

# Widening the Erie Canal

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## Bethinking of Olde Orleans

The accompanying picture of the widening of the canal was taken in 1912 looking east toward the Beals Road Bridge in the Town of Ridgeway. This was during the time of expansion of the old Erie Canal to what became known as the Barge Canal.

It was during the administration of Gov. Mario Cuomo that the name Erie was restored to the canal system.

What strikes me immediately about this picture are the number of horses. In fact, there are 15 teams — 30 horses — shown here.

It also appears there may be dozens of men in the picture.

There is, however, not one single piece of mechanical equipment to be seen. There are no steam engines, no steam shovels and no steam derricks. Therefore, this picture translates as a work force of horse power and man power.

Most of the teams appear to be pulling a dump scoop with two handles, which the man took hold of pushing the scoop into the earth as the team went forward. When the scoop was filled, the horse dragged it to where it was dumped. Hence, we notice a wooden ramp from the canal basin up to the north bank.

When this widening project took place, the canal bottom was not only deepened, but the banks were raised to gain the now proper depth of 12 feet. In many places, the south



bank did not have to be built up as seen here. It was only the north bank and towpath that were raised.

In the immediate foreground of this picture, earth is yet to be removed and rip rap placed along the south bank. Rip rap in this case is irregular pieces of

Medina sandstone. Usually scrap stone are thrown together to make a sloping embankment.

The bridge in this picture is indeed the current Beals Road Bridge right after its installation. Power and telegraph poles may also be seen all along the north side of this canal.