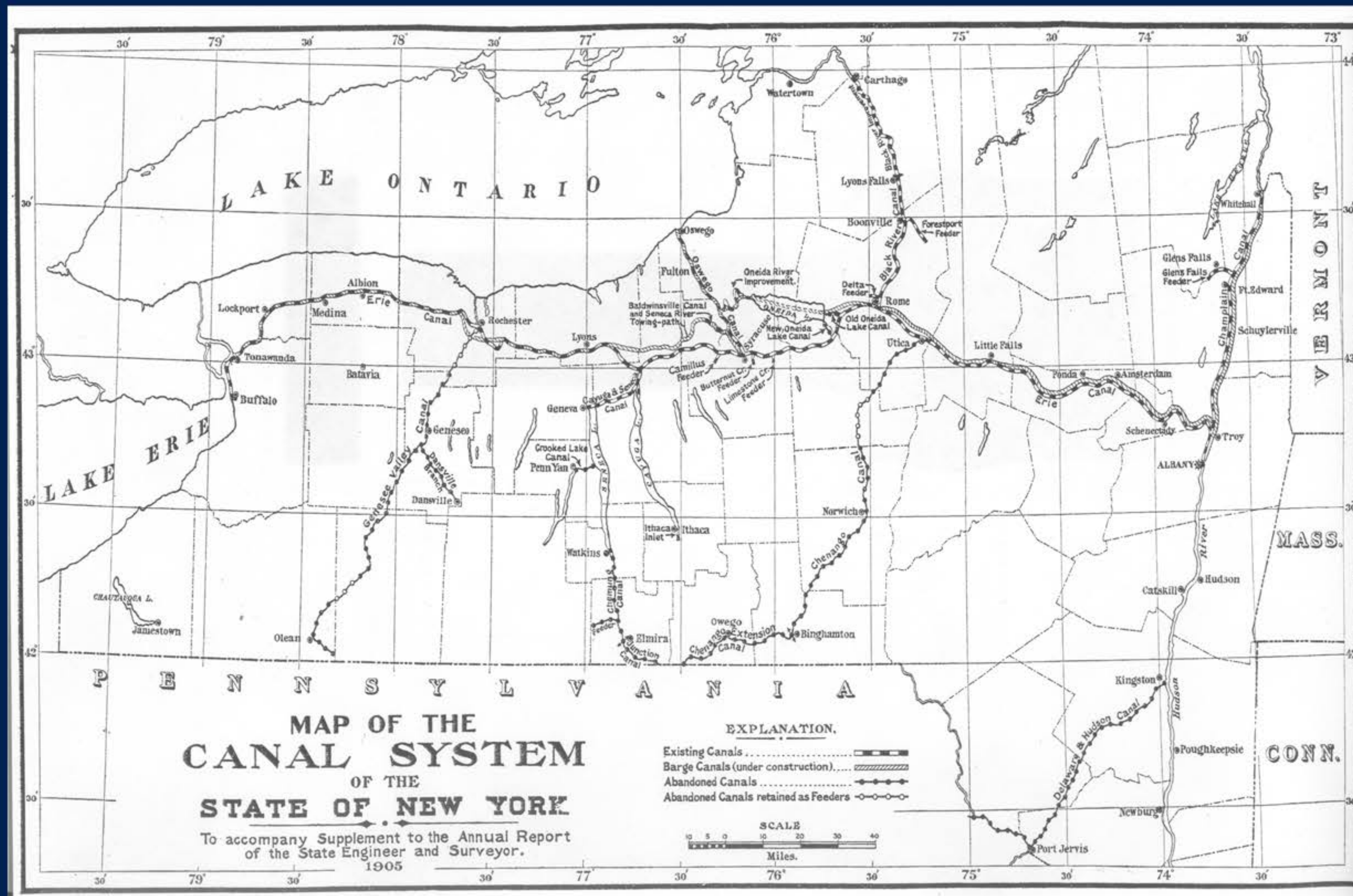




High Hopes

Immigration &
the Erie Canal

Coming to America



1905 Canal system map. Between the early 19th century and the early 20th century, canals covered the Empire State, facilitating transport of people, cargo, and ideas.

The United States is a nation founded by people who came here from other countries. Whether they were seeking a better life than that offered by their home country, escaping religious or political persecution, or fleeing economic or environmental hardship, people have come believing in the promise of the American dream.

The promise of opportunity in what would become the Empire State was noted by early European explorers nearly 500 years ago. Explorers like Hudson, Champlain, Verrazano, and others came from England, France, and Holland to sail the area's waterways, claim the land, and found settlements that opened the door for immigration to this newly "discovered" land. In the years that followed, scores of people from all over the world have joined those early immigrants. Many of them traveled along the Erie Canal to claim that promise for themselves and use the opportunity to enrich the life and history of New York State. This waterway was responsible for transporting more immigrants to the west than any other trans-Appalachian canal. Today the Erie Canal connects cities that were founded, settled, and populated by people from England, Ireland, Germany, Italy, Poland, France, the Netherlands, and the countries of Africa, the Middle East, Central America, and Asia, providing a thread that connects the colorful patchwork that makes up New York State.

Settlers in New York prior to the building of the Erie Canal established thriving communities forming the basis for what would be known as chain migration - networks of people, typically extended families, that provide a system of support for others from their home country to join them in America.

"The Unrestricted Dumping Ground," from *Judge Magazine*, 1903. Nativist attitudes toward new waves of immigrants are reflected in this political cartoon. (Courtesy of New York Public Library)

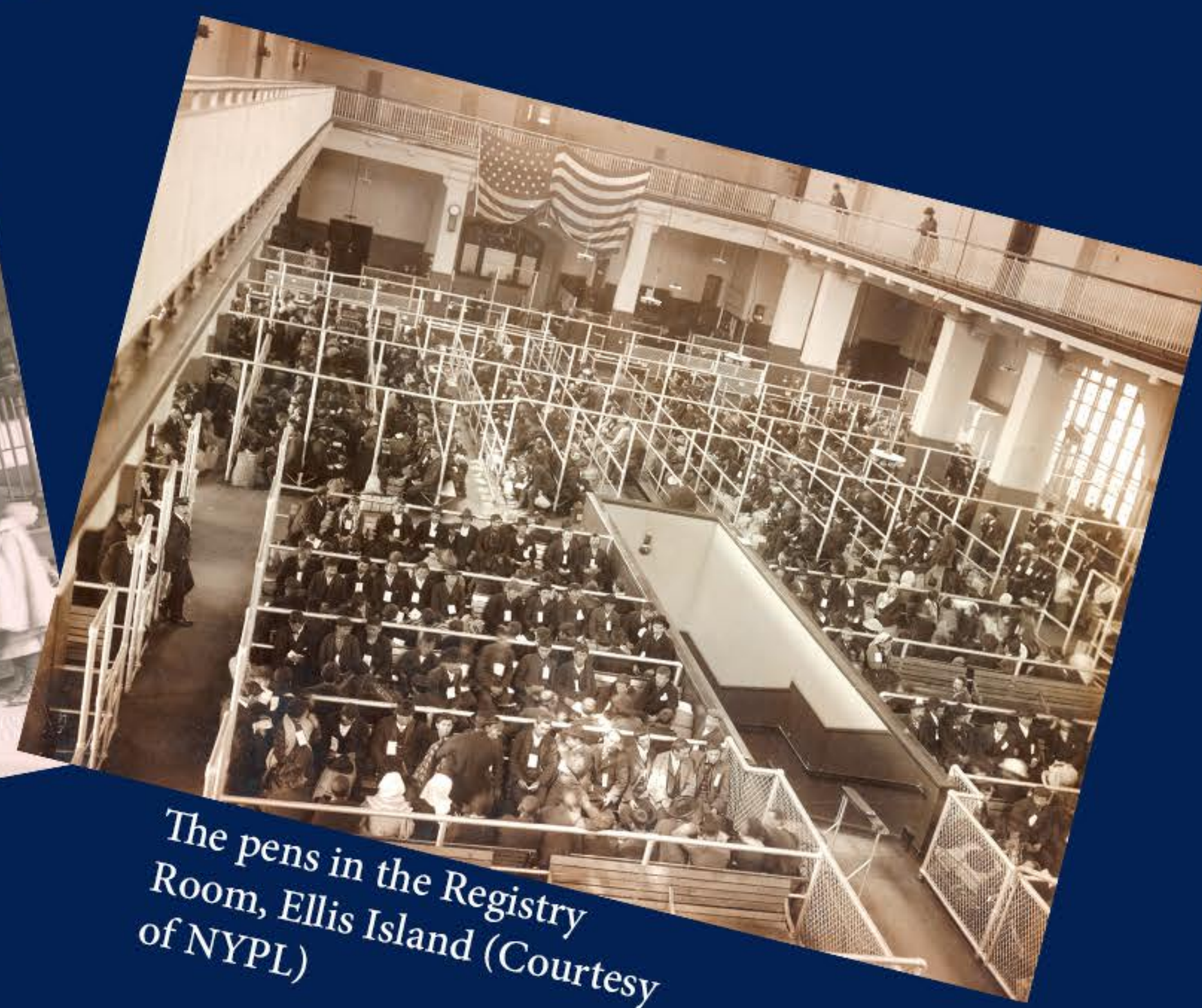
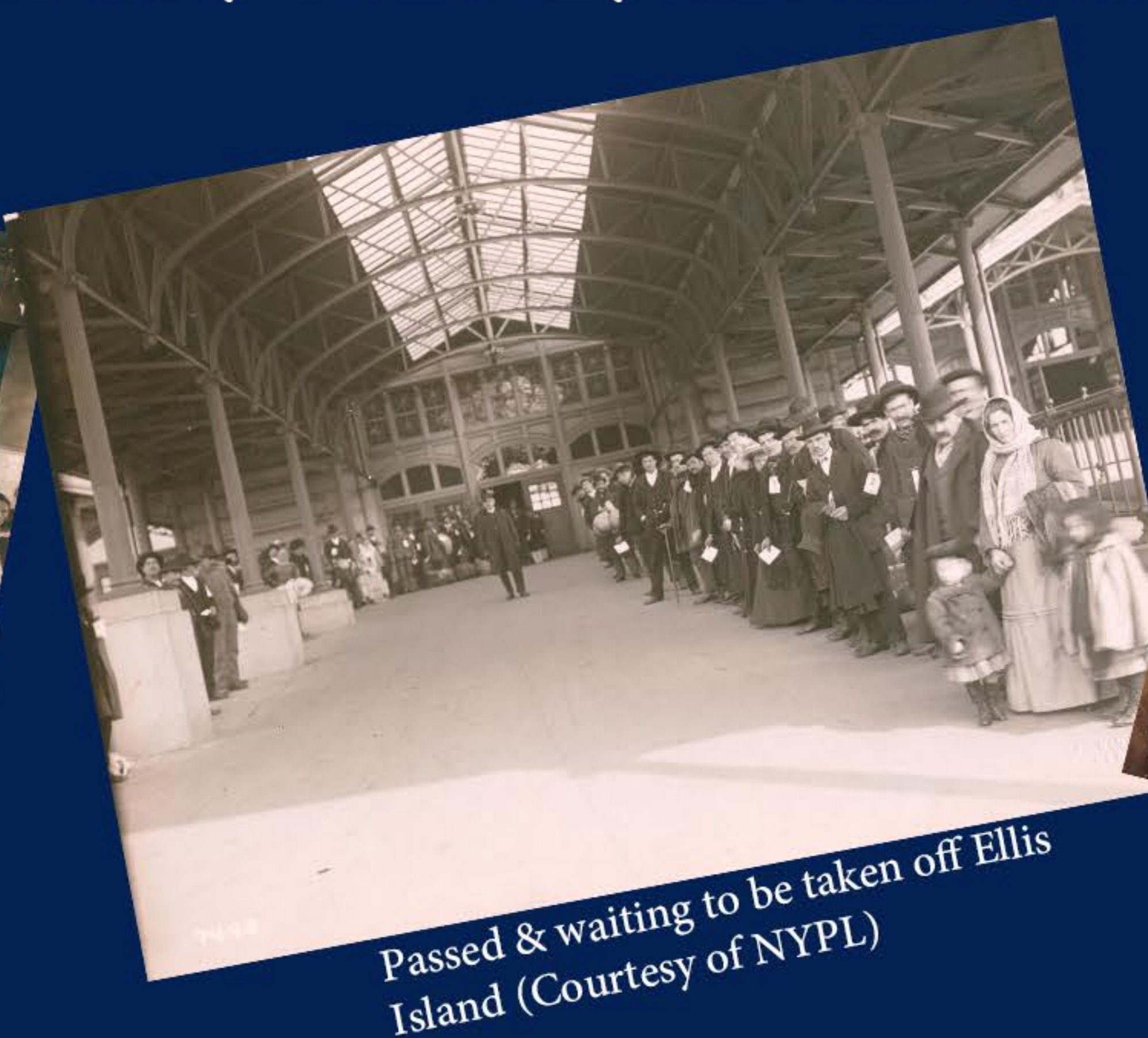
The possibilities available in the abundant farmland and the new communities springing up in New York's frontier afforded these new Americans with the opportunity to make lasting contributions to the economic and social fabric of the state.



