

## Introduction

At a stroke, the opening of the Illinois & Michigan Canal in 1848 made Chicago and northern Illinois the key crossroads of the American mid-continent. The dream of the canal had animated every vision and underlaid every plan for Illinois for over 200 years. As that vision was realized, the canal's commissioners laid out a canal port that would grow into a great metropolis. Their fellow citizens patented agriculture and industrial innovations that would make this the richest economic zone the world had ever seen. That Illinois is now the most populous inland American state, and Chicago the greatest city of the American heartland, is directly traceable to the 96-mile canal that linked the Great Lakes to the Illinois and Mississippi rivers.

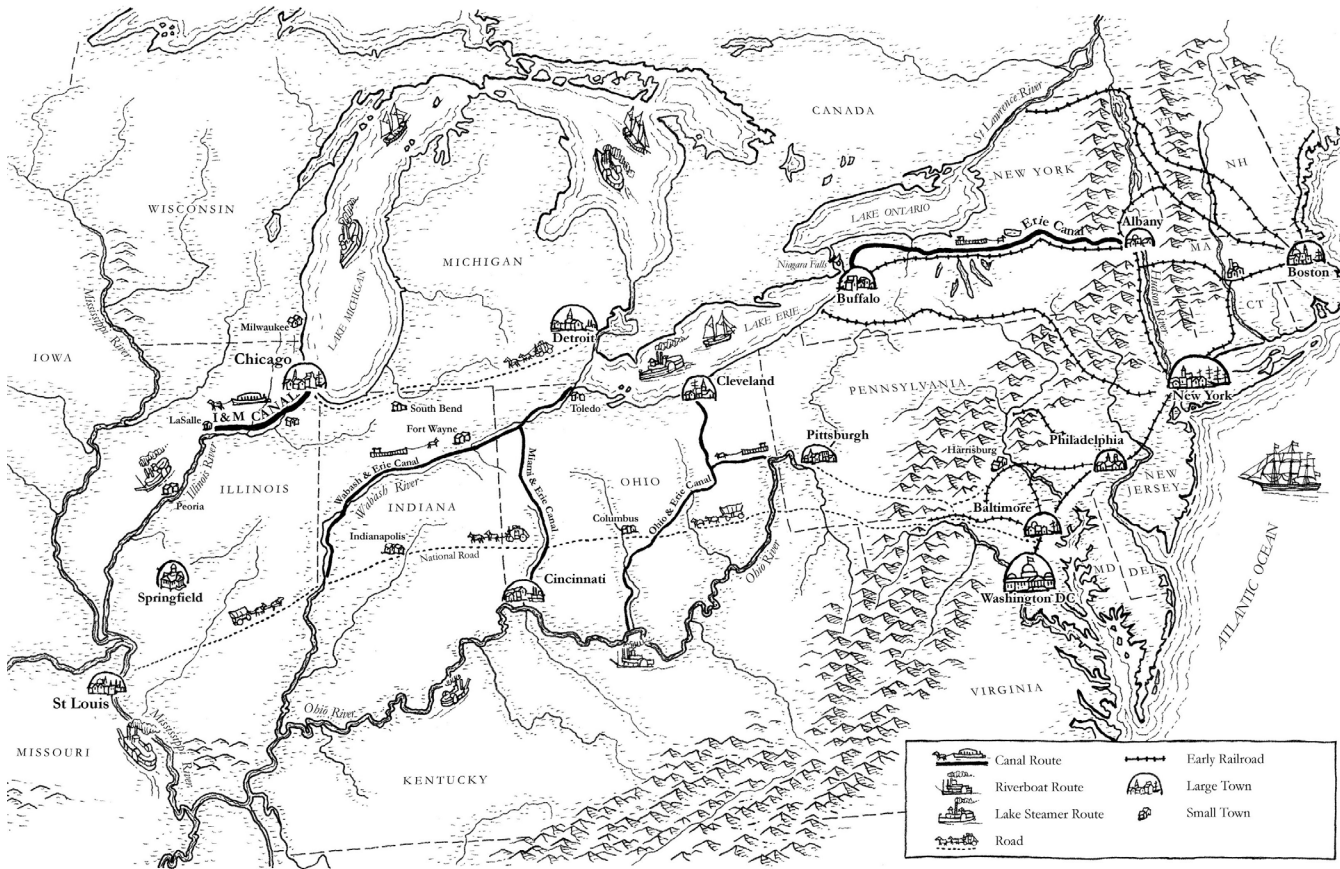
The Illinois and Michigan Canal is one of the best-kept secrets of American history. Though few know today how important it was, everyone here knew it a century and a half ago. We cannot know Illinois' history without understanding how the Canal, as a symbol of the continent-straddling ambitions of America, made it possible for a great civilization to arise here.<sup>1</sup>

The Illinois & Michigan Canal stretches 96 miles, connecting Lake Michigan to the Mississippi River via the Illinois River. When the I&M Canal opened in 1848, it was the final link in an all-water route connecting the Atlantic Ocean to the Mississippi River. The canal, designed to be 60 feet wide and 6 feet deep, drops 141.3 feet between Chicago and LaSalle and consists of 15 locks, 4 feeder canals (Calumet, DuPage, Kankakee, and Fox) and 4 aqueducts. Commercial traffic on the canal utilized 9 canal basins, 12 widewaters, sundry backwaters, 3 lateral canals, and 2 hydraulic basins. Eleven significant towns developed along the I&M Canal, six of them founded by the canal commissioners, including: Ottawa, Chicago, LaSalle, Lockport, DuPage/Channahon, and Morris.<sup>2</sup>

## National Significance of the Illinois & Michigan Canal

### *The Canal Era*

The I&M Canal was the final link in a national plan to connect different regions of the vast North American continent via waterways. Linking the waters of the Illinois River (and ultimately the Mississippi River) with those of Lake Michigan, the idea of the canal went back to Louis Jolliet and the early French fur traders of the 1670s.



**Figure 2.1. Nineteenth Century Transportation Map**

The opening of the Illinois & Michigan Canal radically reduced the costs of transferring goods, particularly grain, lumber, and merchandise, between Midwestern prairies and the East via the Great Lakes trading system. For the first time, the canal allowed goods from the southern U. S., including sugar, salt, molasses, tobacco, and oranges, to be shipped to Chicago. By cutting travel times, the Illinois & Michigan Canal also precipitated a new era of travel for people from the south to the north, and vice versa. (Tom Willcockson, © Canal Corridor Association)

The years between 1800 and 1850 have been characterized as the Canal Era in U. S. history. Since the birth of the new nation, American leaders recognized the urgent need for a network of internal improvements to ease the problem of continental transportation. The success of the Erie Canal, completed in 1825, marked a period of intensive canal building in the U. S. This chapter in our nation's history has been largely overlooked, as most historians have focused on the railroads as the prime force behind America's economic development.

Construction of the I&M Canal and the sale of canal lands brought thousands of people streaming into northeastern Illinois in the mid to late 1830s, and those who braved the hazards of this frontier outpost quickly realized the necessity of improving transportation. Contemporary accounts of stagecoach travel emphasize the perils and discomforts of traversing rutted paths that passed for roads. Much of the region consisted of wet prairie, and spring rains and melting snow turned the trails into quagmires. In 1847, a reporter took a trip by stagecoach along the route of the soon to be completed I&M Canal. He noted that the ride "was as uncomfortable as any enemy, if we had one, could desire. They made progress at the rate of less than three miles an hour; the weather was intensely hot; and not a breath of air

was stirring; the horses and carriage raised any quantity of dust, which, of course, rose only high enough to fill the carriage.” Another traveler noted that a long stagecoach ride “left one more dead than alive.” Canal travel promised a new level of comfort and convenience.



Few events in Chicago's

history were more eagerly anticipated than the opening of the Illinois and Michigan Canal. The digging of the most massive public works project ever attempted in the young state of Illinois, digging began on July 4, 1836. Many hoped the canal could be completed in a few years, but in 1837 the nation suffered its first major depression, and by 1840, Illinois teetered toward bankruptcy. Work on the canal largely ceased until New York, English, and French financiers invested \$1.6 million to jump-start the stalled project in 1845. It took 12 years of on-again, off-again labor to construct the canal, which finally opened in April of 1848.

