

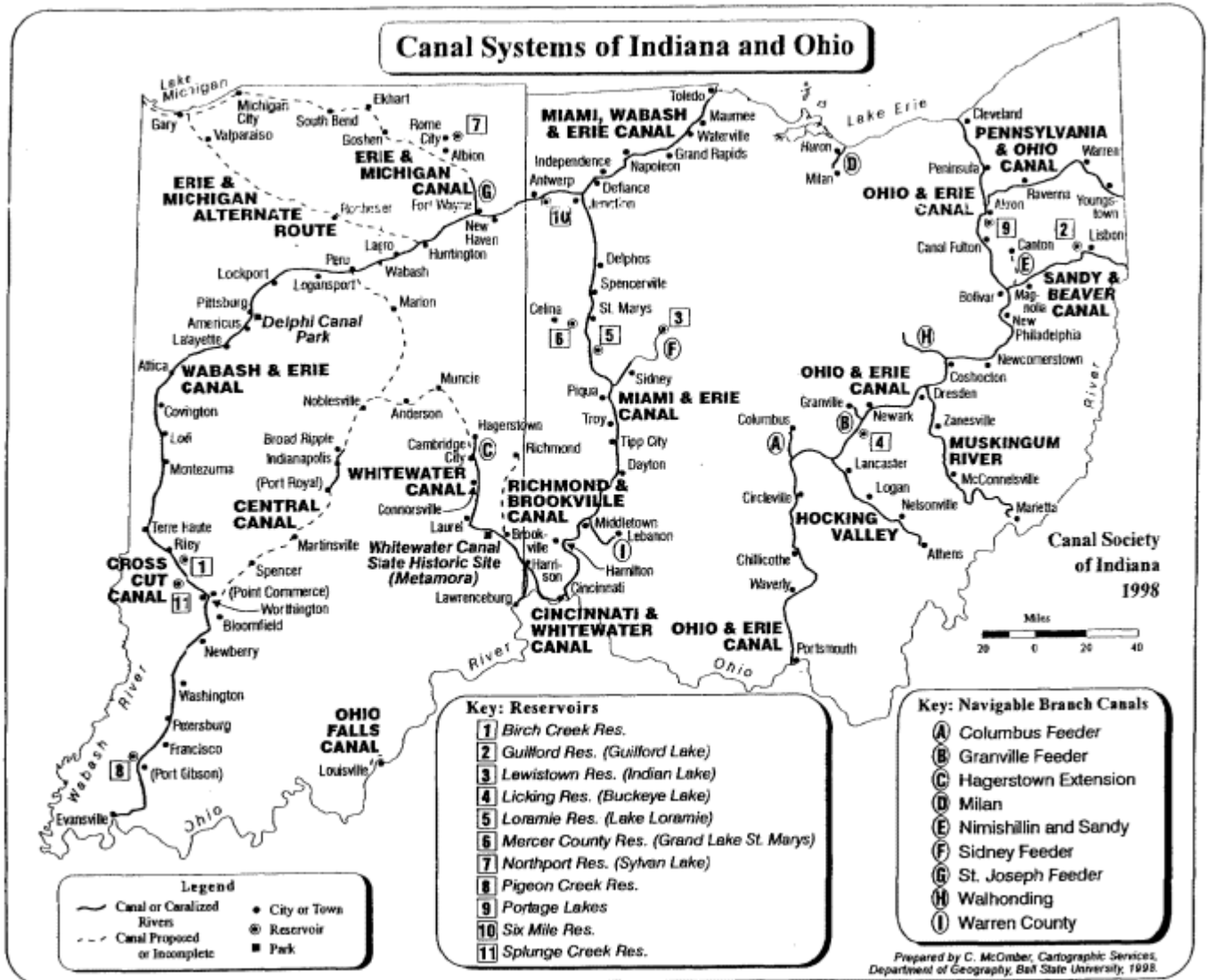
THE AMERICAN CANAL GUIDE

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HISTORY OF THE CANALS OF OHIO

By Terry K. Woods

When Ohio's first canal engineers located the route this new transportation system was to take, they weren't concerned so much with providing the fastest and most direct route between two points, as they were with providing a dependable means of transportation, to as many Ohio residents as possible. Several politicians even suggested that the most advantageous route would be one that would cut the state diagonally from the northeast to the southwest. Such a canal would pass through or near the population centers of youthful Ohio. Though such a route may have satisfied most of the people, it didn't satisfy the engineers. The proposed canal cut the state's watershed in such a manner that it would have been impossible to supply it with water. A compromise was finally decided upon which resulted in two main canals being built, one in the east and one in the west.