“...huddled masses yearning to breathe free”

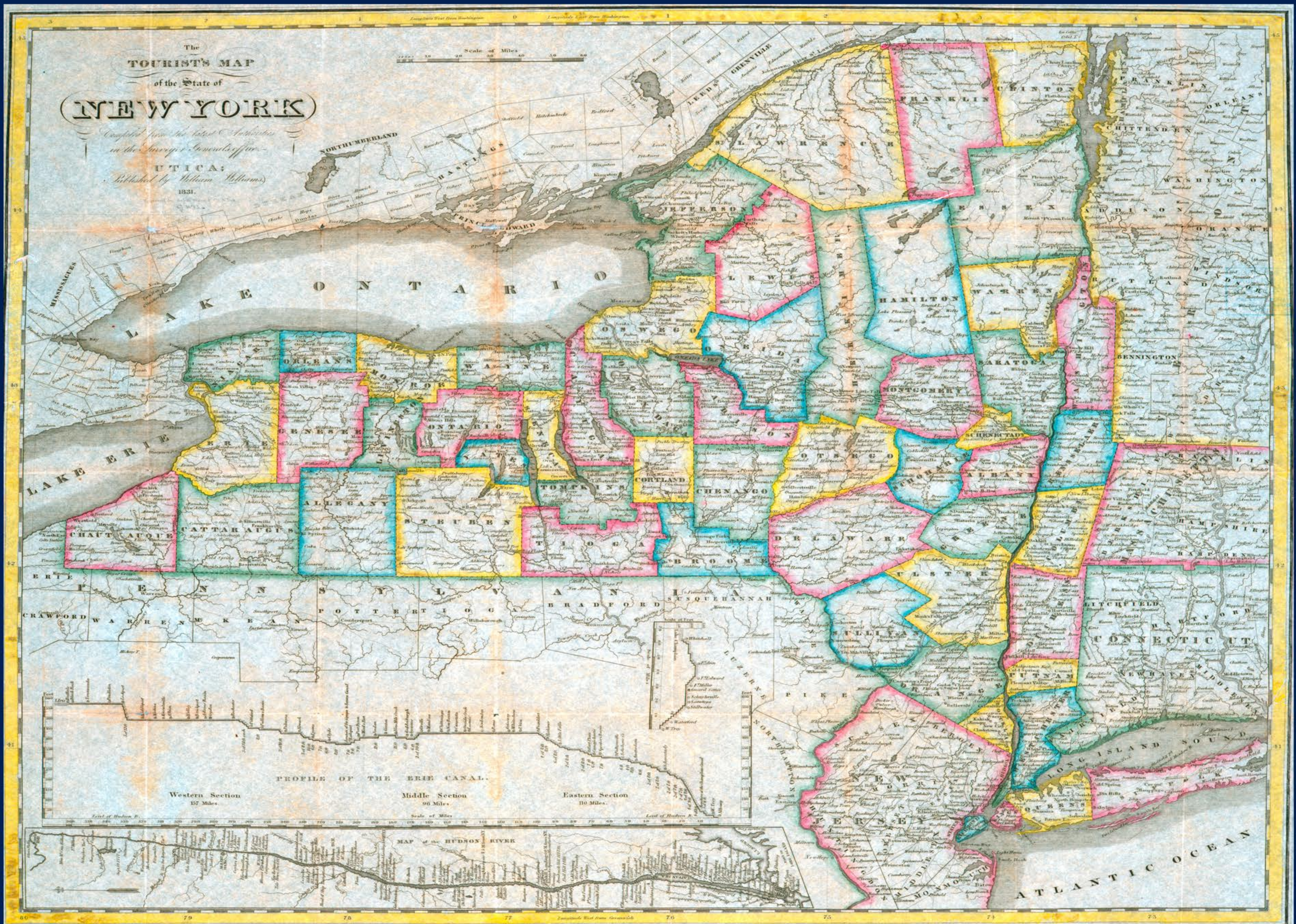


Foreigners coming to the United States prior to 1855 were not channeled through one central location such as Ellis Island. They arrived on these shores at major port cities, such as New York City, on the East and West Coasts. In 1855, Castle Garden (now known as Castle Clinton) became the first immigrant processing center in the United States. Situated on the western tip of Manhattan, Castle Garden was where millions of newly arrived immigrants formally entered the United States before boarding steamships that took them up the Hudson River to Albany where they boarded canal boats that would carry them along the Erie Canal to new lives in the west. Easy access to a route to the interior of the country made New York City a popular landing point for foreigners. This helped to increase the diversity of the city and the state.



In 1892, following the Immigration Act of 1882 and the establishment of federal control over immigration, Castle Garden was replaced by Ellis Island as the Emigrant Landing Depot in New York City. This change did not impact the flow of immigrants into and through New York State as steam and rail travel were additional options for the westward movement of passengers along the Erie Canal corridor. As they moved through the state, some immigrants found what they were looking for in the cities that had sprung up along the Canal and the areas surrounding those cities. Today, the populations of the major cities along the original canal reflect the origins of those immigrants.

New York & the Erie Canal for Immigrants

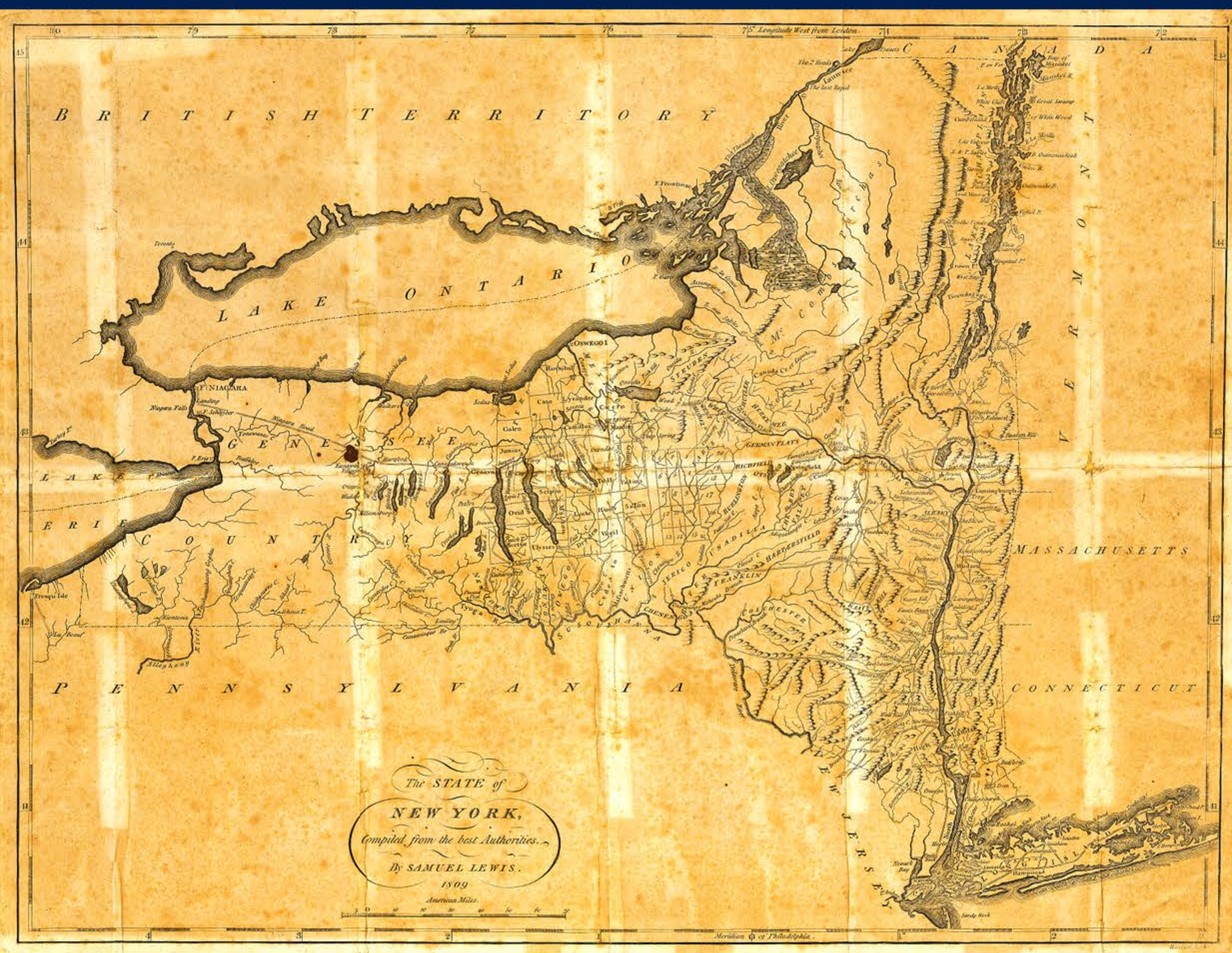


The Tourist's Map of New York State, 1831 (courtesy of New York Public Library)

From The Emigrant's Guide to the United States of America (published 1830):

