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Travel by packet boat

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The Grand Erie Canal officially opened for service across the state Oct. 26, 1825. At that time, Gov. DeWitt Clinton left Buffalo on a flotilla of canal boats for New York City, where he arrived Nov. 4. Travel by packet boat soon became a very easy and popular way to travel across New York state.

Over land it took no less than 20 days to get from Albany to Buffalo, while by boat this distance could be made in six days.

The Erie was four feet deep and 40 feet wide.

Packet boat fare was 2 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 monthly

salary, a considerable amount for those times.

The boats were drawn at the rate of four miles an hour by three horses hitched together tandem, and fresh horses were procured at relay stations every eight or 10 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 the boat and changed every four or five hours.

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

The present canal depth is 12 feet with a minimum

width of 90 feet.

In 1897, there were about 4,000 boats plying the Erie Canal.

The first enlargement to the canal started in 1838 and was carried on into the mid 1850s. The canal deepened to seven feet in 1886 and to nine feet in 1896.

In 1835, the canal was open for 245 days, one of the longest years on record. In 1871, more than 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.

C. W. Lattin is the Orleans county historian. His column appears every Thursday in The Journal-Register and The Albion-Advertiser.

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Bethinking
of Olde
Orleans