The eastern canal, the "Grand" or Ohio and Erie Canal, left Lake Erie at Cleveland and followed the valleys of the Big and Little Cuyahoga Rivers south to Akron. Here it cut across the divide and entered the valley of the Tuscarawas River and followed it south to Roscoe where the Tuscarawas and Walhonding Rivers join to form the Muskingum. The most logical course would have been to follow the Muskingum to the Ohio at Marietta. However, the people from the central part of the state, especially from Columbus, needed to be served. So the canal turned west at Dresden and followed the Licking River to the valley of the Sciota. Then turning south again, the Ohio and Erie Canal followed the Sciota River to its junction with the Ohio River at Portsmouth. This meandering route brought the "Grand" Canal to within 11 miles of Columbus. A branch up the Sciota was started immediately. Work progressed so rapidly that boats began arriving in the Capital City by 1831. The Ohio and Erie Canal was begun in 1825 and opened section by section. The entire 308-mile-length was opened to traffic by 1832.

All this was great, but what about the people of Cincinnati, the largest city in the state? The western canal resulting from the compromise was the Miami Canal. It was also begun in 1825 and was operating from Dayton to the outskirts of Cincinnati by 1829.

Even before these two main canals were completed, minor canals and navigable "feeders" were branching out to isolated towns and villages. The Columbus "Feeder" was already mentioned. Two other navigable feeders were the Granville Feeder and the Trenton Feeder. New Philadelphia was on the "wrong" side of the river so an outlet lock into the river and a short branch canal into town were built. The Zoarites had a similar problem, so a similar lock and branch canal were built into Zoar.

A private stock company built the Lancaster Lateral Canal in Fairfield County. It was later taken over by the state, extended to Athens, and called the Hocking Canal.

Two private stock companies were formed to connect the Ohio and Pennsylvania Canal Systems. Both were finally built years later. The Pennsylvania and Ohio Canal, from Akron, Ohio to New Castle, Pa. was completed in 1840 and the Sandy and Beaver, from Bolivar, Ohio to Glasgow, Pa., was opened to through traffic in 1850. Each of these canals had a branch, the Middlebury Branch Canal on the P & O and the Nimishillen & Sandy Canal (to Canton, Ohio) on the S & B. Another private company built a branch from the Miami Canal to Middletown. This was later taken over by the state as the Warren County Canal.

The Whitewater Canal was built from Cincinnati into Indiana. The Wabash and Erie, a canal from Indiana into Ohio, connected with Lake Erie at Toledo. The Miami Canal was extended to join the Wabash & Erie and later, the route to Cincinnati was known as the Miami and Erie Canal.

Back to the Ohio & Erie, a branch from Roscoe to Mount Vernon, the Walhonding Canal, was initiated, but only the first 24 miles were ever built. The Muskingum River Improvement from Dresden to Marietta was canalized and a branch canal built from Dresden side-cut to the main canal.

The Milan Canal, a three-mile artificial waterway, for a time, made Milan one of the three most important "ports" on Lake Erie. The Portage Canal and Hydraulic Company built a canal near Cuyahoga Falls and Akron, Ohio that was known locally as "Chuckery." It held water in a trial, but was never used and is not usually counted as one

OHIO CANALS

Ohio & Erie Canal
Miami & Erie Canal
Wabash & Erie Canal
Warren County Canal
Cincinnati & Whitewater Canal
Milan Canal
Columbus Feeder
Granville Feeder
Trenton Feeder
Hocking Valley Canal
Walhonding Canal
Muskingum Improvement
Sandy & Beaver Canal
Pennsylvania & Ohio Canal
Middlebury Branch Canal
Nimishillen & Sandy Canal
Sidney Feeder

INDIANA CANALS

Wabash & Erie Canal
Central Canal
Whitewater Canal
Ohio Falls Canal
Cross Cut Canal
Richmond & Brookville Canal
Erie & Michigan Canal

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