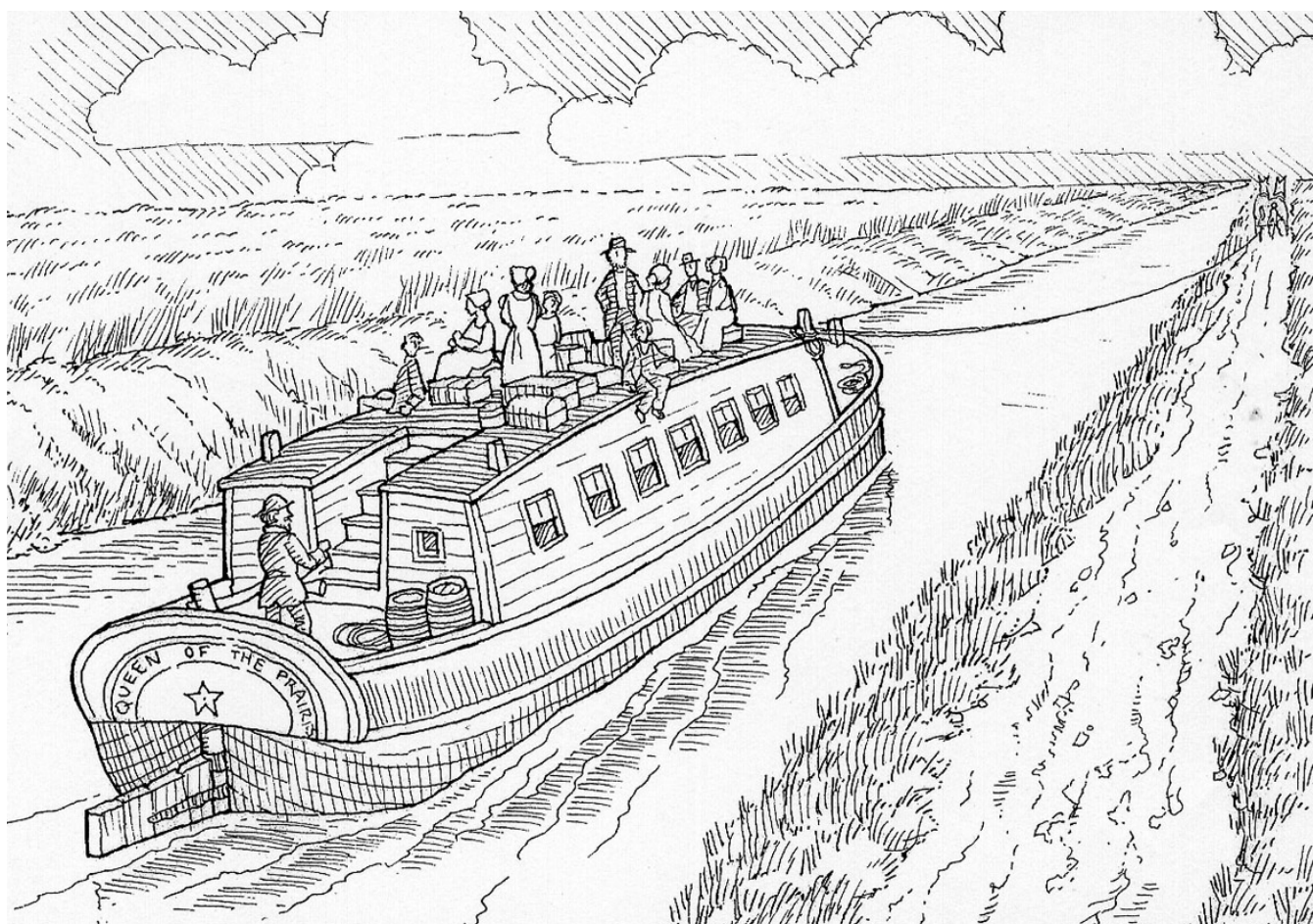
#### **Figure 2.2. Stagecoach**

Stagecoach travel tended to be very rough and uncomfortable for passengers. Before the canal, northern Illinois had no paved roads or railroads. During rainy seasons the few trails turned into rivers of mud, and in the summer, clouds of dust choked horses and people alike.

*(Tom Willcockson, © Canal Corridor Association)*

### ***A New Transportation Corridor***

On its completion, the I&M Canal created a new transportation corridor. By connecting the waters of the Illinois River with those of Lake Michigan, a vast all-water route connected widely scattered sections of the United States, specifically the Northwest, South, and East. Travelers from the eastern U. S. took the Erie Canal to Buffalo, New York, where steamboats brought them through the Great Lakes to Chicago. Transferring to canal boats, a 96-mile trip on the I&M Canal brought them to LaSalle/Peru. Here people boarded river steamers bound for St. Louis and New Orleans. The canal opened the floodgates to an influx of new commodities, new people, and new

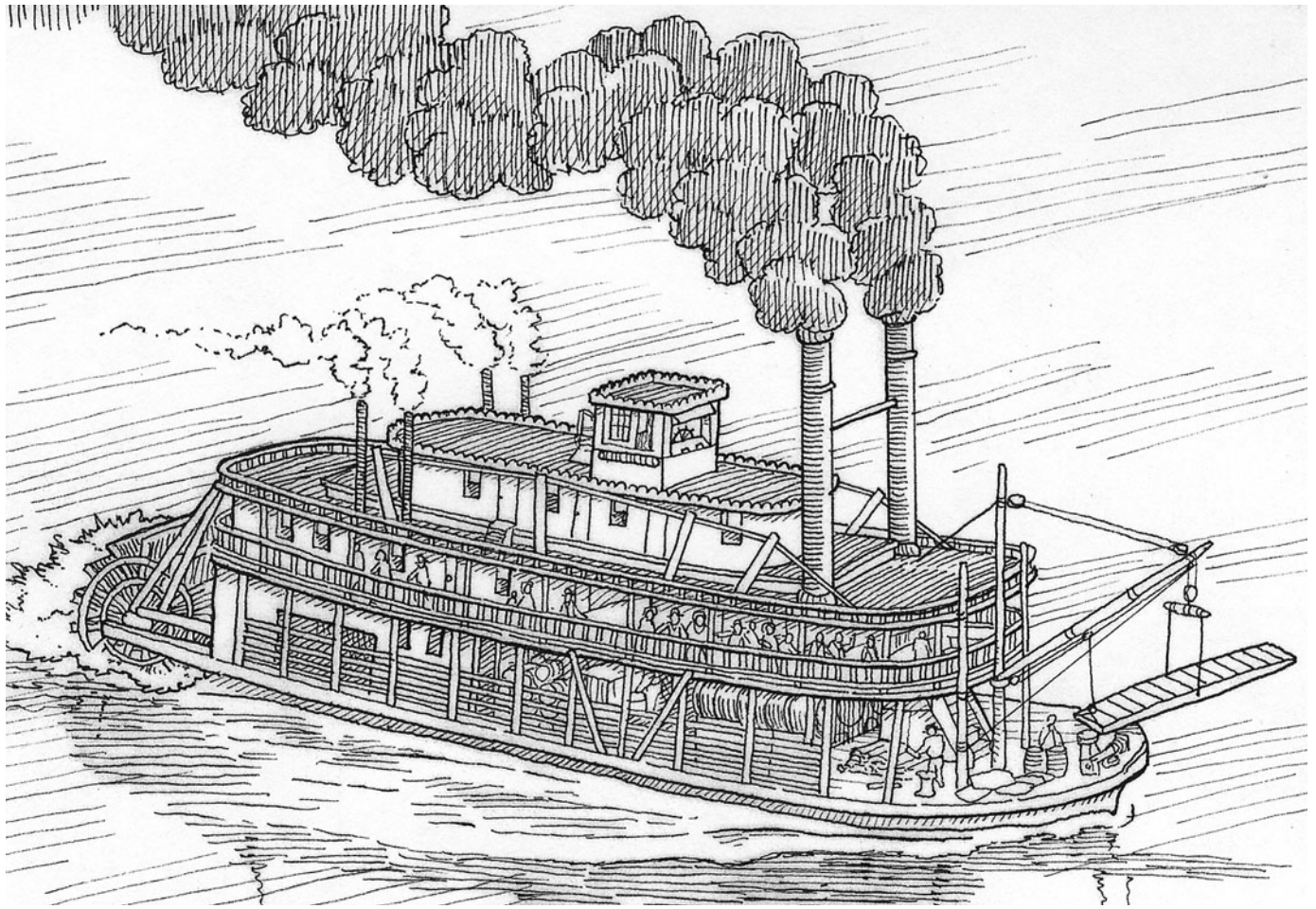


**Figure 2.3. Packet Boat**

In general, people enjoyed traveling on packet boats during daylight hours. After dark, passengers slept in cramped quarters with little space or ventilation. In fair weather one could loll about on deck, enjoying the passing scenery. Some played cards or backgammon, while others sang or read the latest newspapers. Since a trip on the Illinois & Michigan took anywhere from 17-24 hours, meals were also served on board. (Tom Willcockson, © Canal Corridor Association)

ideas. The I&M Canal, and the railroad and highway connections that soon paralleled its path between Chicago and LaSalle/Peru, became the great passageway to the American West. The opening of the Illinois and Michigan Canal in 1848 made Chicago and northern Illinois the key crossroads of the American mid-continent.

The opening of the canal heralded a new era in trade and travel for the entire nation. The I&M Canal allowed travelers the option of taking an all-water route from New York Harbor to Chicago, Illinois, to St. Louis, Missouri and even to New Orleans, Louisiana. This water highway provided a mud and dust-free alternative to overland travel. Passengers increasingly chose the all water route to the West, bypassing the Ohio River route. Freight could go from St. Louis to New York in 12 days via the I&M Canal and the Great Lakes, while the Ohio River route might take 30-40 days. Packet boat companies touted their role in a new transportation network by noting that the packets connected with a daily line of steamboats bound for St. Louis, enabling travelers to make the 400-mile trip between Chicago and St. Louis in 60-72 hours, at a cost of only \$9. One commentator estimated that the number of people traveling from Chicago to St. Louis had tripled since the packet boats began running.



### ***The I&M Canal and the Making of Chicago***

Chicago's rapid development in the nineteenth century is regarded as one of the most remarkable stories in American history, yet few today make a connection between this unprecedented growth and the Illinois and Michigan Canal. The last of the great U.S. shipping canals, the I&M Canal helped transform Chicago from a small frontier town to the fastest growing city on earth. The canal also siphoned off trade from St. Louis, one of the factors that allowed Chicago to surge ahead of its chief commercial rival. St. Louis and others had laid claim to the title of "Queen City" of the West: Chicago solidified its claim through the changes wrought by the I&M Canal. The I&M Canal was the first of the region's transportation systems; all others followed in its wake. Understanding the story of the I&M Canal is critical for understanding the incredibly rapid development of Chicago and Northeastern Illinois in the nineteenth century.

The first few years of the I&M Canal were critical in launching Chicago on its path to urban greatness, and in spawning a dozen other towns along its banks that would soon industrialize and help

**Figure 2.4. Steamboat**

Passengers traveling on the Illinois & Michigan Canal could transfer to steamboats to continue their journeys at both the western and eastern termini. (Tom Willcockson, © Canal Corridor Association)

consolidate the western end of the American Manufacturing Belt in northern Illinois. The opening of the Illinois & Michigan Canal radically reduced the costs of transferring goods, particularly grain, lumber, and merchandise, between Midwestern prairies and the East via the Great Lakes trading system. The degree to which the I&M Canal forever altered life in Chicago cannot be overstated. For the first time, the canal allowed goods from the southern U. S., including sugar, salt, molasses, tobacco, and oranges, to be shipped to Chicago. By cutting travel times, the I&M Canal also precipitated a new era of travel for people between the south to the north.

