

American Canal Society Canal Index

CANAL	STATUS			ACS		
				HAER		
STATE/PROVINCE	ENLARGEMENTS	DATES IN USE	CANAL	LENGTH SLACKWATER	TOTAL	LIFT LOCKS No./SIZE
COUNTIES:		1				
LOCATION (Endpoints of Canal):		2				
TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS:		3				
		4				
HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:						
PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:						
NAMES & ADDRESSES OF GROUPS CONCERNED WITH CANAL'S PRESERVATION/RESTORATION:						
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY:						
UNPUBLISHED RECORDS, PHOTOS, DRAWINGS (CEHR, HAER, HABS. Local or Regional Historical Societies, Libraries, etc.):						
EXISTING OR RECOMMENDED LANDMARK STATUS (CEHR, National Register, ETC.):						
Investigation made by:					Date:	
Address:						

Use additional pages for added information

Historical Significance continued

This aqueduct was the longest and most troublesome on the entire Pennsylvania Main Line route. A contract for the aqueduct was let on June 3, 1827, and when completed the structure was 1140 feet long, 14 feet wide at the bottom, 16-1/2 feet wide at the top and 8-1/2 feet deep with a foot bridge on one side, and towpath on the other. Heavy white pine planks 2-1/2 inches thick, laid diagonally in two courses would, it was hoped, hold the great weight of water.

Another point upon which Pittsburghers insisted was that the canal should be run south through Pittsburgh to connect with the Monongahela River at a point where the proposed Chesapeake and Ohio Canal was supposed to enter the city. This proved to be a most expensive and difficult engineering feat since a 810-foot canal tunnel had to be constructed under Grant's Hill and a series of four additional lift locks had to be built through the heart of the city to lower the canal to the Monongahela River level. The main canal basin and unloading point for the terminus of the canal, however, was located on the north side of Pittsburgh. The "turning basin" ran east and west between Penn and Liberty Avenues, and the canal terminal depot was located on the east corner of Grant and Seventh.

The borough of Allegheny finally won the right to have its own branch and separate terminal facilities on the north side of the Allegheny River with a series of four additional locks below the north end of the aqueduct, which permitted the canal boats to pass on down into the Allegheny River on that side. This connection proved quite valuable on the several occasions when the aqueduct collapsed.

After the foregoing details were settled, construction of the Western Division Canal proceeded along the northwest bank of the Allegheny to Freeport. Subsequently a 14-mile extension, known as the Kittanning Feeder, was built north along the Allegheny, terminating at Kittanning.

In 1827 the legislature authorized an additional 44 mile extension of the canal from the mouth of the Kiskiminetas up that stream and its major tributary, the Conemaugh River, as far as Blairsville. The following year a further extension was approved along the Conemaugh to Johnstown.

Construction on the Western Division followed the same pattern as the Eastern Division, with the canal channel measuring 40 feet at the top water line and 28 feet at the bottom, 4 feet minimum in depth. The locks, constructed of masonry as in the eastern division, were 90 feet long but only 15 feet wide. The total length of this section was 105 miles. Including the four lift locks between the Pittsburgh basin and the Monongahela River and the outlet locks in Allegheny Borough there were a total of 88 lift locks.

There were also two canal tunnels on the route, one in downtown Pittsburgh as previously described, and the second along the Conemaugh east of Tunnelton. The latter, completed in 1830, was the third tunnel constructed in the United States. It was 850 feet in length and was built to avoid following the Conemaugh River on a long meandering loop. Exit from the west end of the tunnel was directly onto an aqueduct crossing the river.

Additional features of the Western Division were a total of 16 aqueducts, 10 river dams, 84 culverts, 39 waste weirs and 152 road bridges passing over the canal channel.

Newspaper accounts in the Pittsburgh area indicate that some traffic began to move on the Western Division by autumn of 1830 but it was not until May of 1831 that the first fully loaded freight boat from Johnstown arrived safely in Pittsburgh, with 1921 pounds of merchandise.

The Pittsburgh canal extension through Grant's Hill tunnel to the Monongahela River was not made operable until August of 1832. The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal never came closer to Pittsburgh than Cumberland, Maryland, so this extension and tunnel served mainly as a spillway to carry off excess water from the canal basin.