

Connecticut River Canals Projected But Never Finished

Besides the six canals that were built on the Connecticut River, there were, during the period of navigation, a number of other canals strongly discussed and some chartered at different places but not built until the bubble of river navigation burst. In 1825, the War Department had sent an engineer to Barnet who had surveyed three different routes from there to Canada. At large expense, and resulting from mass meetings of citizens held in different localities, surveys were made for a system of canals from Wells River over the Green Mountains to Montpelier, thence down the Winooski to Lake Champlain; from the Merrimac, near Concord, up the Pemigewasset to Wentworth, N. H., and then across to the Connecticut in the town of Haverhill, N. H.; from Concord to Claremont, via the Contocook and Sugar Rivers; from the mouth of Millers River, near Greenfield, to Boston; up the Deerfield Valley to the present Hoosac Tunnel, where the mountain was to be cut through and Troy, reached via the Hoosac River, there to connect with the arteries of canals then being constructed, and thus reaching all parts of the country. A canal was already being constructed northward from New Haven, Conn., to Northampton, Mass.

A Canal At Brattleboro

In the office of the Secretary of State of New Hampshire is to be seen an act of incorporation for a dam and canal near Brattleboro, evidently intended to avoid the rapid water just below the bridge, which, it is needless to say, was never constructed. The act chartered "The Connecticut River Canal Company," the incorporators being Richard Kimball, Elias Lyman, Amos A. Brewster, Francis Goodhue, Henry Hubbard and Allen Wardner.

The company was authorized to construct a canal from some point in the town of Hinsdale to the mouth of Israel's River, with the right to cross Connecticut River and locate a part of said canal within the limits of the state of Vermont. The canal was to be no less than 34 feet wide at the surface of the water, 20 feet wide at the bottom, and 4 feet deep. The locks were to be of a length no less than 80 feet in the clear, and of such width, not less than 12 feet, that boats, which could conveniently navigate the Connecticut River, might float and pass through the same. The authorized rates of toll were based on each mile's transportation on said canal and included the following: On each boat carrying less than 20 tons, one cent per mile; on each boat carrying more than 20 tons, one and one-half cents; on each boat used principally for the transportation of persons, ten cents per mile; and on each passenger carried three mills per mile. The capital stock of the company was exempt from all public taxes until the annual income should be sufficient to pay the necessary expenses and 6 per cent on the capital, but this provision terminated at the end of 30 years from the passage of the act.

Canals And Locks On White River

The Vermont legislature on November 2, 1797, passed an Act granting to Elkanah Stevens and two others the exclusive right to lock White River from its mouth as far as "the Royalton Meeting House" under the name of "The Company for Locking White River."

Locks and dams were to be constructed at such places as the incorporators should deem necessary and the work was to be completed within ten years. The toll named for each ton of freight was twenty cents at each lock, and the same for each thousand feet of lumber. It is needless to say this enterprise was never entered upon and the charter was forfeited.

Three Canals Proposed Between The Connecticut River And Lake Champlain

In the Vermont Watchman, printed in Montpelier, May 17, 1825, is the following account of a mass meeting in reference to projected canals:

"At a meeting of the citizens of the village of Montpelier, a committee was appointed to take into consideration the practicability of a canal to unite the waters of Lake Champlain and the Connecticut River. Three routes were examined, starting from Burlington and following the Onion (Winooski) River to Marshfield, a distance of 48 miles, and thence to the mouth of Wells River, about 24 miles, making a total of 72 miles. At this point, the committee divided, part of them exploring a route over the summit between Wells River and Marshfield. On this route, they found two large ponds, surrounded by hills and mountains. From these ponds, and Molly's pond in Cabot, they found, in their judgment, sufficient water to supply a canal.

"Two other routes were also explored from the Onion River through the towns of Plainfield, Marshfield, and Groton, to the Wells River in Newbury. The committee, afterwards, proceeded to examine a southern route from Montpelier through Barre and Williamstown to Brookfield, through the gulf and thence to Royalton on the White River. There are two ponds on this route near each other at the summit, the outlet of one taking a course south to the White River and the north to Onion River. These ponds, they thought, would supply plenty of water for a canal."

A later report of this committee closed with these optimistic words: "We most earnestly hope that the fever will not abate until the cooling waters of the Connecticut shall meet and mingle with those of Lake Champlain."

Canal From Concord, N. H., To Claremont

In the office of the Secretary of State of New Hampshire are excellent profile maps and drawings, made in 1816, for a waterway from a point on the Merrimac River, just below Concord, to the outlet of Sugar River in Claremont, made jointly in behalf of

Massachusetts and New Hampshire.

The scheme that the drawings disclose contemplated making use of the Contoocook, Warner, and Sugar Rivers, deepening their channels when necessary and providing many locks. A resurvey by engineers of the United States was reported to the Secretary of War in 1828, just a hundred years ago.

Based on: *The Connecticut River Valley in southern Vermont and New Hampshire: historical sketches*, Rutland, Vt.: Tuttle Co., Marble City Press, 1929.

Most of the above projected canals were instead built as railroads on approximately the same routes.