### ***Changes Wrought by the Canal***

The I&M Canal's influence reached its peak during 1848-1852, when it had no serious rival as a major artery of commerce in northeastern Illinois. Many people mistakenly believe that the construction of railroads in the early 1850s ended the use of the canal as a transportation artery. Indeed, by 1853, when the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad paralleled the canal, the brief and colorful days of the I&M canal packet (passenger) boats were over. But freight traffic on the canal continued to increase through the 1880s. The I&M Canal remained open for traffic for 85 years, of which only the last 33 were a time of steady decline until traffic was but a mere trickle. The existence of the canal as an alternative shipping route forced railroads to keep rates down on bulk goods, to the benefit of consumers everywhere. With the exception of the Erie Canal, only the I&M Canal opened up a water transportation corridor still viable today. This nationally important water corridor today consists of the Sanitary and Ship Canal and the Illinois Waterway, which eventually supplanted the I&M Canal in 1933.

The results of the canal in the Midwest were profound. Farmers now had a reliable way to get their crops to market, thus allowing them to open up new acreage for cultivation. The mining of limestone, coal, sand, and gravel shifted into high gear, as the canal made it economically feasible to quarry and ship large quantities to fast growing Chicago. Exploiting these natural resources in turn spurred new industries, especially the manufacture of glass, bricks, hydraulic cement, and zinc.

### ***Abraham Lincoln and the I&M Canal***

Throughout his public life, Abraham Lincoln advocated for improvements to the nation's transportation network, including a canal system that would be tied to the harbors, rivers, and roadways of America. He believed the waterways held the key to success, advancing the economic development of his home state and the

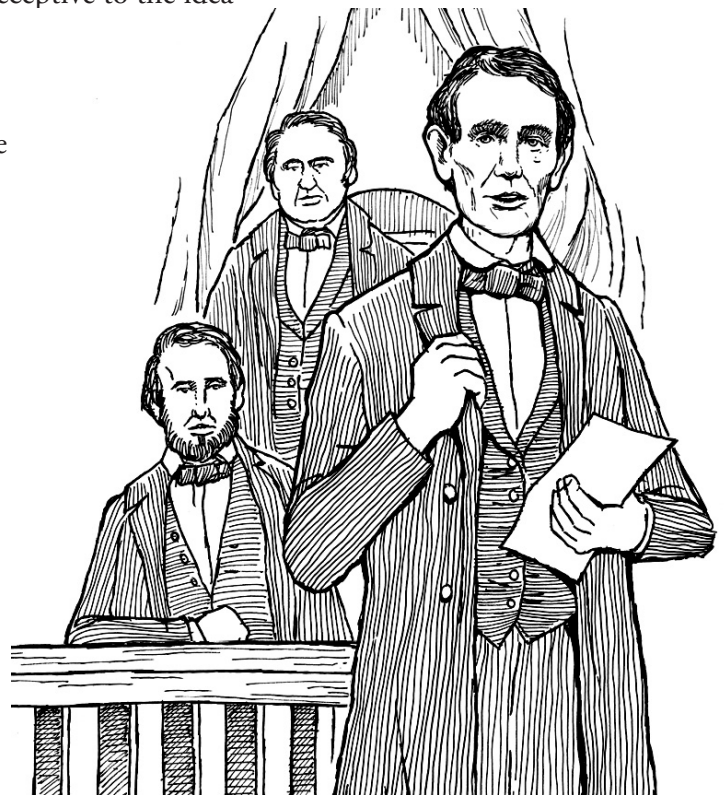
entire nation. As a legislator, an attorney, and the President of the United States, Lincoln actively supported the construction, use, and expansion of the Illinois & Michigan Canal.

While serving in the Illinois General Assembly, Representative Abraham Lincoln and eight of his colleagues addressed the slow development of northeastern Illinois. Some historians argue that legislators from Sangamon County, known as “the Long Nine” because of their height, swapped votes with northern legislators. In this act of “horse trading,” the Long Nine would lobby for the construction of the Illinois & Michigan Canal in exchange for northern legislators’ support of the capitol’s move to Springfield. Given his experiences on the rivers, Lincoln was receptive to the idea of a canal that would connect the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico through northeastern Illinois.

In February of 1835, Lincoln and 39 of his House colleagues voted to approve the construction of the I&M Canal, but funding problems ensued. Lincoln offered two amendments that were ultimately included in the authorizing legislation that passed in January of 1836. One of his proposals reduced the number of Canal Commissioners from five to three, and the other permitted the Governor to remove a Commissioner “for good cause.” As a lawyer in private practice, Abraham Lincoln remained involved in the affairs of the I&M Canal. During the summer of 1852, the Illinois General Assembly appointed Lincoln, along with Hugh Dickey and Noah Johnston, to a special commission. The commission’s task was to gather information about claims against the state resulting from the construction and operation of the I&M Canal. Lincoln and the other special commissioners traveled along the canal and interviewed claimants and witnesses in the Cook, Will, and LaSalle county courthouses. By the end of the year, they submitted a report to the Governor. As President of the United States, Abraham Lincoln’s goal was to preserve the Union. He advocated for improvements to the nation’s transportation system in order to move troops and supplies. Since the Confederacy blocked the lower Mississippi River, more freight and passengers traveled through Illinois. In his annual messages to Congress in 1861 and 1862, Lincoln specifically included improvements to the I&M Canal. The proposed canal enlargement would have allowed warships to travel between the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River. It also

**Figure 2.5. Abraham Lincoln**

In the mid 1830’s Abraham Lincoln, then a member of the Illinois State Legislature voted in favor of construction of the Illinois & Michigan Canal. A staunch advocate of public works projects, Lincoln knew that the young state of Illinois desperately needed to improve its transportation system. (Tom Willcockson, © Canal Corridor Association)



would have permitted a greater amount of freight to be shipped through the canal between the upper Mississippi River region and the eastern United States. Congress did not approve the project, but Lincoln's proposal laid the foundation for the construction of the Illinois Waterway System.

During his lifetime, Lincoln was honored on the I&M canal for his many efforts and accomplishments. No less than three canal boats used his moniker. The first was the Rail Splitter from Morris, which began its voyages in 1860. The following year, Old Abe out of Joliet and A. Lincoln from Morris joined the flotilla of canal boats.

### ***A Story with National and International Significance***

The I&M Canal had significant implications not only for Illinois, but for the entire nation. In 1827, the Federal Government gave the state of Illinois nearly 300,000 acres of prime farmland, the sale of which would finance construction of a canal. The I&M Canal shares with the Wabash Canal in neighboring Indiana the distinction of being the first American canal to receive a federal land grant toward its financing. This precedent is of great historical importance, as it later served as the model for the first federal land grant to support a railroad—the Illinois Central Railroad.

During the years of the California Gold Rush (1848-1856), the population of California increased by 300,000 people. Many of the individuals migrating to California traveled part of their journey on the Illinois & Michigan Canal. In the midst of the California Gold Rush, a nationwide cholera epidemic erupted in 1849. The epidemic came to Chicago on the "John Drew," an Illinois & Michigan Canal boat.

The canal story is also one with international implications. In 1845, with construction of the I&M Canal stalled due to the state of Illinois's near bankruptcy, investors from New York, England, and France put up \$1.6 million to complete the canal. The investors were not disappointed in their returns, and the I&M Canal is one of the few American canals to have more than paid for its construction and operation.



## Timeline of Historical and Significant Impacts on the Illinois & Michigan Canal

### Before the Canal

- 1673 Jolliet and Marquette explore northern Illinois, and Jolliet recommends construction of a canal to link Lake Michigan with the Gulf of Mexico.
- 1763 Britain wrests control of the future Corridor from the French.
- 1770s Portage site is used as a trade route during the Revolutionary War.
- 1783 US Government assumes control of the future Corridor.
- 1795 Treaty of Greenville transfers land around mouth of the Chicago River from Native American to U.S. control.
- 1803 Construction begins on Fort Dearborn (future site of Chicago).
- 1812 War of 1812 with Britain begins. Battle at Fort Dearborn.
- 1816 Treaty with Ottawa, Potawatomi, and Chippewa tribes cedes land along the Illinois River to build a canal.
- 1818 Illinois becomes the 21st state with an amended northern boundary which was moved 41 miles north to encompass the proposed canal.

### Building the Canal

- 1822 On March 30, the United States Congress passes a federal act authorizing the survey and construction of the I&M Canal connecting the Illinois River with Lake Michigan. The canal route is to be 90 feet wide on each side of the canal. The land survey is to be completed within three years and the canal completed within 12 years. When completed, the canal will be used by the United States government, free of charge.
- 1823 On February 14, the Illinois General Assembly appoints a commission to ascertain the best route for the proposed canal.

- 1824 The commission submits five possible routes for the proposed canal to the Illinois General Assembly.
- 1825 Erie Canal opens, increasing migration to Illinois.
- 1827 The United States Congress gives Illinois 284,000 acres of land to finance construction of the canal.
- 1829 On January 22 the Illinois General Assembly passes An Act to Provide for the Construction of the Illinois & Michigan Canal. It establishes a board of Canal Commissioners with the authority to employ surveyors, engineers, draftsmen, and other individuals necessary for the completion of the I&M Canal.
- 1830 Canal Commission plats Chicago and Ottawa, the prospective western terminus of the Illinois & Michigan Canal.
- 1833 On March 1 the Illinois General Assembly abolishes the Board of Canal Commissioners and abandons the proposed I&M Canal due to lack of funds.
- 1835 On February 10, the Illinois General Assembly establishes another Board of Canal Commissioners with the authority to generate funds to complete construction of the proposed I&M Canal.
- 1836 On January 9 the Illinois General Assembly reorganizes the Board of Commissioners. The Board of Commissioners finalizes plans for the construction of the I&M Canal.
- 1836 The canal commissioners plat Lockport, Channahon, and LaSalle and designate Lockport as the administrative headquarters of the I&M Canal.
- 1836 Construction of the Illinois & Michigan Canal officially begins on July 4 at present day Bridgeport.
- 1837 I&M Canal Headquarters is built in Lockport.
- 1837 Panic of 1837, first major national depression.
- 1838 The State of Illinois builds the Gaylord Building as a materials depot for the construction of the I&M Canal.
- 1838 Labor violence erupts among canal workers.
- 1840-44 Most work on the canal halts due to lack of funds.