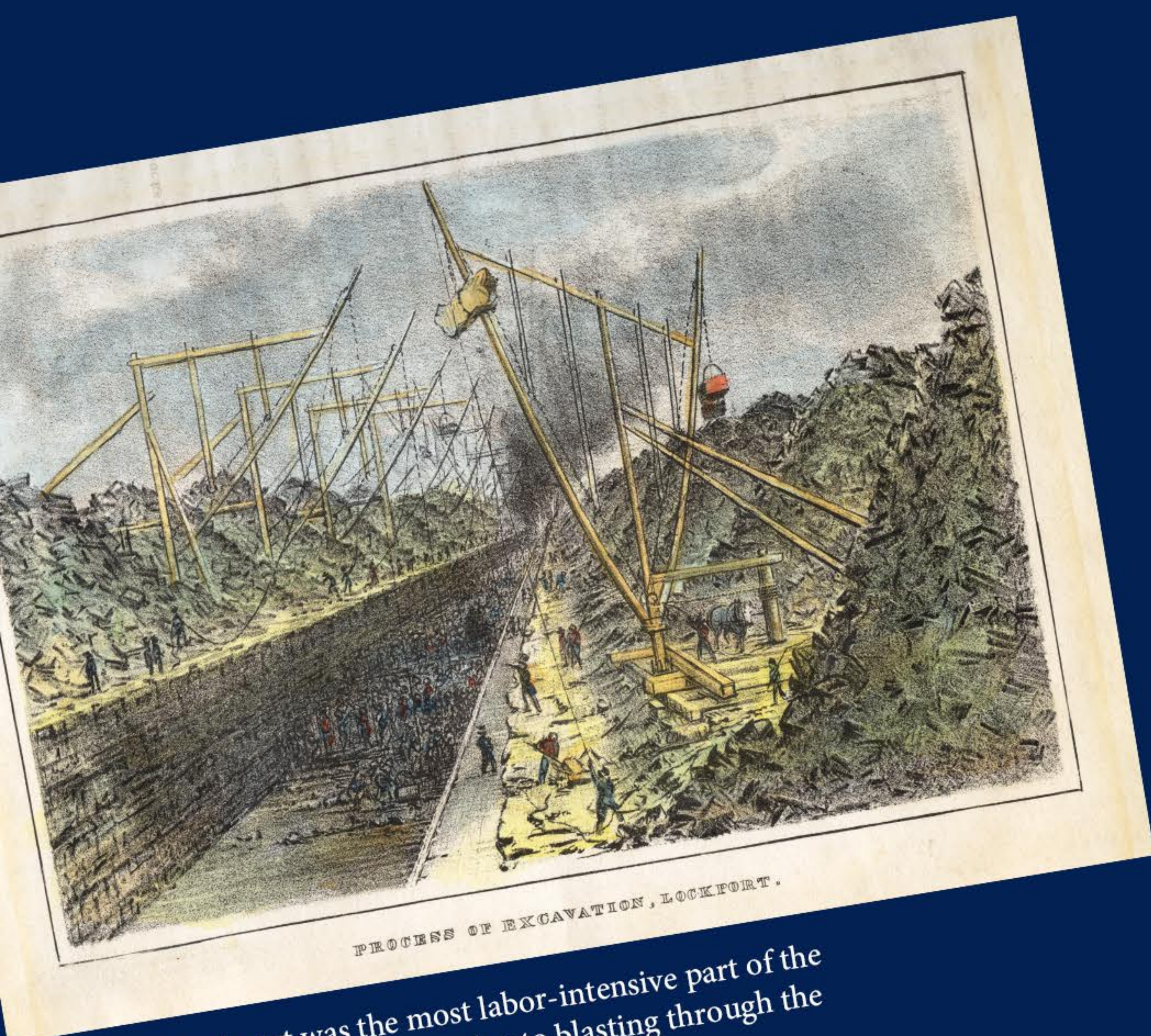
“The great western or Erie canal is unquestionably the most important of the many that have been contemplated since the conclusion of the war. It is an undertaking that reflects the highest credit on the enterprising and public spirit of the state of New York, which planned and executed it at its own proper expense; which carried it on not only without the aid, but with every discouragement on the part, of the general government; and which has the merit of having conducted this work under the guidance of native engineers - a work that, in many respects, may vie with the first of a similar description in Europe.”

Digging Clinton's Ditch

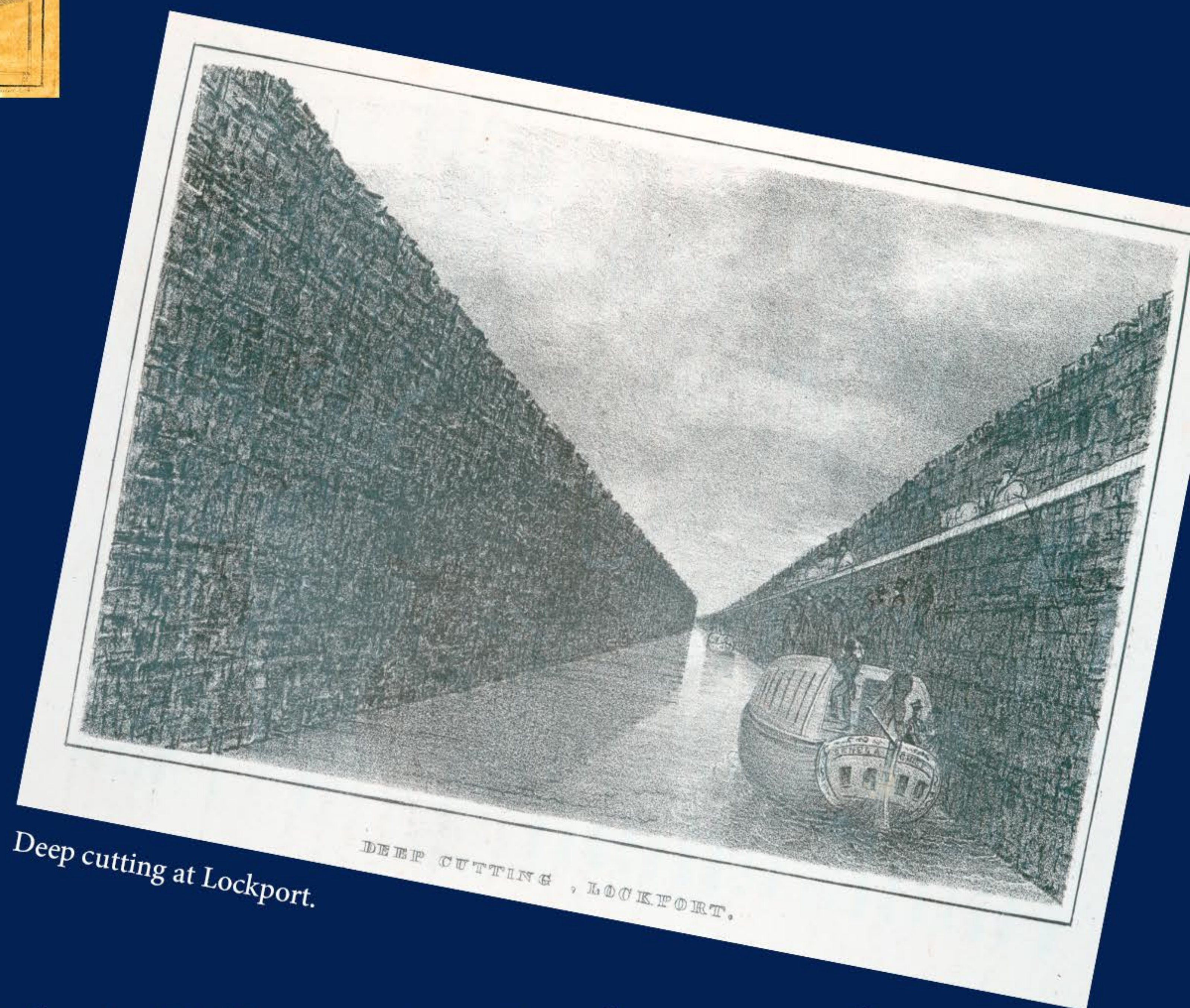


1809 Map of New York State, 8 years before Canal construction began in 1817.

Land west of the Military Tract was purchased by investors of the Holland Land Company who surveyed and divided the land to sell to settlers. These actions opened the door for immigrants to move into New York State and begin making their mark on the land, the society, and the economy of the state.

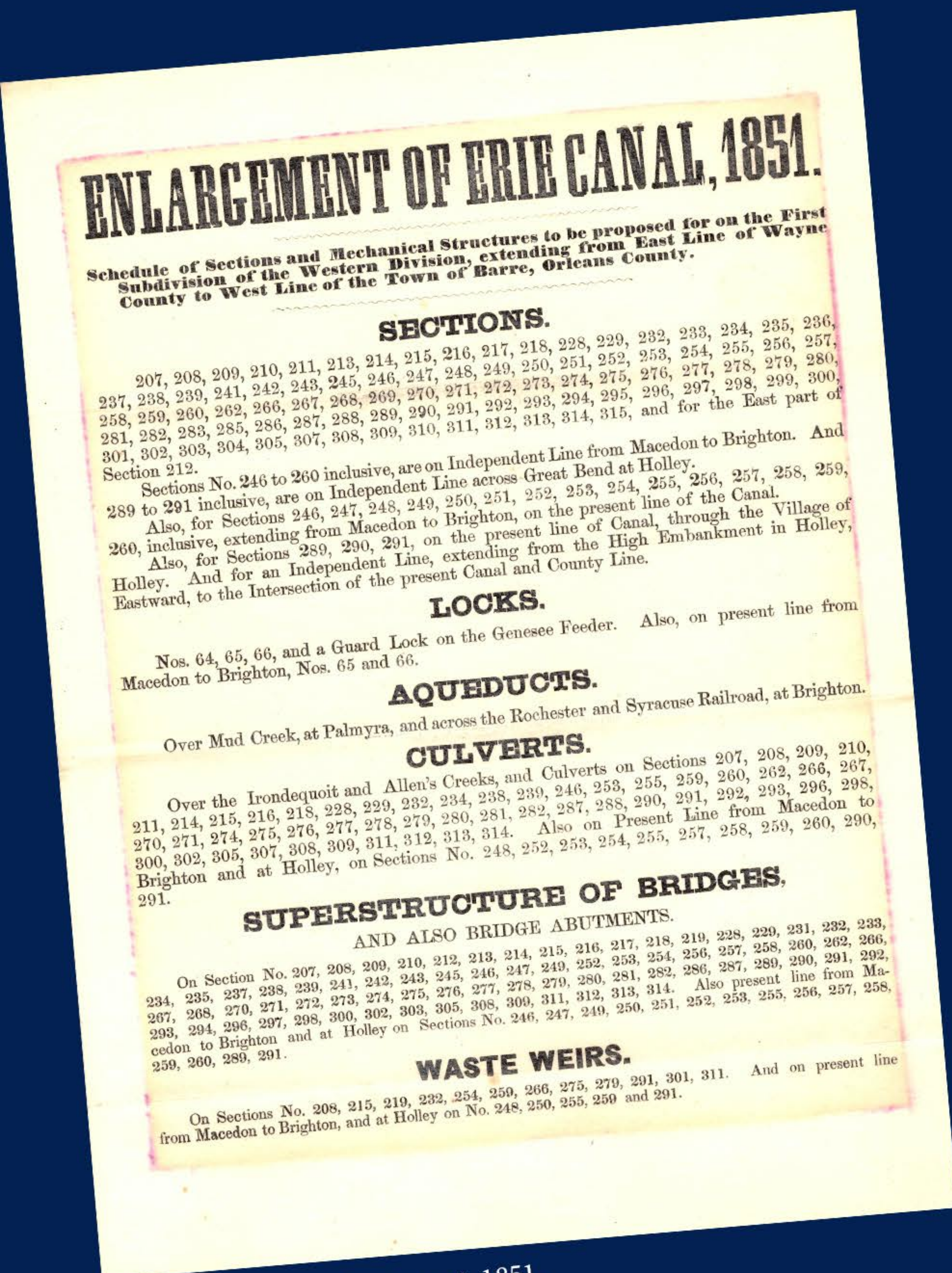


Prior to the American Revolution, European settlement in the western part of New York State was sparse. Native Americans, specifically the Haudenosaunee, and French missionaries were the main residents of areas beyond the Mohawk River. After the Revolution, much of Central New York was set aside as the Military Tract. Soldiers who had fought in the Continental Army were awarded land in this area to settle and farm.



On July 4, 1817, construction began on the original Erie Canal, also known as Clinton's Ditch. Construction continued until the Canal officially opened on October 26, 1825. The original Canal was not built by large numbers of new immigrants, as the later Enlargement projects would be. The New York State Canal Commissioners report for 1819 stated that 75% of workers were "born among us." Most workers were recruited locally, and farmers in particular were a significant group involved, as they owned the land the Canal was crossing. It is a popular and often-repeated misconception that the original Canal was built by the Irish. Many of the workers were certainly Irish, but they already lived in New York, and did not come specifically for the work.

