immigrants who had great difficulty finding authentic Asian ingredients when they came to the area in the 1970s. Now, there are many markets offering these ingredients and Firecracker is one of several Thai restaurants in the city. This history of scarcity is still reflected in the restaurant's recipes, however, as they feature unique ingredients and preparations techniques devised by Sara when the more traditional options were not readily available in Central New York.

The Salt City Market offers an excellent taste of the foodways in a modern Canal Community.
Erie Canal Museum

Serving Travellers

The major impact the Erie Canal had on foodways was caused by the massive increase in travellers moving through Upstate New York. Canal boat crews, businesspeople, campaigning politicians, revivalist preachers, and many more regularly travelled the Canal as part of their jobs. Additionally, the Canal became a major tourist route, taking people all the way to Western New York and the wonder of Niagara Falls. All of these people, whether travelling for business or pleasure, needed to eat, and businesses emerged along the Canal Corridor to serve them.

All travellers needed a place to stay. Some stayed on board packet boats, while others stayed at canalside inns. For the most refined travellers, hotels opened offering the finest lodgings and meals that canal communities could provide. In Syracuse, the first of these grand establishments was the Syracuse House on the south side of Clinton Square. Restaurants, another innovation that started to come into fashion just as the Canal opened, eventually came to fill their lower floors.

The Syracuse House. *10.01*

One of the primary places where African Americans found jobs along the Canal Corridor was in hotels. One prominent African American family in Syracuse during the mid-19th century was Jane and Thomas Leonard. Thomas was a waiter at the Syracuse House while Jane worked as a cook a few blocks away at the Exchange Hotel. In addition to their day jobs, they also played a prominent role in the city's Underground Railroad network, with Thomas even helping to orchestrate the famous "Harriet Rescue" from the Syracuse House in 1839.

A lockside grocery. *22.04*

Around locks arose grocery stores and taverns to service the canallers who had to wait for their boats to pass through the locks. These also grew up in other canalside communities as well, and over time separate facilities often developed to serve canal workers versus more "respectable" travellers and locals.

The volume of travellers in canal communities forced people in Upstate New York to become tuned into broader culinary fashions. At the forefront of this were hotels, who competed to attract guests by offering the most fashionable foods, and the upper classes, who had become much more connected to national high society. This was often reflected in cookbooks of the period. One of the most interesting of these is by noted women's right advocate Elizabeth Smith Miller, daughter of famous abolitionist Gerrit Smith and resident of Geneva, NY on the Seneca Cayuga Canal. Elizabeth wrote ***In the Kitchen***, as she believed that women could further prove their worthiness for political rights by asserting their prowess in household affairs.

Elizabeth Smiller Miller (right) and daughter in Geneva. *Courtesy of Library of Congress*

Immigrant Impact

Immigrants have had a tremendous impact on the Erie Canal for its entire history and they have had an especially deep impact on its foodways. Here are some of the immigrant communities that developed along the canal and their culinary impact.

Irish

Famous for helping to dig the Erie and later New York canals, the Irish represent one of the largest immigrant groups to come to Upstate New York. They brought with them traditional foods like soda bread and also created new ones, most famously salt potatoes in the Syracuse salt works.

Germans

Many Germans moved to the Canal Corridor following the failed Revolutions of 1848, while others moved for economic opportunities in America. With them came many foodstuffs which flourished along the Canal Corridor, including sauerkraut and lager beer. They also invented some of the region's most famous dishes, like Buffalo's beef on weck sandwiches and Utica's half moon cookies. Even the hamburger, named after the German city, is alleged to have originated at the Erie County Fair!

Italians

Italians started arriving in Upstate New York in the late 1800s, and many found work on the Erie Canal, especially in the building of the Barge Cana, while others found work on nearby farms. Utica ended up with one of the most well known concentrations of Italian American families, though most Upstate cities and towns have large Italian communities. In the area around Utica you can find many Italian contributions to the Canal's foodways, including chicken riggies, tomato pie, and Utica greens.

Greeks

A Greek immigrant is responsible for one of the Canal Corridor's most famous dishes: the garbage plate. Consisting of either a hot dog or hamburger, along with a combination of macaroni salad, beans, French fries, and home fries, all on one plate, the garbage plate originated when Nick Tahou, who immigrated from Greece in 1937, sold the dish from his father's Rochester restaurant.

Burmese

Since the mid-20th century, many immigrants have come to the Canal Corridor from Southeast Asia. At Hurd Orchards and many other farms, these immigrants have been essential in their operations and like other immigrant populations before them, many have formed communities around their shared ethnicity. One nation where many immigrants have come from is Myanmar, or Burma, and Burmese immigrants have already started making an impact on the region's cuisine, like the San family, who founded Syracuse's first Burmese restaurant, Big In Burma, in 2021 at the Salt City Market.

Of course, these are just some of the immigrant groups who have moved to the Canal Corridor over the years and contributed their their rich culinary traditions to its foodways. This advertisement for a Ukranian grocery and meat market in 1917 further illustrates the diversity of cultures that have called the Corridor home. *69.627.2*