

# Bethinking of Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin County Historian

One of the Apple Yards, Medina, N. Y.



## Vol. X 6-9-88 No. 22 CANAL TRAVEL

When the Erie Canal was completed in 1825, its total cost was \$7,143,780.86. It was over eight years in construction, and in 1826 \$687,976.68 in tolls were received by the state. In 1831 the toll totaled \$1,091,714.26, in 1844 it was \$2,190,147.34, and by 1853 the toll amounted to \$2,833,970.90.

By 1857 there were 76 locks, 49 waste weirs, 243 culverts and 509 bridges. In 1843, 2,136 boats plied the canal, and by 1859 the number had increased to 3,500.

By 1833 the state had received enough tolls from the canal to pay the original cost.

Travel by packet boat became a very easy and popular way to travel across New York State, and the packet boats were the luxury lines of the times, even if a bit slow by today's standards.

The captains were in a class with ocean-going ship captains and were highly respected.

Packet boat fare was two cents per mile with board and one cent without board. The food served on these boats was the best that could be obtained, and some of the stewards received as much as \$125 per month salary, a considerable amount for those times.

The boats were drawn at the rate of four miles an hour and three horses hitched together tan-

dem, and fresh horses were procured at relay stations every eight or ten miles.

The early freight boats were 60 or 70 feet long and 12 feet wide and carried from 15 to 20 tons. They were drawn by two horses at the rate of two miles an hour. Later on, horses and mules were carried in a stable in the stern of a boat and changed every four or five hours.

The photo here shows a scene along the canal docks in Medina around 1900. Thousands of barrels of apples await shipment on freight boats like the one pictured.

The steamboat made its appearance in 1879. However, mules were used to haul canal boats until the completion of the Barge Canal about 1916.

The original canal reduced traveling time from New York to Buffalo from 20 to six days and freight dropped from \$100 to \$5 per ton.

In 1897 there were around 4,000 boats plying the Erie Canal. The Canal was deepened to seven feet in 1886, nine feet in 1896 and twelve feet in 1911-13. In 1835 the canal was open for 245 days, one of the longest years on record, and in 1871 over 800 boats were frozen in by a sudden cold snap.

No other part of the state received such benefits from the canal as Western New York. The canal was responsible for opening up this part of the state and stimulated it to become a rich and profitable area.