- 1842 Morris is jointly platted by the county commissioners and the canal commissioners at the geographical midpoint of the county along the canal traverse.
- 1843 To generate funding for the canal, the Illinois General Assembly authorizes the Governor to pledge the property and all revenues generated by the canal to the bondholders in a deed of trust. According to the agreement: the canal, its revenues, and its property will revert to the state once the principal and interest are paid to the bondholders. During the period of the trust agreement, the canal will be governed by a Board of Trustees composed of three members. Two members will be chosen by the bondholders, and one member appointed by the Governor.
- 1845 Funding arranged by Governor Ford with new york, english, and french investors. Construction resumes.
- 1845-1848 Canal construction completed.
- 1847 Canal diggers strike for more wages and fewer hours. The strike fails.

### **Commerce on the Canal**

- 1848 Illinois & Michigan Canal opens in April. Construction begins on railroad to parallel the I&M Canal.
- 1848 The Chicago Board of Trade is founded to handle increases in shipments of grain.
- 1852 Last year of major passenger travel on the I&M Canal; Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad opens for business and attracts most passengers.
- 1854 Chicago and Rock Island Railroad opens to the Mississippi River.
- 1861-1865 The I&M Canal plays a key role in the Civil War. The years 1861-1865 were among the busiest and most profitable in the canal's history, with a record \$300,000 in tolls in 1865. With the Mississippi River blockaded for much of the war, the canal and Great Lakes trade become critical to the war effort. Tons of government grain and oats pass through the canal toll free on its way to the Union soldiers.

- 1871 I&M Canal is deepened and the flow of the Chicago River is reversed in hopes of allowing Chicago sewage to be sent down the Illinois River. The attempt was successful, however the growth of the city and increased volume of sewage made the attempt inadequate.
- 1871 In April, the Illinois General Assembly formally dissolves the agreement between the state and the canal creditors. Beginning May 1, the canal bondholders are paid off and the state of Illinois resumes complete control of the I&M Canal. A Board of Canal Commissioners appointed by the Governor is to administer the canal.
- 1882 Greatest tonnage shipped on the canal in a year, over 1 million tons.
- 1889 The Illinois General Assembly creates the Chicago Sanitary District (now the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District) in 1889 for the purpose of managing water supply and wastewater issues. The Chicago Sanitary District begins a project to permanently reverse the flow of the Chicago River by building the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal.
- 1900 On January 17, the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal opens between Chicago and Lockport, reversing the flow of the Chicago River, sending sewage from Chicago to the Des Plains River, and diverting barge traffic from the I&M Canal.
- 1910 The northernmost section of the I&M Canal between Chicago and Lockport is permanently closed to traffic.
- 1911 Construction begins on the 16-mile long Calumet-Saganashkee (Cal-Sag) Channel.
- 1914-18 I&M Canal experiences a brief resurgence during World War I.
- 1917 The Illinois General Assembly transfers control of the I&M Canal to the Illinois Department of Public Works and Buildings.
- 1922 Cal Sag Channel opens, reversing the flow of the Calumet River and connecting the Calumet River to the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal just east of Lemont. The Cal Sag is designed to carry sewage and heavy commercial traffic.

- 1925 The Illinois General Assembly transfers control of the I&M Canal to the Illinois Department of Purchases and Construction.
- 1933 The Illinois Waterway, a series of locks and dams that regulate the Illinois River at a depth of 9 feet, opens and the LaSalle-Joliet section of the I&M Canal officially closes.

### **Recreation on the Canal**

- 1933 The Illinois General Assembly transfers control of the I&M Canal back to the Illinois Department of Public Works and Buildings.
- 1933 The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) establishes five camps along the I&M Canal from Willow Springs to LaSalle to make repairs to the canal.
- 1933-38 The CCC develops bridle paths, foot trails, trailside shelters, comfort facilities, and boat docks. In addition, the CCC plants trees and shrubbery and constructs picnicking accommodations.
- 1935 Designation of Illinois and Michigan Canal State Parkway from Joliet to LaSalle, built by the CCC to connect recreational areas along the canal. The canal begins to be used solely for recreational purposes.
- 1936 Charles M. Gates writes a Historical Report on the Illinois & Michigan Canal at the request of the director of the National Park Service.
- 1947 On July 1, 1947, the United States government relinquishes the title to the Illinois and Michigan land and cedes it to the State of Illinois (HR 1628).
- 1955 The I&M Canal and adjacent areas become a state park.
- 1963 Open Lands Project (Openlands) is founded and becomes the official voice for open space in the civic community and media in northeastern Illinois. Openlands spearheads a movement called Operation Greenstrip to utilize the I&M Canal and its adjacent land as a recreational corridor. Recreational use of the I&M Canal is supported by many organizations along the canal including: Illinois Audubon Society, the National Campers and Hikers Association, the Sierra Club, the LaSalle and Will County historical societies, and

- the Chicago Heritage Committee. Openland's first director, Gunnar Peterson, lobbies the state legislature for a "Greenstrip" designation of the I&M Canal.
- 1963 The I&M Canal is listed in the National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings as one of 33 "sites of exceptional value" under the "Travel and Communication" category for the country.
- 1964 The I&M Canal is designated a National Historic Landmark.
- 1964 Stevenson Expressway (I-55) opens in Chicago, built over the eastern-most 7 miles of the I&M Canal. An old canal warehouse is dedicated in Utica to the LaSalle County Historical Society.
- 1966 Openlands forms an "I&M Canal Coordinating Committee", which pushes for state preservation of the canal as a recreational area.
- 1969 I&M Canal office in Lockport closes and is turned over to the Will County Historical Society.
- 1970 On December 2, 1970, the Village of Lemont purchases the I&M Canal between Cal-Sag Channel and the Cook-Will county line, for \$333,750.00 to be paid over a 20-year period, with payments of \$16,687.50 per year.
- 1971 The Illinois General Assembly transfers the I&M Canal to the Illinois Department of Transportation which assumes responsibility for all administrative activities connected with the canal.
- 1972-1975 Beginning in the Spring of 1972, a group of individuals from the LaSalle Rotary Club called the Canal Volunteers start to work on restoring a section of the I&M Canal from LaSalle, IL to Split Rock. They dredge the canal and turning basin, remove garbage, cut down trees, restore portions of the towpath, and repair Lock 14, returning it to its original state.
- 1974 On January 1, the I&M Canal jurisdiction is transferred from the Illinois Department of Transportation to the Illinois Department of Conservation (now Illinois Department of Natural Resources). A comprehensive development and management plan of the Illinois & Michigan Canal

is developed for the state of Illinois Department of Transportation, as part of the transfer agreement, and the Illinois & Michigan Canal Task Force Committee by Harland Bartholomew and Associates of St. Louis, MO. This plan is never formally adopted.

- 1974 A 61.5-mile stretch of I&M Canal State Trail opens from Rockdale (south of Joliet) to LaSalle/Peru.
- 1980 John Husar, a sports writer for the Chicago Tribune, writes an award winning series entitled Chicago's Hidden Wilderness, about the DesPlains River Valley. He becomes an advocate for the creation of the Illinois & Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor.
- 1980 National Park Service releases their report entitled Reconnaissance Survey of the I&M Canal.
- 1981 National Park Service creates a concept plan for I&M Canal written by John D. Peine and Deborah A. Neurohr. The study provides a conceptual plan for protecting and enhancing the many cultural and natural resources in the I&M Canal Corridor, while at the same time providing opportunity for economic development. In many ways, the Peine report serves as the blueprint for all subsequent visions of what comes to be known as the I&M Canal National Heritage Corridor.

### **A National Heritage Corridor**

- 1984 Congress passes a bill authorizing the creation of the Illinois & Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor. On August 24, President Ronald Regan signs the bill in the Chicago Hilton establishing the first National Heritage Corridor.
- 1986 Buffalo Rock Effigy Tumuli Sculptures, the largest earth sculptures in the world, are completed by artist Michael Heizer near Starved Rock State Park. The project reclaims a seriously disturbed, former coal strip mine and creates a remarkable expression of site sculpture drawing in the tradition of the ancient Native American mound builders. This sculpture enhances the IMCNHC for public enjoyment.
- 1986 IDOC resurfaces 13 miles of the towpath, dredges canal prism between Utica and LaSalle, rebuilds the

- foot bridge over the Fox River parallel to the I&M Canal aqueduct at Ottawa, and improves drainage by dredging a portion of the canal near Seneca.
- 1987 IDOC resurfaces the hiking/biking trail through Ottawa, and puts a pump and spillway in the Utica-Marseilles area.
- 1988 IDOC surfaces 30 miles of the canal towpath and rehabilitates the Aux Sable Aqueduct, the Little Vermillion Aqueduct, and Lock 14.
- 1988 Forest Preserve District of Cook County surfaces over five miles of the canal towpath at Willow Springs.
- 1989 Construction begins on a 26-mile Centennial Trail between the Chicago Portage Site and Lockport. The trail will be built and maintained by the Forest Preserve Districts of Cook, DuPage, and Will Counties. By the end of the year, 11 miles of the 26-mile long Centennial Trail opens for hiking.
- 1989 The Forest Preserve District of Cook County surfaces 5.5 miles of towpath along the I&M Canal in Willow Springs.
- 1990 Forty-six wayside exhibit panels are completed and installed throughout the Corridor.
- 1992 Three wayside exhibits are completed for Navy Pier.
- 1992 IDOC continues improvements along the I&M Canal State Trail with the placement of two bridges across the canal in Utica to improve access to the trail and surfacing of the trail from Channahon to Interstate 55.
- 1993 IDOC improves the I&M Canal State Trail with the placement of two bridges across the canal at Channahon and one across the Aux Sable Creek Aqueduct.
- 1993 Several projects in the Corridor are funded by the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) including: the Fox River Aqueduct, the Pullman Railroad Car site, locks and the towpath of the I&M Canal, the dredging of the Canal prism in three spots, the locktender's house at Lock 8, the Seneca Grain Elevator, stone facing on the Aux Sable Aqueduct, and the steel mill ruins in Joliet Heritage Park.



