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FEBRUARY 2026

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SPECIAL EDITION

★ ERIE CANAL ★

Courtesy: New York State Archives



ERIE CANAL

Yesterday and Today



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New York Archives magazine is a donor-funded educational product published quarterly by the NYS Archives Partnership Trust. For subscription information, visit nysarchivestrust.org.

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Additional Resources and Activities can be found at:



ConsidertheSourceNY.org

Erie Canal Yesterday and Today

“I’ve got an old mule and her name is Sal, 15 miles on the Erie Canal!” This popular folk song tells of life during the early days of the canal. It gives us clues as to what the canal’s purpose was—to move goods, like lumber, coal, and hay, as well as people, from cities along the canal’s path from Albany to Buffalo. The canal made many small farming communities into commercial ports.

Over time, railroads became the main method of transportation. Later, goods were moved by tractor trailers, while people used buses and cars to travel. By the early 1960s, many sections of the canal were no longer used and eventually fell into disrepair.

Fast forward to 1995. The New York State Canal Recreationway Plan was created. New York State wanted to turn the canal into a place where people could come to have fun. In many canal communities there are still buildings and structures along the canal that were once used to process farm products into items people needed, like milling wheat into flour. Other buildings were used to store produce and different types of goods to be shipped along the canal.

In many communities those same buildings have been updated and repurposed to help bring people back to the canal. For example, the old flour mill and grain tower in Pittsford, used for processing and distribution



Courtesy: New York State Archives

from 1882 until 1996, have been restored and are used for office space. The old coal tower, which once held coal for steam powered canal boats, is a restaurant. People come to the canal for concerts at the town gazebo. They walk their dogs and bike along the old towpaths. The “Sam Patch” is a replica packet boat that cruises the canal.

The Erie Canal has been open for 200 years. Its purpose has changed over time, but it is still an important part of life in many communities.

Gnaw on This



- Construction on the Erie Canal started on July 4, 1817, in Rome, NY.
- The original canal was 363 miles long.
- In Lockport, there were five locks to move boats up and down. This was an engineering marvel of the time.
- When Governor DeWitt Clinton first suggested the canal, people laughed. They called the project “Clinton’s Ditch” and “Clinton’s Folly.”
- The canal made it possible for people and goods to get from the Midwest all the way to New York City and beyond!

Community Connections



- **Erie Canal Museum.** Learn about the impact and history of the canal. eriecanalmuseum.org/
- **Erie Canalway National Heritage Center.** Learn about the fun things to do along the canal! eriecanalway.org/
- **Erie Canal Village, Rome.** Events, a museum, and attractions all centered on the canal can be found here. eriecanalvillageny.org/
- **Sam Patch Erie Canal Tours.** Take a ride on a replica packet boat. cornhillnav.org/sam-patch/
- **Colonial Belle Tour Boat, Fairport.** Take a ride along the canal and experience Lock 32. colonialbelle.com/



Take a Closer Look

Student Name _____

We can learn a lot about a place by comparing historic photographs to current photographs. These two photographs are of the same section of Schoen Place on the Erie Canal in Pittsford.

Courtesy: Pittsford Town Historian's Office



Observe:

1. What do you see in the older photograph that is not in the newer one?

2. What do you see in the newer photograph that is missing in the older one?

3. What is the same in both photographs?

Courtesy: Robert Corby



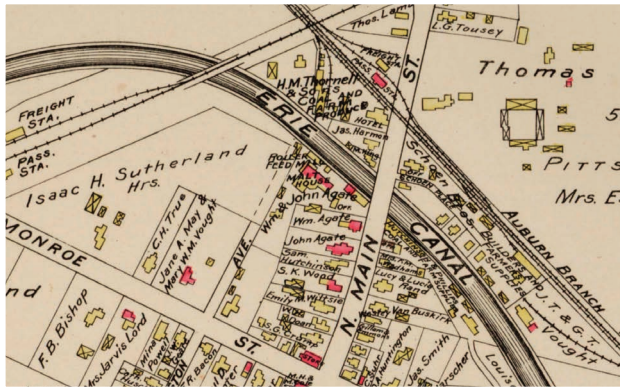
Infer:

4. Using what you read in the text and these two photographs, how do you think life along the canal has changed in the past almost 90 years?

Learning Activity

Maps are a great way to see change over time. For this activity we are going to look at two different maps of Pittsford. One is historic and one is from the present day. Both maps show the businesses in the Village at the time the map was made.

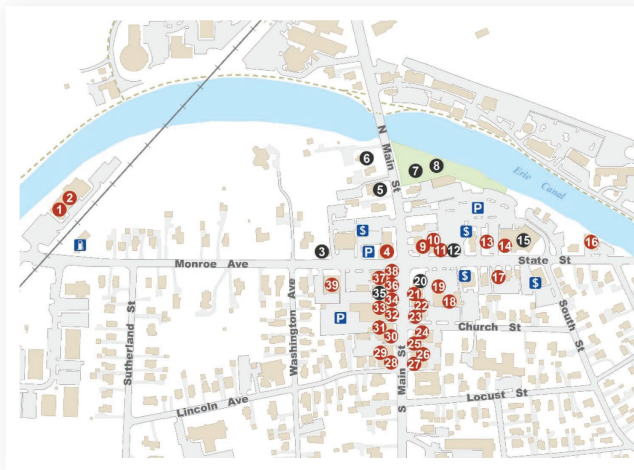
You can view larger versions of each map by visiting the link under each question. When you zoom in you will see that businesses are shown on the map in red.



Observe:

List the businesses you see on this map.

considerthesourceny.org/document/plat-book-monroe-county-new-york-plate-15-1902



Observe:

List the businesses you see on this map.

considerthesourceny.org/document/discover-pittsford-brochure

+ Infer:

Using what you read in the article, the photographs on page 3, and the information from these maps, compare and contrast Pittsford and the Erie Canal in that area then and now. Your paragraph should include:

- A paragraph about Pittsford and the canal in Pittsford in the past.
- A paragraph about Pittsford the Erie Canal in Pittsford in the present.
- A paragraph that tells how Pittsford and the area along the canal have changed over time.

Have you ever wanted to travel through time? Primary source documents sort of let you do that by giving us information about the past. You could pretend to be a time traveler and create a travel brochure for Pittsford or your community to show what it was like in the past. Check out our online resources for more documents and directions! considerthesourceny.org/new-york-archives-jr/special-edition-erie-canal-yesterday-and-today

