

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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"CLINTON'S DITCH" STILL VISIBLE

On Sunday morning, September 24 a group of people assembled near the Murray-Holley Historical Building to dedicate an historic marker. This sign, which was paid for through a grant acquired by the Orleans County Tourism Board, is one of fifteen to be erected within Orleans County. Murray-Holley Historian Mrs. Marsha DeFilippis spoke about the importance of the canal in connection with the message cast on the marker. Here is an excerpt of her speech:

"The Village of Holley owes its existence to the Erie Canal. This area that today is our village, was merely a hemlock forest with only a handful of settlers at the time the digging of the canal commenced on July 4, 1817. The route of this incredible, and often joked about "Clinton's Ditch", was laid out by the state, and the maps showed a grand loop in the canal at this spot. Visioning an opportunity, Aerovester Hamlin purchased most of the land which Holley now rests on, and began to create a village. In 1822 Mr. Hamlin had the area surveyed and the name of Holley given to the area in honor of one of the canal commissioners, Myron Holley. Nicknamed by the canalers as Saltport, due to the large amount of salt manufactured in these early days, and shipped on the canal, Holley is also seen listed as Holley Ville on early canal maps. When the canal opened on October 26, 1825, Holley was a growing hamlet, and the great waterway of that time brought further growth and prosperity to our region. This waterway, 363 miles long, 28 feet wide at the bottom, 40 foot wide at the top and 4 feet deep, proved successful financially to the state, but also as an important shipping means to our local agricultural and manufacturing, as well as providing a means of transportation for settlers."

"Today we commemorate the original loop of the Erie Canal through Holley. This loop ran directly



behind the storefronts and warehouse blocks, affording easy loading and unloading. The stone house on Frisbie Terrace was once a canal grocery, and the loop is still visible between it and the stone warehouse where the original canal loading doors and moorings can be viewed. The advent of the railroad in 1852 brought competition to the Erie Canal, and in 1856 the large loop was rerouted and shortened. The loop remained, serving as a canal slip for many years, but by 1917 the shallow water in the slip was scarcely used, and the residents, complaining of the stench and mosquitos created by the stagnant water, requested the state to close off the loop."

"This historic marker now stands at the old loop, to designate the only loop of the original Erie Canal, still visible west of Rochester. The two basins that once stood nearby are gone, the canal no longer is used for shipping, but merely for pleasure boating. Let this sign stand proudly in our village as a permanent marker of this historic area of the old Erie Canal."