- 1994 Thirty-two new wayside exhibits are completed. These exhibits supplement the 46 wayside exhibits already installed throughout the Corridor.
- 1994 The Village of Lemont extends the canal trail system, opening a two mile stretch of trail west of the Village into the downtown.
- 1995 Work begins to repair and rehabilitate the Fox River Aqueduct at Ottawa using ISTEA funds.
- 1996 Congress directs the Federal Commission to study possible additions to the IMCNHC (Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Act, Sec. 902 P.L. 104-333).
- 1996 In July, areas of the I&M canal are affected by a 500-year flood. The DuPage River washes out the dam and intake gate at Channahon, de-watering the canal for a distance of about 15 miles. (Federal Emergency Management Agency provides \$685,000 for repairs State Department of Natural Resources provides another \$250,000).
- 1997 An archeological excavation of seven canal boat segments in the canal bed in Morris is completed by IDNR. These canal boats are discovered after a portion of the canal is de-watered during the flood of 1996.
- 1998 Congress extends authorization of the Federal Commission to August 24, 2004 (Automobile National Heritage Area Act, Title V—Other Matters, Sec. 502 P.L. 105-355).
- 1998 A 15-mile section of the canal between Channahon and Morris, that had been closed since the flood of July 1996 is re-watered and the canal boat remnants are entombed.
- 1998 The repair and rehabilitation of the Fox River Aqueduct in Ottawa is completed.
- 1998 Face stones are replaced on the Aux Sable Aqueduct. At Aux Sable, several old buildings are demolished and later additions removed from the locktender's house.
- 1998 A new segment of the I&M Canal State Trail between Channahon and Joliet opens making a continuous trail of 67 miles.

- 1998 This year is the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the canal and the dedication of the Joliet Iron Works Historic Site.
- 1999 The Chicago Park District completes Phase 1 of the Canal Origins Park in Bridgeport. The project includes: site clean-up, bank and shoreline stabilization, grading, and preliminary landscaping.
- 2000 Congress increases the funding authorization from \$250,000 to \$1,000,000 (Consolidated Appropriations Act, Sec. 126 P.L. 106-554).
- 2000 Canal Corridor Association launches the I&M Canal Passage Wayfinding Program installing 75 mile markers along the I&M Canal State Trail and the towpath north of Joliet to Lockport and in Lemont.
- 2000 IDNR completes restoration of the Seneca Grain Elevator and completes all stone and concrete work on Locks 2-12. Trail restoration and landscaping around the locks is also completed. The exterior rehabilitation of the Aux Sable Locktender's House is completed.
- 2001 Canal Corridor Association develops and installs the I&M Canal Passage driving tour signage throughout the western portion of the I&M Canal.
- 2001 NPS staff works with IDNR to advise on reuse plans for the Ottawa Toll House and to talk about ways in which the Commission could contribute to development of a master plan for the I&M Canal State Trail.
- 2004 The Village of Lemont opens the I&M Canal Heritage Quarries Recreation Area through the assistance of an Illinois First Grant.
- 2006 On October 12, 2006 Congress designated the Canal Corridor Association the local coordinating entity for the Illinois & Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor.

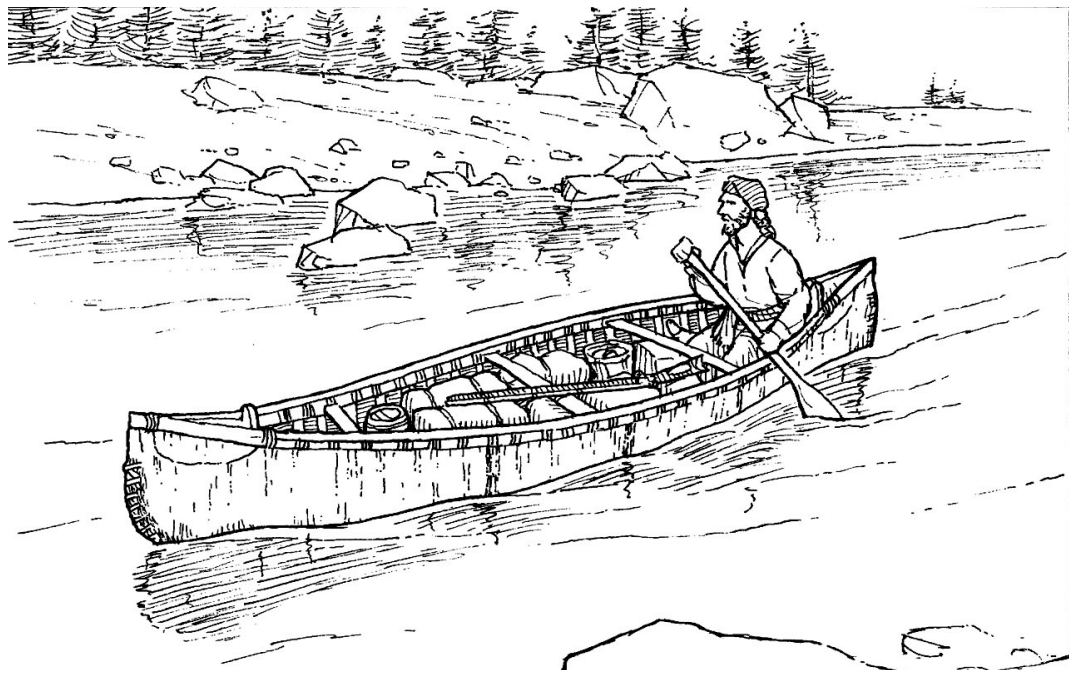
## The Unifying Story of the Illinois & Michigan Canal Passageway

### Overarching Theme: Illinois & Michigan Canal Passageway

The overarching theme of the Illinois & Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor is the “Illinois & Michigan Canal Passageway.” This theme summarizes the diverse themes of the Corridor in one simple word: passageway. The Illinois & Michigan Canal was carved through a glacial passageway that has been used by migratory birds, Native Americans, French fur traders, nineteenth-century pioneers, canal trade, and modern shipping industries. The visitor to the Corridor is yet another traveler through this passageway.

This corridor through the prairies has been a critical continental passageway for millennia. Every May and October, its skies witness the annual flight of migratory birds. In their own astonishing continent-wide commercial system, pre-contact Indians plied these waters and portaged their canoes here to connect far-flung trading partners. The French voyageurs and trappers recognized over 300 years ago that this wetland would be the easiest link between the Mississippi and the St. Lawrence. Enterprising Americans in the second quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, among them State Representative Abraham Lincoln,

calculated that extraordinary wealth might flow into Illinois if a canal could connect the young nation’s greatest seaport at New York to New Orleans. From that early investment stemmed not only Chicago’s dominance of the inland trade in basic commodities but an explosion of industrial growth within the corridor itself of iron and steel, glass, zinc, clocks, ships, and a thousand other products. Into the corridor and through the corridor have come streams of the world’s people and goods.



**Figure 2.6. French Trapper**

French Trappers used the passageway carved by the glaciers to travel between the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River. (Tom Willcockson, © Canal Corridor Association)

Much of this history, human and natural combined, is still visible in our living landscape. For those who take time to read it, the Corridor tells the story of geology and American Indian cultures, diverse intersections of ecology, social change, and changes of economics. With a bit of imagination, visitors see pelts being traded, stone cut and laid into canal walls, barges off-loaded at these industrial plants. They can also imagine how immigrants arrived and signed up for jobs in these factories, Americans rallied to join in the war effort, and post-war families created new homes and enjoyed the outdoors in a new leisure-time economy. <sup>3</sup>

Today, the Illinois & Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor continues as a passageway for transportation and recreation. The transportation corridor includes I-80 and I-55, railroads, intermodal locations, and the Illinois Waterway and Sanitary and Ship Canal that replaced the Illinois & Michigan Canal. It is also a recreational corridor with its network of state parks, trails, and recreational opportunities that draw thousands of visitors a year. A haven for both casual and active outdoor enthusiasts, the Corridor offers a variety of experiences for its visitors and residents.

### **Core Sub-Themes**

The interpretive sub-themes of the Illinois & Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor illustrate the continued use of the Corridor as a passageway. They reflect the past, present, and future evolution and unify the Illinois & Michigan Canal Passageway as our own unique contribution to our nation's story. While the big idea of the IMCNHC is the Illinois & Michigan Canal Passageway, three core sub-themes emerge within the context of the Passageway:

- The IMCNHC Passageway: A Natural Connector
- The IMCNHC Passageway: A Magnet
- The IMCNHC Passageway: A Place for Recreation and Reconnection

Within each are multiple stories that collectively combine to make the overarching theme of the Illinois & Michigan Canal Passageway. Illustrations under each are by no means comprehensive but guide us into topics to be explored within each story.