Enlarging the Canal & Creating the Barge Canal

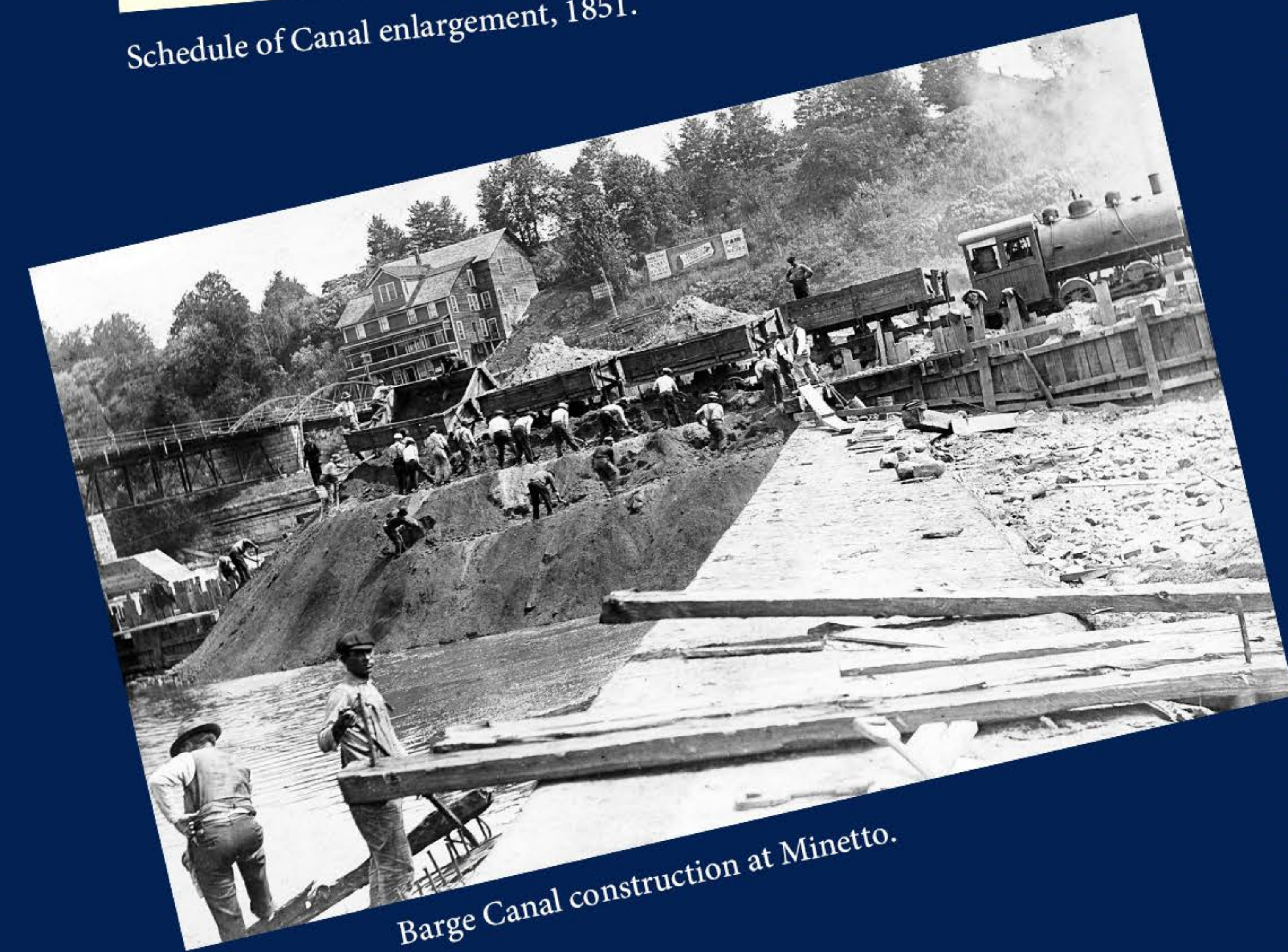


Schedule of Canal enlargement, 1851.



Barge Canal construction.

The success of the original Erie Canal led to the first enlargement projects beginning in the 1830s. By this time, immigrants had been flowing into the United States from European countries like Ireland. Those immigrants provided an abundant pool of workers who were eager to work for a wage. Businesses and industries that developed along the Canal took advantage of this new pool of workers as well as the unique skills and expertise they brought with them from their homelands.



Barge Canal construction at Minetto.

By the end of the 1800s, immigration policy in the United States had been codified into federal law. The opening of the Barge Canal in 1918 coincided with laws limiting immigration by defining a list of “undesirables” and preventing those who could not demonstrate the ability to care for themselves financially.



Barge Canal construction, Cayuga-Seneca branch,

These policies discouraged people like those who had immigrated in the early days of the Erie Canal, but did not undo the importance of those immigrants in the building of the Canal nor the lasting influence of their work and culture on New York State.

Traveling on the Canal

ERIE CANAL NAVIGATION COMPANY.

Way-Bill for the *August 30 1823.*

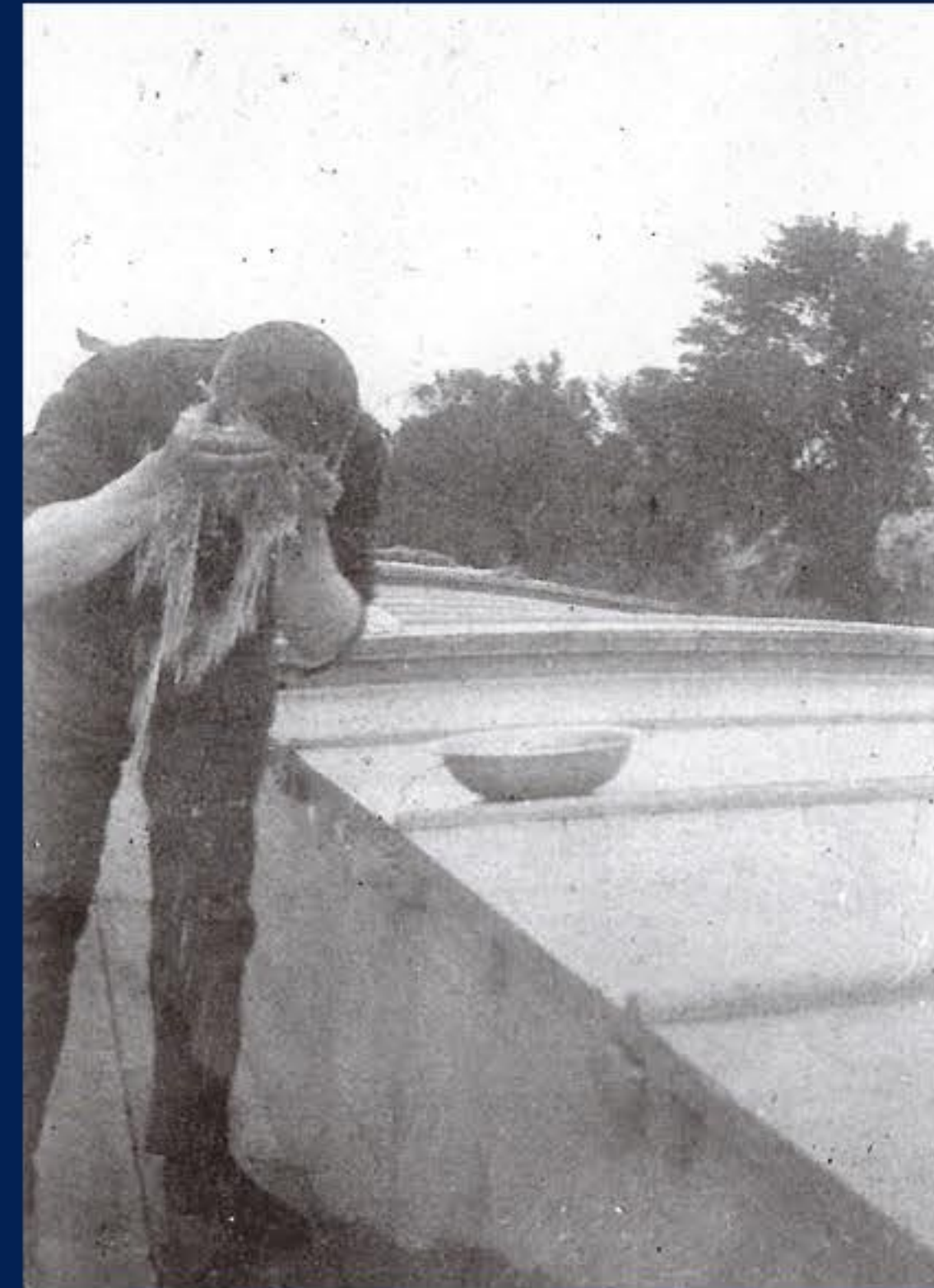
from *Utica* to *Rochester*

Passengers' Names.	No.	Where from.	Where to.	Dolls.	Cts.	No. Birth.	
<i>Lingess</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>Utica</i>	<i>Woods</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>44</i>
<i>Knapp</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>Woods</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Wallace</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>Woods</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Chapman</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>Woods</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Beings</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>Woods</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>50</i>
<i>Spencer</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>Woods</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>72</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Clark</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>Woods</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Gruft</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>Woods</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>72</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Cole</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>Woods</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Bak</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>Woods</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>McNaughton</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>Woods</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Richards</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>Woods</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>72</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Conley</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>Woods</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Anderson</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>Woods</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>By Grandon</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>Woods</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Phillips</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>Woods</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Utica</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>Woods</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>180</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Mr. Kent</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>Woods</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Mr. Perry</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>Woods</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Mr. Phillips</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>Woods</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Mr. Wallis</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>Woods</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Mr. Meach</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>Woods</i>	<i>110</i>	<i>1100</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Mr. Dudley</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>Woods</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>By</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>Woods</i>	<i>110</i>	<i>1100</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>27</i>

Some canal boats kept passenger records. This is a record of a boat traveling from Utica to Rochester, August 30, 1823.



