

11-23-2000

Excavation Circa 1905

Keeping in mind this is the 75th anniversary year of the completion of the Erie Canal, I draw your attention to the photo taken around 95 years ago.

It must have been taken around this time of year or in the spring as the trees are devoid of foliage. Myron H. Dunning who took the picture stood on the south side of the canal dock in Albion and aimed his lens in a northerly direction.

In the distance he captured the north end of the old swing bridge, which crossed over the canal at Main Street. Immediately adjacent to the canal and now path (north side) is the Rabbit Hotel with a two-story porch.

The north wall of the canal here shows being laid up with blocks of Medina Sandstone. This obviously predates our picture to the present poured concrete walls of the canal which were put in around

1910-11.

The center of interest here, however, is the temporary planking and ramp constructed across the canal and the number of workers shown. Some sort of excavation work is taking place along the south edge of the canal.

I can count at least 16 wheelbarrows loaded with dirt and a man behind each one stretching up the ramp to the towpath. There are a total of 23 men shown here, several with shovels, in the foreground.

No power equipment is to be seen. It all appears to be man power on the project.

I hope this gives you an idea of the scope of man power that was needed years ago to accomplish excavation work. It was hard labor down in the trenches to say the least, one shovel at a time.

I vividly remember my second-grade teacher, Marion Hassett, almost 50 years ago,

saying to students who didn't do well in their studies. "Do you want to end up being a ditch-digger all your life?"

This line of work wasn't held in high esteem despite its necessity.

Many of the men in the picture almost appear to be dressed up. This however, is a delusion because years ago working class men like this did not necessarily go out and specifically buy work clothes. There is only one man in the picture with overalls on.

He is pretty well up on the ramp by a wheelbarrow. The others, I think are wearing dress-up clothing which was getting worn, and no longer suitable for Sunday best.

They didn't necessarily throw out things which could still be worn for work clothes. It wasn't that these men were so formal, they were just saving money by making the most of what they had.