### ***Sub-Theme: A Natural Connector***

Glaciers carved a natural passageway through the prairies a natural connector and an obvious place for people and animals to pass through and live within for centuries. Native people traversed between Lake Michigan and the Mississippi River in their continental trading network, and during times of high waters paddled along easily in their handmade canoes. When the water was low in the marshy

prairie rivers, they carried, portaged, their canoes through parts of the passageway, giving the low divide between the Chicago and Des Plaines River the name of the Chicago Portage. French explorers were the first to recognize that this natural connector could be manipulated to create a transportation passageway with the construction of a canal. Today, this corridor is a conduit for transportation against the backdrop of the ever-changing natural passageway.

### **Story: The Natural Pathway**

Although the canal was built in the 19th century, its story actually begins with the geologic forces that created the passageway and its underlying soils and bedrock. These forces created varied landforms that became habitats for diversified plant and animal life.

Illustrative points:

- Today's landforms in the Corridor were formed during the last glacial period, the Wisconsinian glaciation, which ended over 10,000 years ago. The glaciers of this period carved out Lake Michigan, flattened our prairies, created wetlands, and established today's topography and drainage patterns.
- The vast ice sheets of this period covered most of northern Illinois, and when they retreated the melt waters created Lake Michigan, the Des Plaines and Illinois River valleys—the Illinois & Michigan Canal passageway.
- Between Ottawa and Marseilles is a large moraine, formed when the glaciers retreated from the area more than 10,000 years ago.
- Four thousand years ago a sub-continental divide rose up to interrupt this passageway and force the Chicago River to flow east into Lake Michigan and the Des Plaines River to flow west into the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers.
- The limestone that was discovered here when the canal was constructed indicates that 400 million years ago the region was a warm, saltwater ocean.

### **Story: The Idea of the Canal**

The idea of a canal that could connect the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River was central to plans for northeastern Illinois for 200 years before it opened. French explores were the first to recognize the need for a canal to connect the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River. The idea of the canal was pursued by the young American nation and the new State of Illinois.

Illustrative points:

- Early French explorers recognized the advantages of a canal

from Lake Michigan to the Des Plaines River. In 1673, Native American guides led French explorers Father Jacques Marquette and Louis Jolliet from the Illinois River to the Des Plaines, across the Chicago Portage to the Chicago River and Lake Michigan, providing them with a shortcut back home to Canada. Jolliet immediately conceived of a canal that would allow an inland passage from the Great Lakes down the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico.

- In 1803, Fort Dearborn was constructed at the mouth of the Chicago River to protect this strategic future port site.
- Before the canal was built, it took days of bone-jarring travel on rutted turnpike roads that baked rock-hard every summer and became a sea of mud after each winter. Pioneers had two main choices for travel by wagon and horseback over muddy roads or by canoe. The marshy prairie rivers were unreliable for shipping. In 1818, Gurdon Hubbard wrote of an agonizing 3-week-long journey across the Chicago Portage to the Illinois River. Later he joined the ranks of political leaders, including Abraham Lincoln, who advocated for a canal.
- If not for the idea of the proposed Illinois & Michigan Canal, some of Chicago would have been a part of Wisconsin. In 1818, legislators decided that the canal should be within only one state's borders, so they moved Illinois' boundary north 41 miles.
- In 1822, a Federal Act authorized the survey and construction of the canal, but provided no funds. Five years later, Congress gave Illinois 284,000 acres of land to help finance the construction of the canal.

### **Story: Canal Construction**

The construction of the Illinois & Michigan Canal was a major undertaking that involved engineers, contractors and thousands of immigrants. Canal laborers worked long hours, lived in temporary shantytowns near the construction sites, and frequently were injured or killed in accidents or by diseases that plagued the shantytowns.

#### Illustrative points:

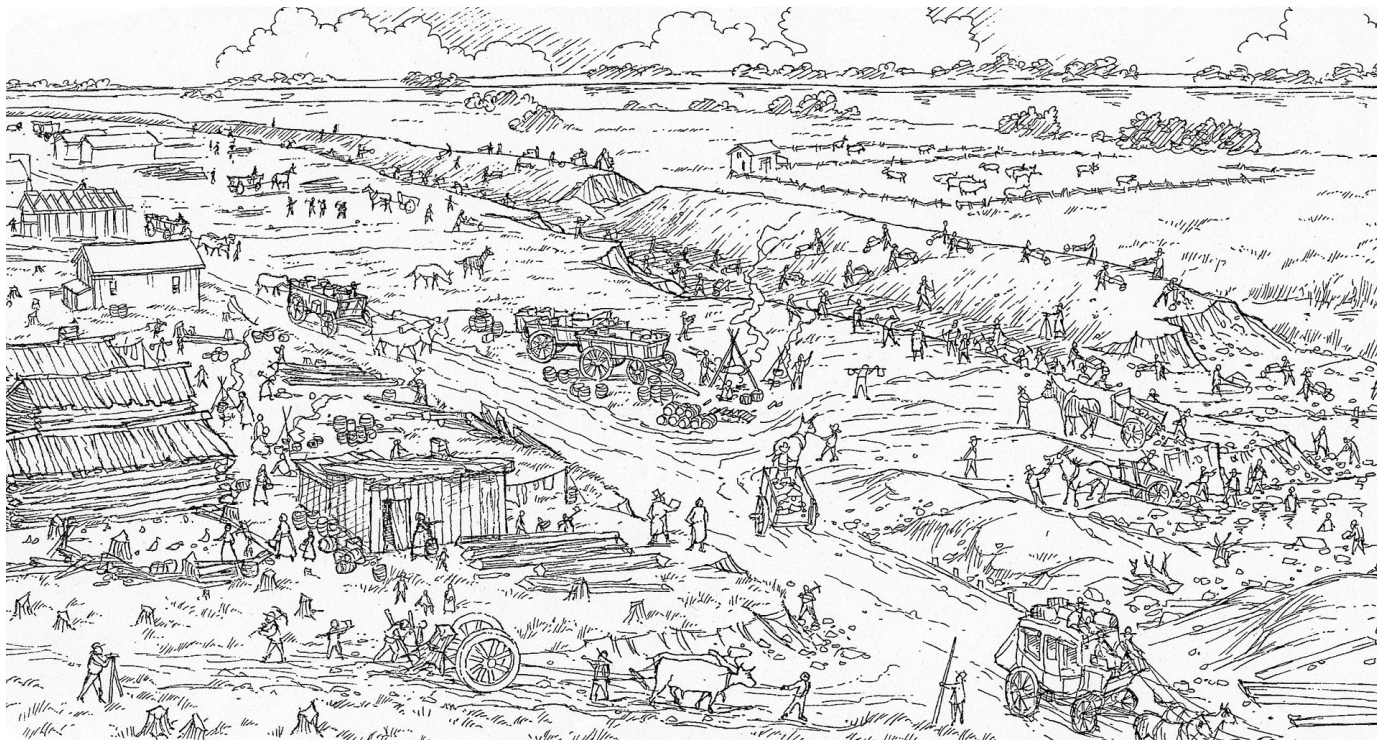
- Before the canal could be dug, men had to clear the land of trees, brush and boulders.
- Many different ethnic groups helped to dig the canal - Scandinavians, French Canadians, and Germans among them but the Irish played the lead role in this backbreaking work.
- Digging the canal was backbreaking labor done by brawny men. Their basic tools were shovels, wooden scoops, and wheelbarrows. They earned a dollar a day for 12-14 hour days filled with hard labor. By the end of 1838, over 2000 men

were working to build the canal. It took 12 years to build and over 1000 workers died of accidents, disease and squalid living conditions.

- One European visitor called the construction of the canal “truly fabulous” given the “savage condition” of the state of Illinois.
- Shantytowns for canal diggers and their families sprang up along the canal. Living conditions in these shanties were deplorable; dozens of people often lived crowded into small huts.
- In 1838, a posse was formed to put down a bloody feud between different factions of Irish canal workers.
- Canal workers unearthed large quantities of magnesium-rich dolomite, a kind of limestone that is particularly hard. It was used to construct the canal locks and area buildings.
- Canal contractors faced serious obstacles, including unruly workers, rough terrain, and lack of funds. Many were driven to bankruptcy in the 1840s when work on the canal was suspended. Canal employees were issued scrip, which could be redeemed for land, and many turned to farming.
- The canal was a minimum of six feet deep, 60 feet wide at the top and 36 feet at the bottom. Several widewaters allowed canal boats to pass each other.
- Canal engineers built four aqueducts - Aux Sable, Nettle Creek and at the Fox and Little Vermilion Rivers - to carry the canal over water.

#### Figure 2.7. Canal Construction

Irish, as well as German, Scandinavian and other immigrants, attracted by the promise of abundant jobs, flocked to Illinois to begin the arduous work of digging the canal by hand. The workers lived in rude shanties, and many died of diseases, including cholera and dysentery. (Tom Willcockson, © Canal Corridor Association)



### **Story: The Gateway to the West**

The Illinois & Michigan Canal was the key to the development of the Midwest and helped fuel westward expansion. The canal revolutionized the transportation system of Illinois and established Chicago as a gateway for goods and people traveling throughout the continent. It also served as the gateway to the West, and ended Chicago's days as the western frontier in 1848. Today, Illinois is still a leader in transporting goods and people, but few realize that it all began with the Illinois & Michigan Canal.

#### Illustrative points:

- The opening of the Illinois and Michigan Canal in 1848 made Chicago and northern Illinois the key crossroads of the American mid-continent.
- The 96-mile canal connected the waters of Lake Michigan with the Illinois River. It brought people, commodities and prosperity to canal towns like Lockport, Chicago and Ottawa, as well as the entire Midwest.
- The Illinois & Michigan Canal connected agricultural and industrial producers to markets. Canal boats pulled by mules carried grain and livestock, stone, coal and foodstuffs like sugar, salt, molasses and whiskey to fuel the region's rapid growth.
- The canal meant that farmers would no longer have to traverse muddy roads to reach the grain port in Chicago. Families could get calico for clothing, woolen blankets, furniture, and other finished goods from New York and New England. Sugar and oranges could be found on dinner tables.
- During the first six years of canal operation, grain exports grew from three million to 13 million bushels as the prairie was settled and turned into farmland. In 1855, the canal transported almost 26,000 cubic yards of limestone.
- The Illinois & Michigan Canal was the last of the great American canals built during an era when waterways were the nation's major highways.
- The I&M played a role in major national stories, including the California Gold Rush, the Underground Railroad, the 1849 cholera epidemic, and the Civil War.