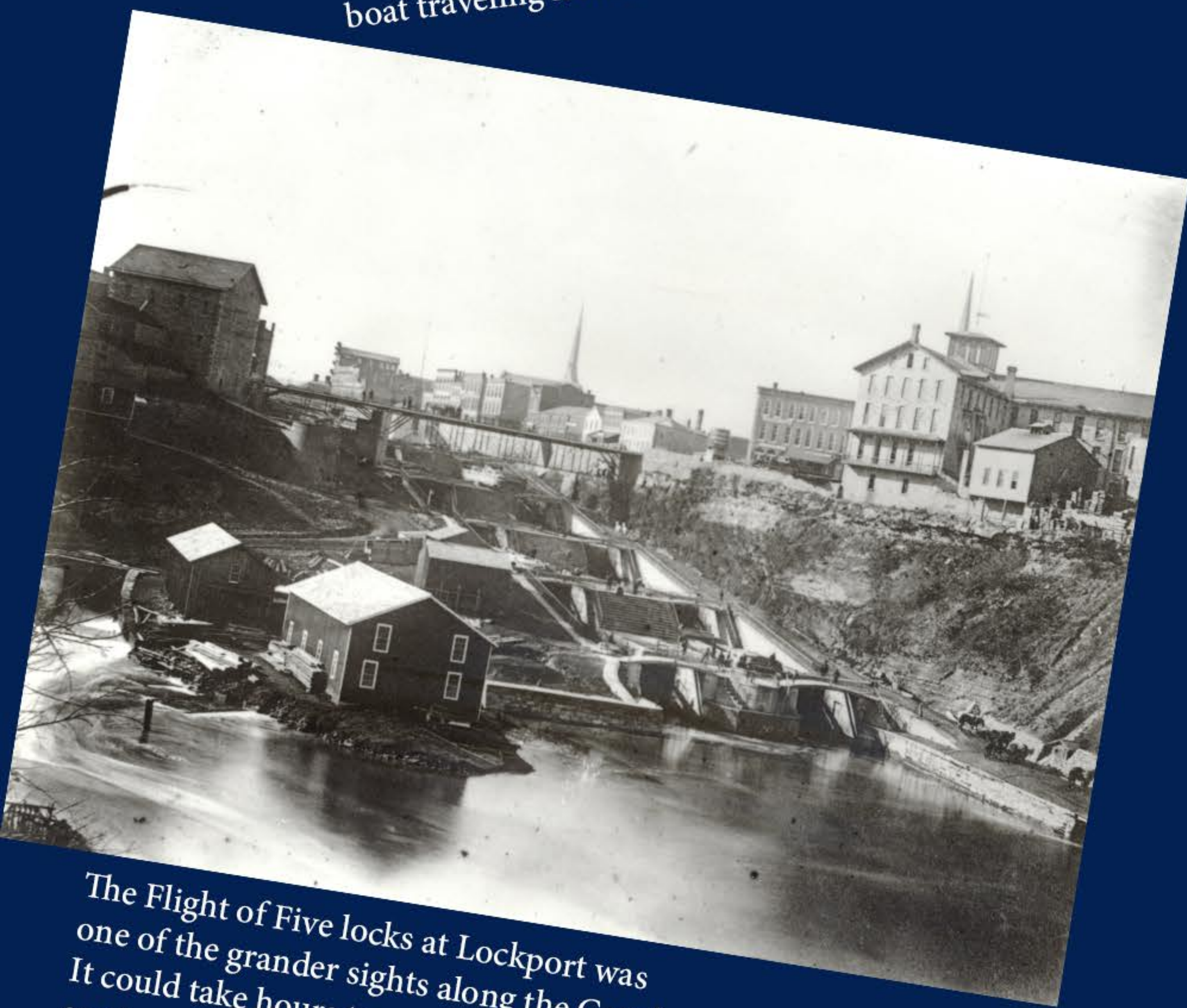
All ages worked and traveled on canal boats. This photo was taken on the Black River Canal, a lateral canal running from the Erie at Rome to the Black River.



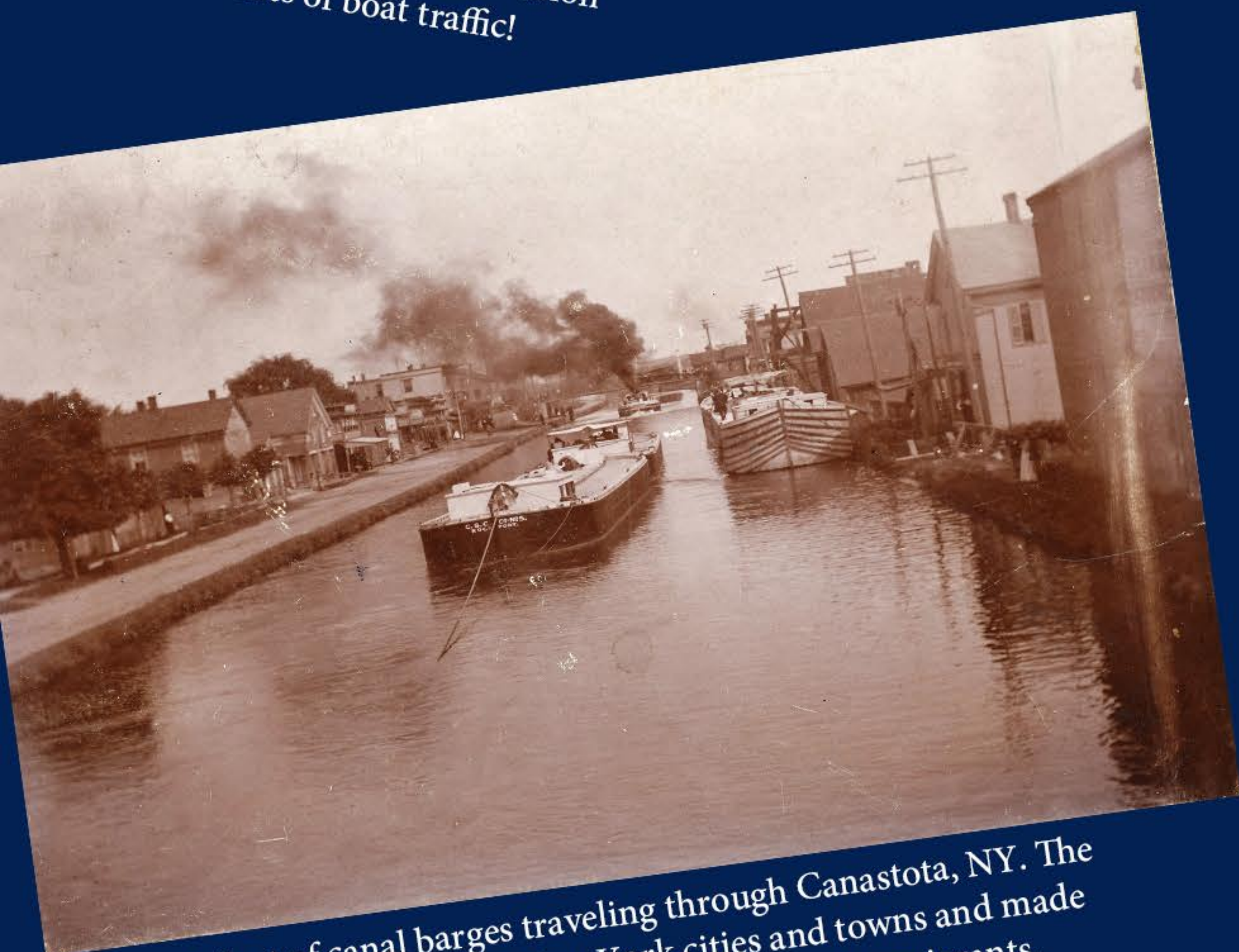
Washing up on a canal boat. The water was not taken from the Canal, but from a barrel of fresh water on board.



Canal boats traveled through one of 7 weighlocks, like the one in Syracuse, future home of the Erie Canal Museum. Boats were weighed and tolled by these buildings, and a charge was assessed per passenger.



The Flight of Five locks at Lockport was one of the grander sights along the Canal. It could take hours to get through this section, due to the drastic elevation change and lots of boat traffic!



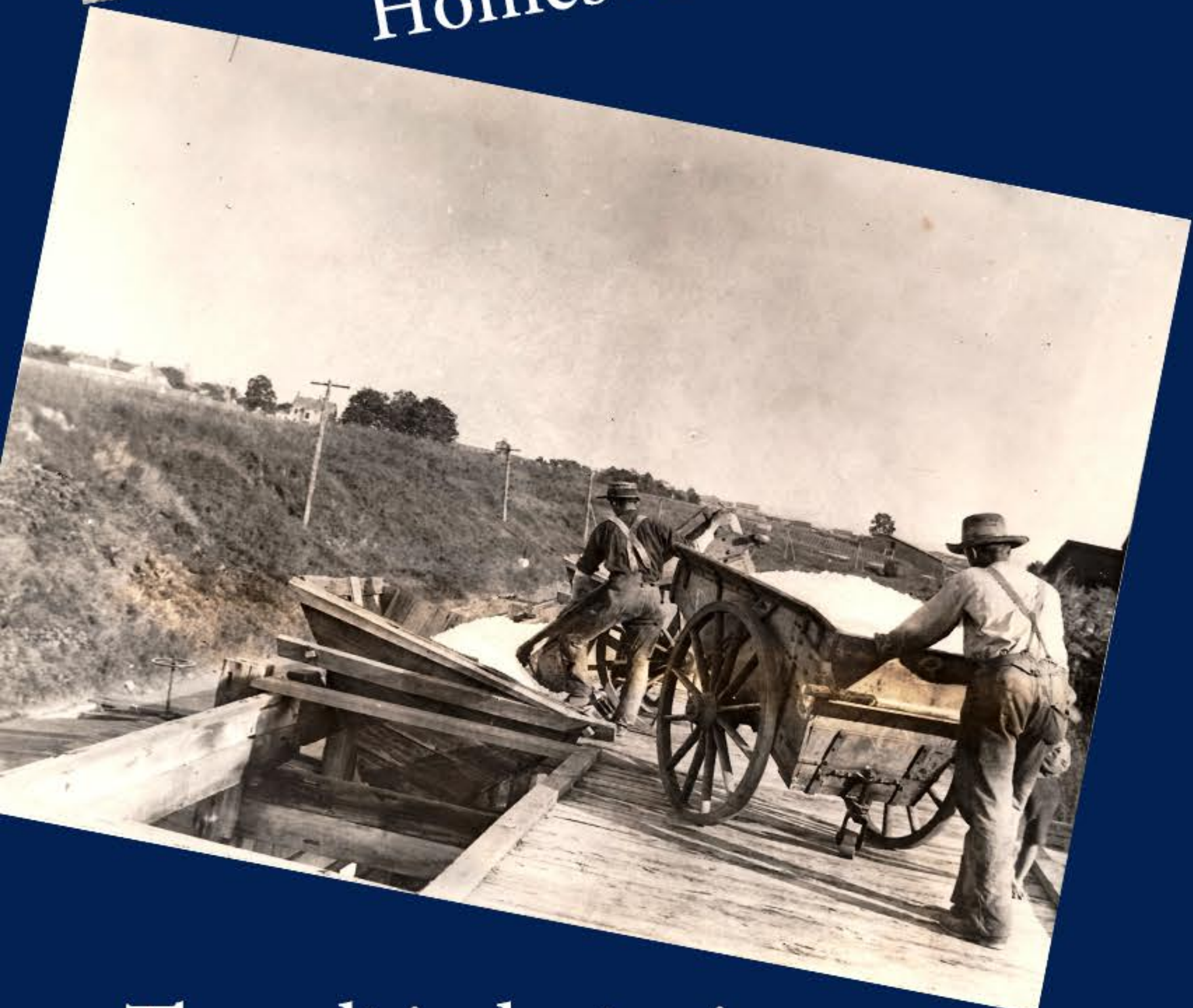
A fleet of canal barges traveling through Canastota, NY. The Erie Canal connected New York cities and towns and made passage to them accessible to newly arrived immigrants.

Immigrants traveling on the Erie Canal had their choice of boats. Some carried passengers, some carried cargo, and some carried a combination of the two. Packet boats, those carrying passengers only, were more "luxurious" in their accommodations. There was plenty of room for each passenger and their luggage. Meals were often included in the cost of passage. However, line boats, like the Frank Buchanan Thomson (replica on display in the Museum's weigh chamber), were often the chosen mode of travel for new immigrants. These boats typically hauled cargo but passengers were allowed when there was room. You can see on the boat that the accommodations were cramped and could have housed more passengers than the number of beds displayed. The fare for passengers on this type of boat was cheaper than that of the packet boat, which made them more attractive to people newly arrived in New York. In addition to their luggage, these boats also allowed passengers to bring tools aboard - an important consideration for immigrants hoping to establish farms in this new land.

Working in Canal Cities and Towns



Homes of Irish salt workers.



The salt industry in Syracuse had many immigrant workers.



Courtesy of NYPL



Courtesy of NYPL

Sewing room at a Syracuse shoe factory.



