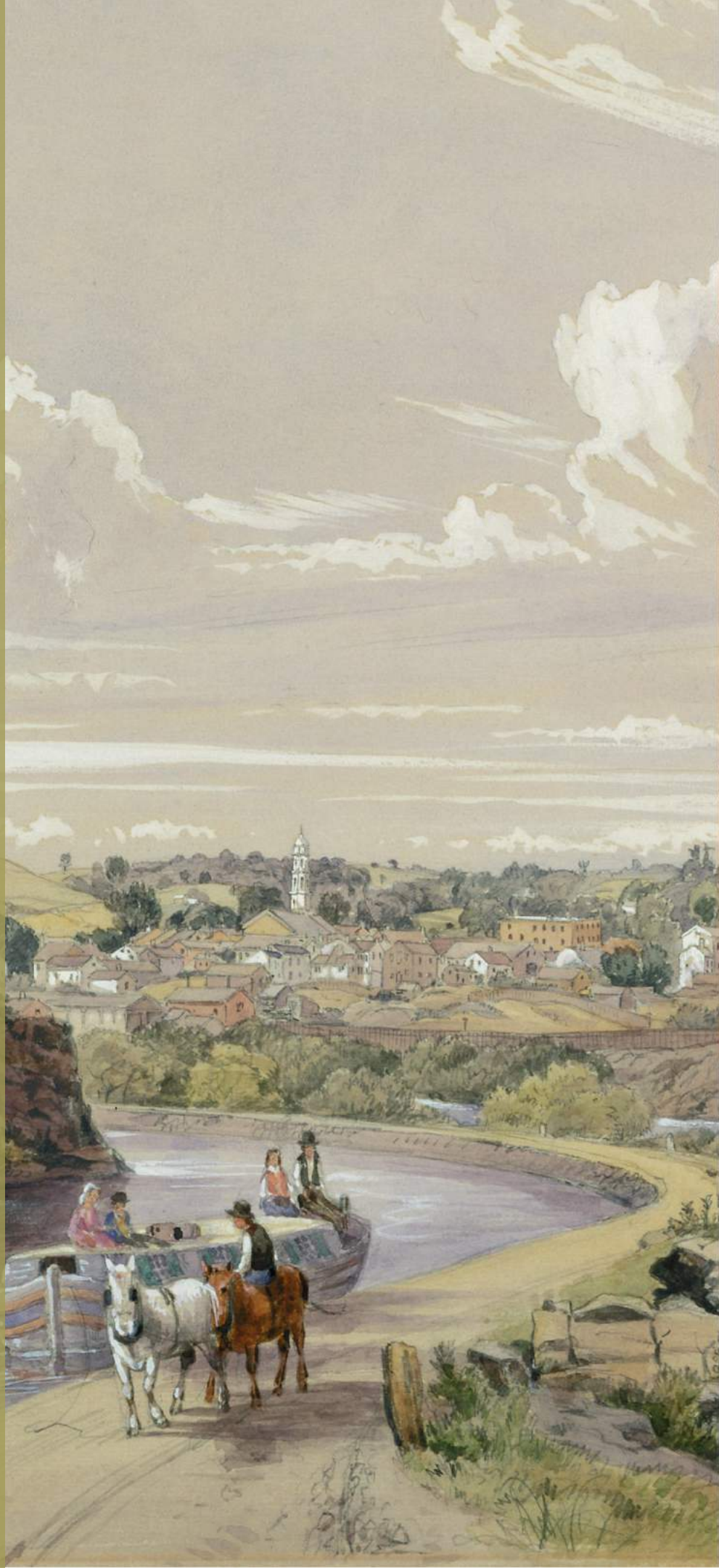


Erie Canal



Image: **View of Little Falls, New York, 1852**, William Rickerby Miller, watercolor on paper, Albany Institute of History & Art Purchase, 1946.69



Object: **Erie Canal Commemorative Medal and Presentation Box**
Box made by Duncan Phyfe, 1825, Wood and metal with printed paper label
Albany Institute of History & Art, gift of Albert B. Roberts, 2006.49.10

The Capital Region in 50 Objects

Erie Canal

When completed in 1825, the Erie Canal was an engineering marvel. Geographic, political, and financial obstacles were overcome to create the most successful public works project in the nineteenth century. The Erie Canal spanned New York for 363 miles, included 18 aqueducts, and required 83 locks to raise and lower boats the 568-foot change in elevation between the Hudson River at Albany and Lake Erie at Buffalo. When complete, the canal was 4 feet deep and 40 feet wide, with a ten-foot-wide path along one side for the horses and mules to walk as they towed the boat. The Erie Canal lowered the cost of freight, reduced the travel time across New York State, and opened access to the Northwest Territory for settlement.

For the opening celebration, New York City furniture maker Duncan Phyfe produced small wood boxes from lumber cut in the Great Lakes and shipped to New York City via the canal. The boxes housed commemorative medals struck with the official seal of the Erie Canal, which depicted the classical gods Neptune and Pan to represent the Atlantic Ocean and Great Lakes.

In 1853, the Erie Canal carried 62 percent of all U.S. trade, twice as much as all other water routes combined, including the Mississippi River. The Erie Canal was enlarged several times over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But by the end of the nineteenth century, railroads were moving more freight and people than waterways. The Erie Barge Canal that opened in 1915 was the last effort to make the canal profitable but it could not compete against expanding railroads and highway systems. Today, the Erie Canal is a National Heritage Corridor used by pleasure boaters and tourists.

Vocabulary

Aqueduct - an artificial channel for conveying water, typically in the form of a bridge supported by tall columns across a valley

Canal- an artificial waterway for navigation or for draining or irrigating land

Commemorative- intended to honor an important event or person from the past

Engineering- the work of designing and creating large structures (such as roads and bridges) or new products or systems by using scientific methods

Lock - a device used for raising and lowering boats between stretches of water of different levels on waterways

Erie Canal

Name _____ Date _____

Directions

Use the depiction of the object, image, and corresponding text to answer the following questions.

1. What is the name of the object? _____

2. In what year was it created? _____

3. What type of material was the presentation box made from? _____

4. Where did the material come from and why was it so special? _____

5. What do you think the eagle perched on the globe represents? _____

6. What is the name of the image? _____

7. What are the landscape/geographic features in the painting? _____

8. What year was this work of art created? _____

9. What did the farmers and merchants gain by transporting their goods along a canal and not a road across New York State?

10. How many miles long is the Canal? _____

11. What two classical figures are represented on the official seal of the canal?

a. _____ b. _____

12. Why do you think the canal could not compete against the railroads?