### **Story: A Transportation Corridor**

The Illinois & Michigan Canal Passageway has been used as a transportation corridor for over 400 years. The Native Americans used the passageway in their continental trading network. French and American trappers used it to transport their furs to market. The opening of the Illinois & Michigan Canal played a major role in establishing the passageway as a major transportation highway. Railroads were built along the passage enhancing shipping and passenger travel. As the Illinois & Michigan Canal became too small to handle the bulk and magnitude of the shipping industry the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal, the Illinois Waterway, and the Cal Sag Channel replaced it. These waterways, the railroad and the interstate highway system still play a major role in the national transportation network.

#### Illustrative points:

- Native Americans traveled between Lake Michigan and the Mississippi River using a natural water passageway on rivers we know today as the Chicago, Des Plaines, and Illinois Rivers. During times of high waters, they paddled easily in canoes. When the water was low in the marshy prairie rivers, they carried their canoes through parts of the passageway, especially over a low divide between the Chicago and Des Plaines River that later became known as the Chicago Portage.
- Native Americans used this passageway as a link in their continental trading network.
- Railroads first paralleled the canal in 1853 and quickly supplanted packet boats for passenger traffic. The canal remained the cheapest way to ship bulky goods, and competition from the canal kept railroad prices low, helping to cement Chicago's preeminence.
- The Illinois & Michigan Canal closed in 1933, replaced by the Illinois Waterway comprised of the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal, the Cal-Sag Channel, the lower Des Plaines River and the Illinois River.
- Barges on the Illinois Waterway can carry 10 times as much cargo as an I&M Canal boat could, and one tugboat can push 15 of them, equaling 22,500 tons.
- The Stevenson Expressway (I-55) was built over the easternmost seven miles of the I&M Canal. During the planning stages it was even called the Illinois & Michigan Canal Expressway.
- The North/South bound Interstate I-55 intersects with the East/West bound I-80 within the Corridor, linking two of the great interstate highways in the nation.



**Figure 2.8. Rail Road**

The Illinois & Michigan Canal carried on a lively passenger trade between 1848-1852. Canal packet boats carried thousands of people back and forth between Chicago and La Salle. By the end of 1852 the Chicago and Rock Island Railroad paralleled the canal, effectively ending the Illinois & Michigan canal packet boat.

*(Tom Willcockson, © Canal Corridor Association)*

- The Corridor remains a national transportation hub for industrial and consumer products, the center of passenger air travel, railroads, modern waterways, and a major crossroads on the interstate highway system.

***Sub-Theme: A Magnet***

The Illinois & Michigan Canal Passageway has been a magnet for people for over 400 years. Native Americans used the passageway as a trade route and a place to live. The opening of the I&M Canal attracted an endless sea of people moving west, looking for work and a place to call home. Many individuals and families earned their living through the daily operations of the canal. Canal towns sprang up along the canal becoming individual centers of commerce and industry. The services of the Illinois & Michigan Canal soon established Chicago as the pre-eminent city of the Midwest, the city that served as the terminus and the connector for goods now smoothly moving between the east and the west.

**Story: Native Americans - first to travel and live in the passageway**

For thousands of years before the canal was built, Native Americans traversed the passageway, utilizing trade highways along the Des

Plaines and Illinois Rivers. The passageway was home to many Native American tribes and the location of the Grand Village of the Illinois.

Illustrative points:

- Native Americans have been in the region since the last glaciers retreated over 10,000 years ago. At one time, the Potawatomi, Ottawa, Illinois and Miami tribes all lived in the corridor.
- In both Morris and Utica large Native American settlements were established, numbering thousands of residents. Illinois Indians maintained a large village of as many as 6000 people on the Illinois River near Utica. The Grand Village of the Illinois was a meeting place for many tribes.
- Little is known about the Illinois Indians. Composed of a dozen related tribes, their culture was largely exterminated by 1800. Many perished atop Starved Rock in 1769.
- Buffalo Rock, situated between Utica and Ottawa, was once home to the Miami tribe.
- Following the War of 1812, an 1816 treaty ceded much of the present-day canal corridor to the United States from Great Britain.
- After the Black Hawk War of 1832, Native Americans in Illinois were forced to sign treaties ceding all of their land east of the Mississippi River. Soon after the last of the Native Americans departed, the first shovel full of dirt was turned for the construction of the canal.
- Canal surveyors in 1837 discovered 19 Indian mounds in what is now downtown Morris. Other Indian mounds were found at Channahon and Starved Rock.

**Story: Chicago— The pre-eminent city in the Midwest**

Chicago's phenomenal growth began with the canal, which established Chicago as the nation's greatest inland port.

Illustrative points:

- In 1830, much of northeastern Illinois was designated canal lands and sold for \$1.25 an acre. Thousands of people from all over the country took advantage of these sales to realize the American dream of owning their own land.
- The mere idea of the canal drew land speculators to Chicago, and when work on the canal began in 1836, Chicago's meteoric growth was launched and its future as the Midwest's pre-eminent city was assured.
- Before 1871, Chicago received more vessels than San Francisco, New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Charleston and Mobile combined.

- Because of the canal, Chicago would outstrip St. Louis as the Midwest's major port and transportation hub. By 1880, Chicago was the busiest port in the United States.
- Immigrants flocked to Chicago to dig the canal and unload canal boats filled with grain, stone and coal. They worked in the city's vast lumberyards, stockyards, steel mills and factories. They helped build the Sanitary & Ship Canal and the railroads and highways that followed the canal.
- After the canal opened, Germans, Italians, Poles, Swedes, and many other immigrant groups came to canal towns to plow the prairies, farm the rich soil, process corn and wheat, mine coal, quarry stone, build railroads, and make steel. They also worked as canal boat captains, locktenders, toll collectors, and mule drivers.
- Two of Chicago's greatest landmarks - the Water Tower and Pumping Station - were built of dolomite quarried in the Corridor.
- The Chicago Board of Trade was created in 1848 to take advantage of the new trade opportunities afforded by the canal.

**Story: Canal Towns — Eleven distinctive towns grew and prospered along the I&M Canal**

The Illinois & Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor includes 11 significant historic towns/cities that grew and prospered because of the Illinois & Michigan Canal. Six of these towns were platted by the canal commissioners during the planning and construction of the Illinois & Michigan Canal including: Chicago, Channahon, LaSalle, Lockport, Morris, and Ottawa. The five additional communities that developed were: Joliet, Lemont, Marseilles, Seneca, and Utica. As you travel in the passageway you can visit these special places that still exhibit the distinctive characteristics of nineteenth-century canal towns.

Illustrative points:

- Local industry sometimes fueled by waterpower from prairie rivers, helped canal towns become centers of employment and markets for meeting the needs of farmers.
- Canal towns, like Lockport, Joliet, Morris, Ottawa and LaSalle boomed with the canal's construction. They became shipping points for the region's rich resources and developed as local transfer points for grain and other farm products and as quarrying, mining, milling, and manufacturing centers.
- Settlers were drawn by the rich natural resources of the passageway and created markets for them.

- In Morris, there were breweries, factories, and grain elevators that dotted the landscape along the canal.
- In the 1830s, Lockport, headquarters of the Canal Commissioners, had hopes of surpassing Chicago.
- Irish and English immigrants flocked to the western half of the canal to work in coalmines. The coal was shipped on the canal from Morris.
- Joliet, the second largest city in the IMCNHC, drew thousands of immigrants to work, first in its dolomite limestone quarries, and later in the steel industry.
- Many residential and commercial buildings still visible in the Corridor are constructed of the dolomite unearthed when the canal was built.
- In the early years of the I&M Canal, the arrival of a canal boat was cause for great excitement. Boat captains blew a large horn to announce their arrival. Residents came to the canal and to nearby stores to buy fresh lemons and oranges, sugar, molasses, and tobacco.
- Ottawa's Washington Square Park was the site of the first Lincoln-Douglas debate in 1858, which drew thousands of people from all over Illinois.
- Ottawa was home to a prosperous glass industry - and the very fine silica sand from this area is still used for glass making.
- Canal towns were vibrant community centers where farmers' wagons crowded the streets and grain elevators dotted the landscape.
- The last two remaining canal warehouses along the I&M Canal are located in Lockport and Utica.
- Seneca contains the oldest surviving grain elevator in the passageway.
- LaSalle, the canal's western terminus, was a place where northern and southern culture came together as canal boats and steamboats from the Mississippi exchanged goods and passengers. Here boatmen would gather in the rough and tumble levee district.

### **Story: Life on the I&M Canal**

The canal looks serene today, compared to its heyday when there was great activity along the route. In the first few years, thousands of passengers used the canal, and over its life, millions of tons of freight were shipped. Boat captains, lock tenders, towpath walkers, toll collectors, and mule drivers were among the colorful characters who made the canal work on a daily basis.

Illustrative points:

- Teenage boys led the mules that pulled the canal boats. Mule drivers had a reputation for swearing, smoking and gambling.



- James Butler “Wild Bill” Hickok was once a mule driver on the I&M Canal. In the first known fight of his career, he and an opponent fell into the canal.
- The list of items shipped on the canal included: ale, beeswax, ice, horns, hemp, animal skins, corn, wheat, stone, and timber. People were also transported on the canal.
- One passenger likened the experience of traveling on a packet boat to a floating dormitory, a cramped one in which men slept on one side and women the other.
- Mules pulled the canal boats, some loaded with 150 tons of goods.
- The trip from Chicago to LaSalle took packet boats 17 to 26 hours.
- From 1848 to 1852 thousands of people traveled on the Illinois & Michigan Canal between Chicago and LaSalle. Railroads eclipsed passenger traffic on the canal after 1852.