Courtesy of New York Public Library

Once new immigrants made their way to New York, there were many industries they could work in. These included salt production, shoemaking, farming, cigarmaking, and many others. The American Industrial Revolution happened alongside the Canal's creation and biggest years in the 19th century, and there was a great demand for labor, both skilled and unskilled.

“Laborer” was the most common profession listed by new immigrants.



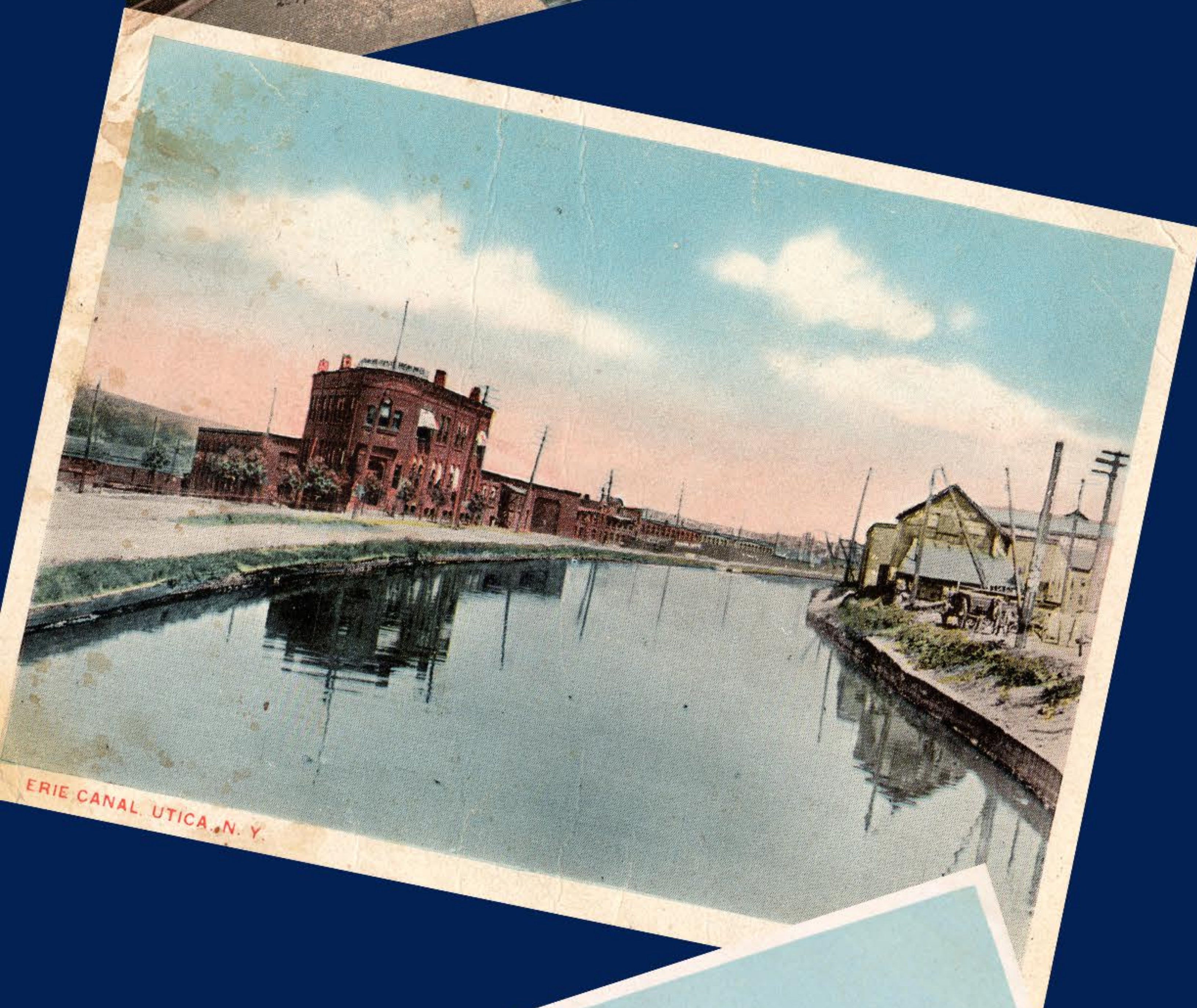
Workers at a Syracuse cigar factory, circa 1920.



Farming was a common profession among new immigrants to New York State.



Immigrant Cities Along the Erie Canal



Some of the larger Canalside cities owe their booming existence to large immigrant populations. According to the American Community Survey published by the Census Bureau greater numbers of people in Albany, Utica, Syracuse, Lockport, and Buffalo list their European heritage as German, Irish, Italian, or Polish than any other foreign identification.



The Largest Immigrant Groups: Italians



Young Italian woman photographed at Ellis Island, 1906 (courtesy of New York Public Library)

Even though Italian sailors had been among the first to explore the coast of what would become the United States, large-scale Italian immigration came later than that of the Irish or the Germans. The first wave of Italian immigrants came in the last half of the 19th century with the Unification of Italy.

Many of these immigrants worked building the West Shore Railroad from Weehawken, New Jersey to Albany to Buffalo following the route of the Erie Canal. Italians from northern Italy moved to the west coast where they planted vineyards and continued the winemaking industry. Immigrants from southern Italy tended to locate to the cities like New York City, Utica, and Syracuse. So called “Little Italy” neighborhoods sprang up where concentrated populations of Italian immigrants settled.

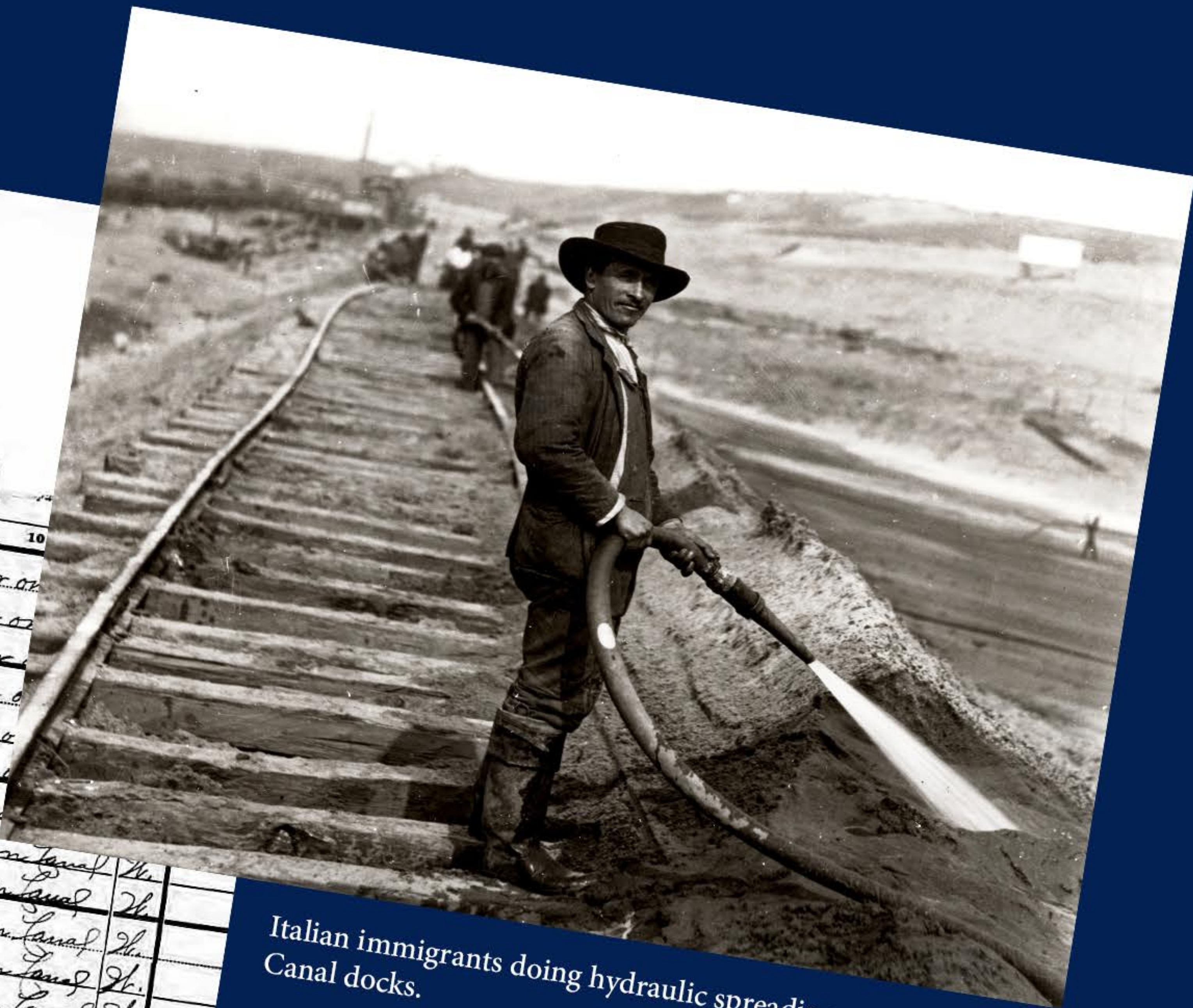


Postcard of a Venetian canal.

Enumeration of the Inhabitants living in 4th
Village of Fort Miller, **County of** Washington
Name of Institution _____

RESIDENCE.		NAME of each person whose usual place of abode on June 1, 1906, was in this family. Enter surname first, then the given name and middle initial, if any. Include every person living on June 1, 1906. Omit children born since June 1, 1906.	RELATION. Relationship of each person to the head of the family.	COLOR, SEX AND AGE.		NATIVITY. If born in this country, write United States; if of foreign birth, write the name of the country.	CITIZENSHIP.	
Street	House number			Color or race.	Sex and age at last birthday.		Number of years in United States.	Citizen or alien.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
		Mario Lini, Ross			M. 13	Italy	1	Al Labor on Canal
		Di Francesco, Emile			M. 39	Italy	4	Al Labor on Canal
		Felice, Paolo			M. 20	Italy	4	Al Labor on Canal
		Pedro, Leon			M. 18	Italy	4	Al Labor on Canal
		Pedro, Domingo			M. 17	Italy	4	Al Labor on Canal
		Antonio, Antonio			M. 21	Italy	2	Al Labor on Canal
		Libro, Eustacio			M. 37	Italy	4	Al Labor on Canal
		Manfredi, Francisco			M. 18	Italy	3	Al Labor on Canal
		Ugo, Guido			M. 41	Italy	1	Al Labor on Canal
		Simona, Tezidis			M. 39	Italy	1	Al Labor on Canal
		Dondacci, Luigi			M. 20	Italy	1	Al Labor on Canal
		Pomero, Emilio			M. 31	Italy	1	Al Labor on Canal
		Luigi, Paolo			M. 21	Italy	1	Al Labor on Canal
		Antonio, Nicolo			M. 49	Italy	1	Al Labor on Canal
		Antonio, Carmine			M. 35	Italy	1	Al Labor on Canal

List of workers at a Fort Miller labor camp (courtesy of Craig Williams)



Italian immigrants doing hydraulic spreading on Canal docks.

The Largest Immigrant Groups: Irish



Irish salt workers, Syracuse



Three unidentified Irish men (courtesy of New York Public Library)

Irish immigrants have long been credited with building the original Erie Canal. Seventy-five percent of the original Canal's workforce were native-born, but Irish workers certainly contributed to the project. The first Irish immigrants arrived in Boston and New York City with little money and few resources other than their willingness to provide manual labor. These workers joined laborers hired by the Upstate farmers contracted by the Canal Commission to construct sections of the original Canal. The Erie Canal had been in operation for two decades before the first wave of Irish immigration due to the Great Famine came in 1845.

More Irish workers added their muscle to the later enlargement of the Canal and established their place in the history of the waterway that carried them from the port of New York to settle across the state and points further west.



NEW YORK CITY.—IRISH DEPOSITORS OF THE EMIGRANT SAVINGS BANK WITHDRAWING MONEY TO SEND TO THEIR SUFFERING RELATIVES IN THE OLD COUNTRY.—SEE PAGE 27.

Irish sending money home to relatives (courtesy of NYPL)

The Largest Immigrant Groups: Germans



German language newspaper published in New York.

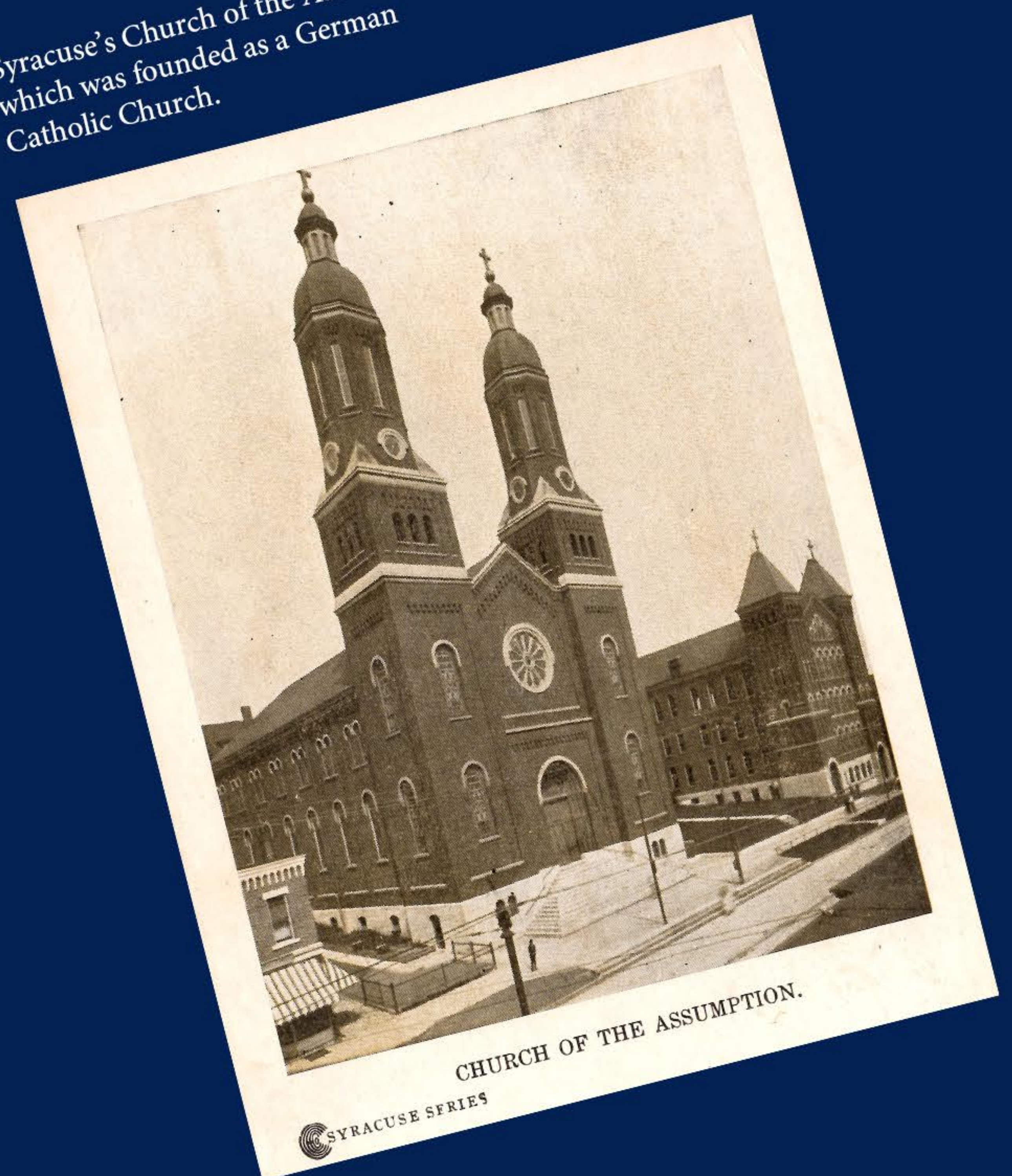


German canal postcard.

Originally settling in the Mohawk Valley, German immigrants and their descendents moved west influencing the culture and economy of New York State. They fought in the American Revolution, built churches, established farms, started businesses, and added to the growing number of industries created in the state.

German immigrants produced salt, made cheese, brewed beer, processed sausages, manufactured cigars, and made high-quality liturgical candles. Oktoberfest celebrations held across the state as well as names like Berlin, Mecklenburg, Steuben, Palatine, Busch, Hoffman, Will, and Baumer remind us of the legacy of the German immigrants whose high hopes helped to create the New York State of today.

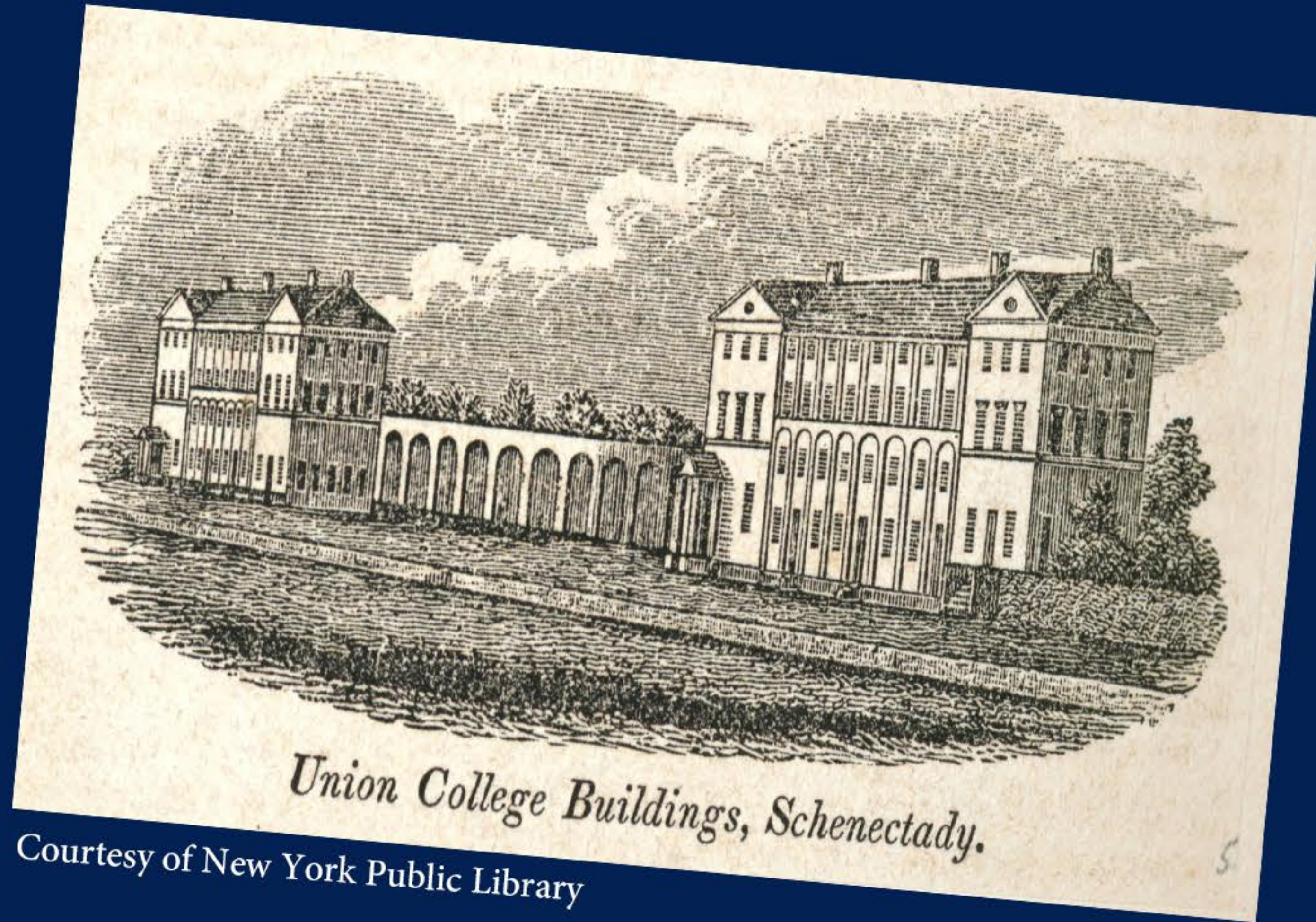
Syracuse's Church of the Assumption, which was founded as a German Catholic Church.



Spotlight: Charles Proteus Steinmetz

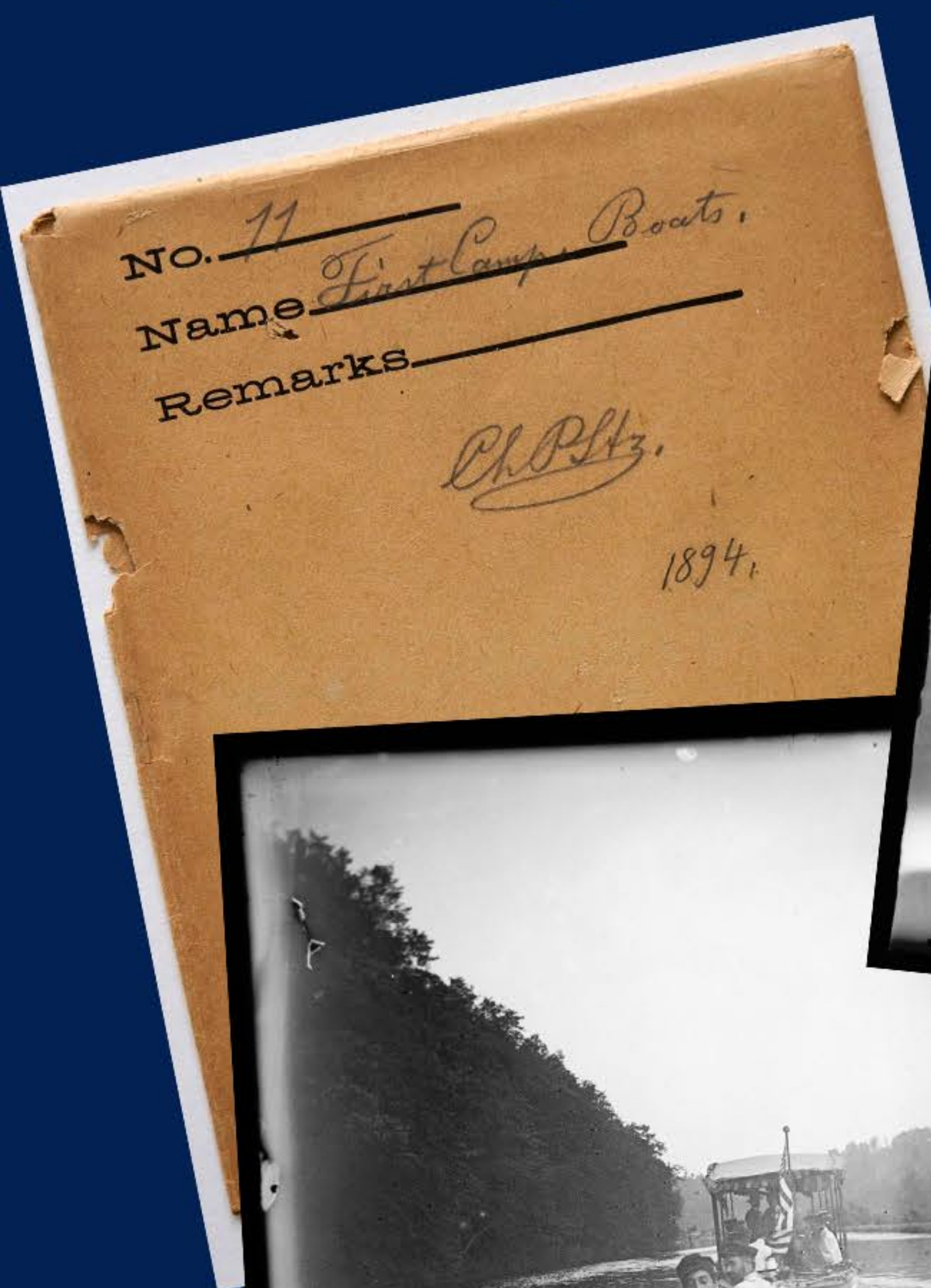


Steinmetz in his greenhouse (Canal Society of New York State)