- There were 15 locks along the canal needed to compensate for the 140-foot drop in elevation. Locktenders operated the wooden canal lock gates. They occasionally had to break up fights between boat captains jockeying for position.
- Going through each lock took more than 15 minutes.
- Several women worked as locktenders, including Mrs. George Funk, who operated Lock 11 from 1896 to 1915.
- Canal boats moved through such a rich countryside, passengers sometimes shot deer as they passed along the canal.
- Mule barns dotted the length of the canal. Mule teams were changed every 10 miles.
- Life on the canal boats was often a family affair. The wife of the boat captain cooked, and children were sometimes tethered to the deck to keep from falling in the canal.
- Many canal workers and settlers in the region contracted malaria and typhoid.

**Figure 2.9. Mule Driver**

Many young men found jobs on the canal as mule drivers. In 1850 Morris had nineteen canal drivers, the majority of them teenagers. Mule drivers often had a reputation for swearing, smoking and gambling. (Tom Willcockson, © Canal Corridor Association)

***Sub-Theme: A Place for Recreation and Reconnection***

The Illinois & Michigan Canal Passageway is a recreation corridor and a place to reconnect with the special places of the passageway.

With the construction of a series of parks and trails along the Illinois & Michigan Canal the passageway has become a haven for recreation enthusiasts and nature lovers. It's also a place to reconnect with the natural and historical landscapes of the passageway and a place to retrace the steps of our forefathers reconnecting with our heritage.

### **Story: Creation of a Recreation Corridor**

Recreation along the Illinois & Michigan Canal dramatically expanded in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Increased leisure time, the popularity of the automobile, the closing of the I&M Canal in 1933, and the creation of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) during the Great Depression led to the development of a recreational corridor along the I&M Canal. A series of state parks were created along and connected by the Illinois & Michigan Canal creating a ribbon of natural areas for the enjoyment and recreation of visitors and residents. The CCC enhanced the state parks by developing picnic areas, hiking trails, bridle paths, boating and camping facilities, parking lots, trailside shelter, and comfort areas. The state further improved the recreation corridor by developing a portion of the Illinois & Michigan Canal towpath into a hiking/biking trail in the 1970's.

#### Illustrative points:

- Between 1911 and 1935 five state parks were created: Starved Rock (1911), Buffalo Rock (1928), Illinois & Michigan Canal (1933), Gebhard Woods (1934), Illini (1935).
- The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) established five camps within the western portion of the Corridor to create recreational facilities and enhance these state parks.
- The CCC developed picnic areas, hiking trails, bridle paths, boating and camping facilities, parking lots, trailside shelter, and comfort areas.
- The CCC created Channahon State Park in 1939.
- Between 1938-39 the Works Progress Administration (WPA) cleaned the canal of weeds and debris between LaSalle and North Utica.
- Several additional state parks were created: Matthiessen State Park (1943), William G. Stratton State Park (1959), and Goose Lake Prairie State Park (1969).

### **Story: Special Places — Reconnecting with the passageway**

Within the Illinois & Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor there remains extant pockets of pre-settlement landscape that support flora and fauna. Forests, prairies, wetlands, spectacular geologic

formations, river islands, and diverse bird and animal life are to be found throughout the Corridor. Natural areas reminiscent of the pre-canal era provide opportunities to reconnect with the natural landscape of the passageway and experience the passage as it was when the French explorers arrived in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Corridor also provides opportunities to reconnect with the people from a previous time by retracing their steps through the passageway. Within the Corridor are special places that stand as testaments to our past that allow us to walk where our forefathers walked. Places like the Grand Village of the Illinois, the Chicago Portage National Historic Site, the last remaining tollhouse along the Illinois & Michigan Canal and the Illinois Waterway Visitor Center tell the stories of the passageway and allow us to reconnect to our roots rejuvenating us for the future.

Illustrative points:

- The Illinois River valley, which comprises much of the IMCNHC, remains a haven for wildlife. More than 200 species of birds either breed in the valley or use it during migrations.
- Great blue herons, great egrets, and other water birds flourish on the Illinois & Michigan Canal. Fishermen routinely catch channel catfish, carp, and bluegill.
- Several remnants of original prairie exist within the corridor, and restoration efforts are adding to the total acreage covered by native Illinois plants.
- The Corridor is home to at least four plants and animals on the Illinois and federal lists of threatened or endangered species: the Hines emerald dragonfly (federal endangered list), the Lakeside daisy (federal threatened list), the Blandings turtle (Illinois endangered list), and the Leafy prairie clover (Illinois threatened list).
- Along the canal corridor, there are sandstone canyons and panoramic views. In some cases, transportation and industrial systems actually preserved nature because they needed land as a buffer along their edges, like the Santa Fe Prairie along the rail road or the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie on the site of the former Joliet Army Ammunition Plant.
- Traveling in the passageway today, visitors can still see limestone and sandstone bluffs and canyons, reminders of the great natural resources that helped the region grow and prosper. Many historic canal buildings in the Corridor as well as the canal locks are built of limestone unearthed when the canal was being built.
- The Fox River is the most popular canoe route in the state. Its scenic bluffs—vertical walls of St. Peter’s sandstone—reach up to 150 feet high.



- The Grand Village of the Illinois is the site of the first European contact with Native Americans in Illinois and home to the Illini Confederacy.
- Chicago Portage National Historic Sites is the last surviving remnant of the Chicago Portage Area also known as Chicago's Plymouth Rock.
- The canal tollhouse in Ottawa is the last surviving tollhouse along the Illinois & Michigan Canal Corridor.
- There are only two remaining locktender's homes along the canal. One is located in Aux Sable and the other in Channahon.

## Key Corridor Sites

The strongest assets of the Illinois & Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor are the waterways and key resources along those waterways that tell the stories of the Illinois & Michigan Canal Passageway. The Illinois & Michigan Canal, the Sanitary & Ship Canal, the Cal Sag Channel, and the Illinois Waterway form the spine of the heritage corridor. Each of these waterways has its own story and brings its own list of sites and resources that help tell the broader themes of the Passageway. Within the heritage corridor are sites that tell the story of the creation and use of the natural passageway before the construction of the canal such as the Chicago Portage National Historic Site. Along the Illinois & Michigan Canal are locks, aqueducts, a tollhouse, two locktender's houses and a number of sites that have gained significance from the canal such as the Gaylord Building. Additional sites along the waterways and within the heritage corridor interpret the themes of the Illinois & Michigan Canal Passageway.

During the planning process we compiled a preliminary list of key sites that have the potential to interpret one or more of the themes of the heritage corridor. As opportunities for additional development arise other sites could be added to this list.

**Figure 2.10. Key Corridor Sites**

THEMES	A Natural Connector	A Magnet	A Place for Recreation and Reconnection
<b>LaSalle County</b>			
Buffalo Rock State Park			X
Fox River Aqueduct	X		
Hegeler Carus Mansion		X	
I&M Canal Locks 9-13	X		
I&M Canal Locks 14-15	X		
Illinois Waterway Visitors Center	X		
Lock 16 Visitors Center/ LaSalle Canal Boat	X		
LaSalle County Historical Society (canal warehouse)	X	X	
Lincoln and Douglass debate site (Washington Square Park)		X	

THEMES	A Natural Connector	A Magnet	A Place for Recreation and Reconnection
Little Vermilion Aqueduct	X		
Marseilles Dam & Hydro Electric	X	X	
Marseilles Lock and Dam	X		
Ottawa Scouting Museum		X	
Ottawa Toll House	X		
Reddick Mansion		X	
Seneca Grain Elevator	X		
Split Rock	X		X
Starved Rock State Park			X
Sulphur Springs Hotel	X		
<b>Grundy County</b>			
Aux Sable Aqueduct/ Aux Sable Locktender's House/ Lock 8	X		
Canalport Park	X	X	
Canalport Plaza	X	X	
Carbon Hill School Museum (Carbon Hill Historical Society)		X	
Dollinger Family Farm	X	X	
Dresden Lock and Dam	X		
Evergreen Cemetary		X	
Gebhard Woods State Park			X
Goose Lake Prairie State Natural Area			X
Grundy County Historical Society	X	X	
Mazon Creek Fossil Beds			X
Mule Barn	X		
Nettle Creek Aqueduct	X		
Rutherford's Tavern	X		
<b>Will County</b>			
Brannndon Lock and Dam	X		
Channahon Locktender's House	X		

THEMES	A Natural Connector	A Magnet	A Place for Recreation and Reconnection
Four Rivers Environmental Education Center			X
Gaylord Building	X	X	
Grant Creek Prairie Nature Preserve			X
I&M Canal Lock 1-4	X		
Isle a la Cache Museum	X		
Joliet Area Historical Museum		X	
Joliet Iron Works		X	
Keepataw Preserve		X	X
Lockport Prairie Nature Preserve			X
Midwin National Tallgrass Prairie			X
Norton Warehouse	X	X	
Public Landing (Lockport)	X	X	
I&M Canal Commissioners Office (Will County Historical Society)	X	X	
<b>Cook County</b>			
Canal Origins Park	X		
Chicago Portage National Historic Site	X		
Heritage Quarries Recreation Area		X	
Lake Katherine Nature Center			X
Lemont Historical Society (Old Stone Church)	X	X	
Gateway Park (Navy Pier)	X		
Pullman Historic District	X		
Santa Fe Prairie Nature Preserve			X
St. James of the Sag (Lemont)	X		
<b>DuPage County</b>			
Waterfall Glen			X

(Endnotes)

1 Rabinowitz, Richard, PhD, American History Workshop, 1998.

2 Conzen, Michael, PhD, I&M Canal National Historic Landmark application, pg. 4

3 These last three paragraphs were taken from Illinois and Michigan Canal Corridor Wayfinding Design Study completed for the Canal Corridor Association by the American History Workshop, 1996.