Union College Buildings, Schenectady.
Courtesy of New York Public Library

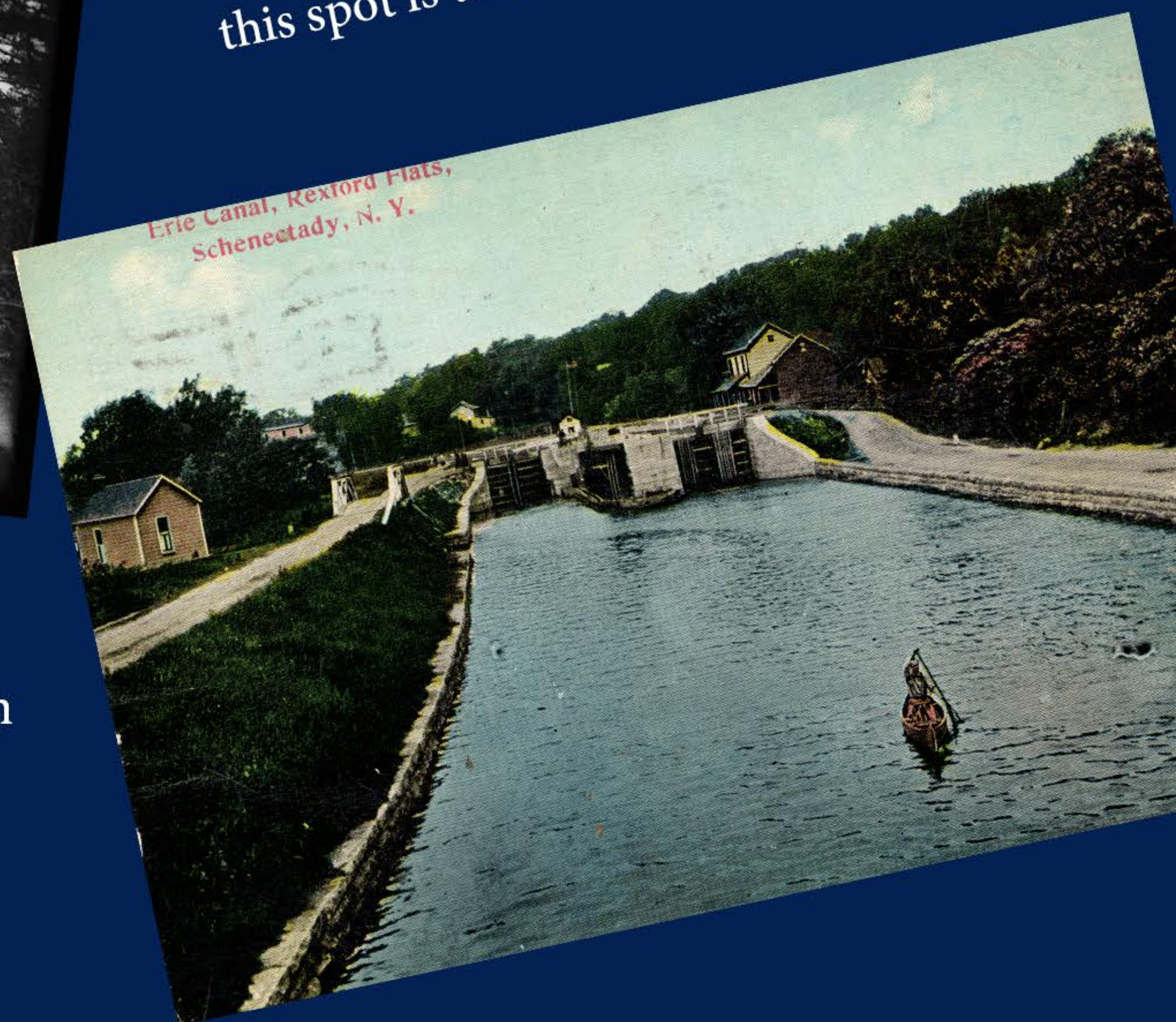
Charles Proteus Steinmetz was born Karl August Rudolph Steinmetz in what is now Wrocław, Poland. He arrived in the United States, passing through Castle Garden, on May 20, 1889. Steinmetz was a mathematician and electrical engineer who greatly contributed to the development of alternating current, or AC. This became the cornerstone of the electrical power industry in the United States. Steinmetz initially worked for Rudolf Eickemeyer, whose company was later purchased by General Electric. He settled in Schenectady, NY, was the chair of electrical engineering at Union College, and was an amateur photographer. At the time of his death in 1923, Steinmetz held over 200 patents and had written extensively about engineering and electricity. He was known as the “Wizard of Schenectady” and “Forger of Thunderbolts.”



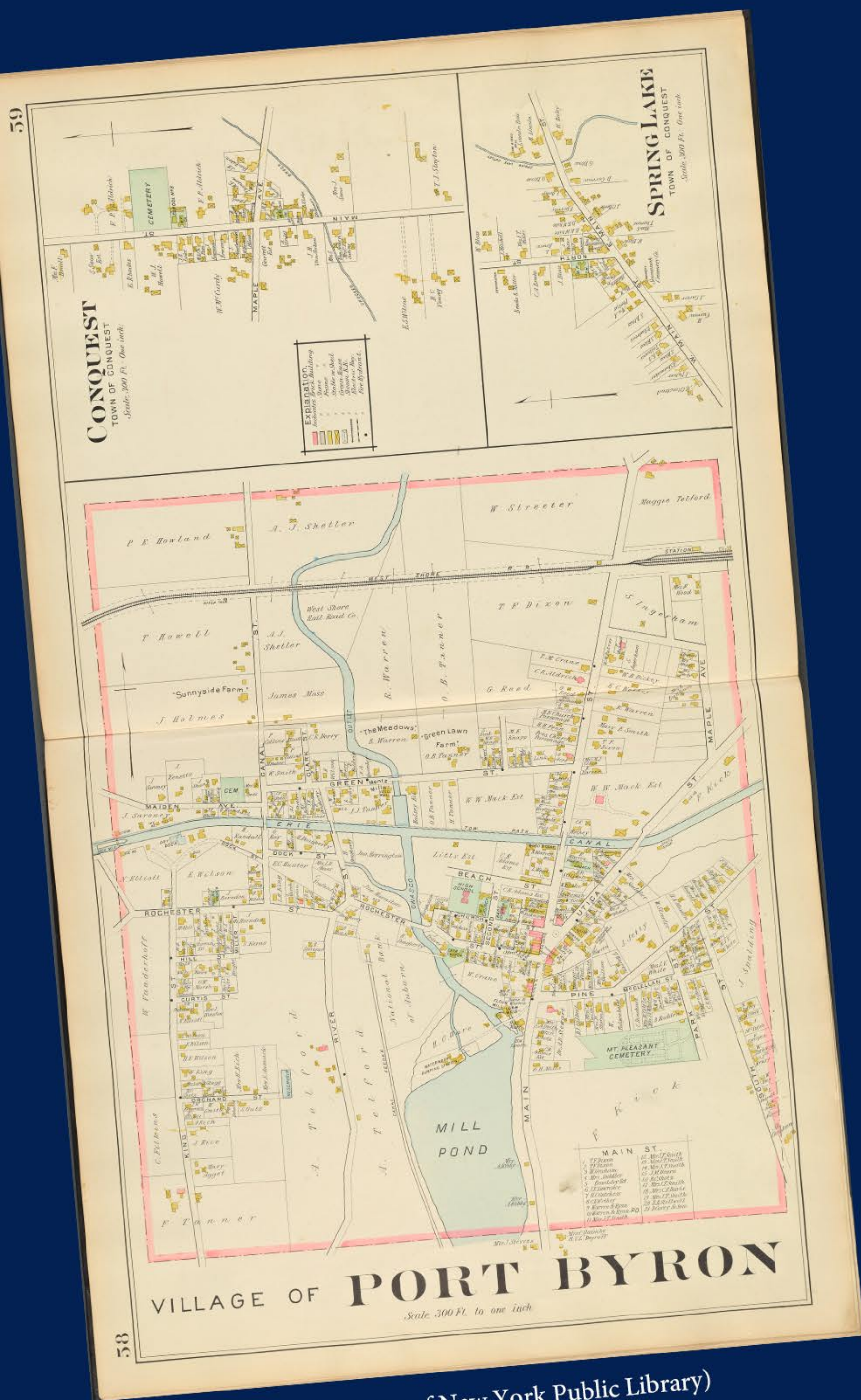
Postcard image of Rexford Flats at Schenectady; Steinmetz's photo of this spot is to the left.



The Canal Society of New York State's Gayer Collection includes several glass plate negatives of photos taken by Steinmetz, as well as an envelope with his signature.



Spotlight: Peter Van Detto & the Erie House



Map of Port Byron (courtesy of New York Public Library)



Tanner drydock and boatyard, Port Byron.

Port Byron, NY is home to the Erie House, a tavern built on the Canal in 1895 by Peter Van Detto. Van Detto immigrated to New York from Italy in 1881, originally settling in Rochester. After running a saloon in an Italian neighborhood there, he made the move to Port Byron (which also had a growing population of Italian immigrants) to take advantage of the Canal traffic coming through Lock 52. The Tanner drydock and boatyard was situated across the Canal from the Erie House, and the tavern had a steady stream of customers waiting on their boats to be repaired. A few years after the tavern opened, Van Detto added mule stables and a blacksmith shop, expanding his business.

The Erie House was closed and became the Van Detto's personal residence only in 1909, as it was located in the Town of Mentz, which voted to ban the sale of alcohol. Peter Van Detto soon opened a new saloon in nearby Montezuma, which had voted against Prohibition. In addition to immigrants, the Canal also transported ideas. Port Byron is located within New York's "Burned Over District," a region which saw the sweep of many religious and social movements, some of which were a reaction to immigration.

The Erie House, circa 1901 (courtesy of Craig Williams)



Spotlight: David Vaughan and Mapping the Canal



David Vaughan was an Irish-born cartographer who made maps of the Erie Canal during the Canal's enlargement period. In addition to his work on maps of the Erie Canal, he also mapped and planned the construction of lateral canals. When he arrived in Albany in the late 1840s, he came with the knowledge and skills needed for drafting and surveying, by way of family tradition. Over the course of several generations, Vaughan men were mapmakers. David traveled all over the state in the course of his work on Canal projects, as he was employed by the State Engineer and Surveyor in the 1850s and early 1860s. His work shows both the geographic features of the land as well as a whimsical sense of humor, and he incorporated little drawings and symbols which became his signature touches, such as a running stag and a buzzing beehive.

