



Chimney missing

Top of quion post

E-56 Sign



Detail of lock gates

*Images modified by John R. Groves 09-12-05, Chili, New York*

The above image of the E-56 lock gate is part of a series we had several years ago (1997) of the lock as it appeared in the late 1930's. The lock has been abandoned for about 15 years and during that time the gates deteriorated. What remains here is the south gate of the north lock chamber. The north lock chamber was the one that is lengthened.

When I first saw the image I noted two items:

- The presence of two chimneys on the “grocery”.
- The odd structure appearing just above the south lock wall.

The two chimneys are probably original to the “grocery”. Later, and possibly during a fire in the attic, I believe around the 1960’s the west chimney was removed. The fire nearly destroyed the structure. Had not the Perry family been in residence we would surely have lost that building. If that were the case there probably would only remain a field stone foundation and some memories.

The “odd structure” turns out to be the top of the quoin post. The quoin post supported the gate in a recess in the lock “gate recess”. This post of wood formed a hinge by which the gate was opened and closed. What is seen here is the square notch that fitted into the “balance beam”. The balance beam is a large wood structure that serves two functions:

- The weight of the beam counter-balances the weight of the gate making its opening and closing less effort for the lock keeper.
- The balance beam was also extended beyond the lock wall that provided leverage to again assist the lock tender in opening and closing the gates. Lock gates were constructed of heavy white oak timbers, ten or more feet in height. This constituted some considerable weight, which was offset by the balance beam.

There is an earlier image of this lock taken around the turn of the century (i.e.1900). This image to be analyzed and presented on the E-56.org site soon, shows the E-56 sign missing, as seen in this image. This could be the result of the early image being a copy, where details are simply lost in shadow or resolution. In the early image there seems to be something there, but it isn’t clear if it is the E-56 sign seen above. When looking at old photographs it is fascinating to record things that are seen and not seen in other images of the same subject. This can be useful when trying to date images. One means of determining lost resolution is through enlargement, printing and viewing at a distance. This method will be applied to the E-56 sign. Results TBA!

This image is interesting because of the differential decay of these gates. The north gate is much more decayed, or is it simply vandalized or materials taken for re-use somewhere else? I suspect that much of the timbers on the lock were removed by salvage to be re-used elsewhere. In other early images of this lock considerable use of white oak can be found in lock gates, entries to lock chambers and elsewhere. Wood generally takes 100’s of years to decay naturally on the forest floor. In this case the wood is simply missing.

Already in the image you can see the destructive forces of plant and tree growth beginning. In the far right appears to be a small shrub or tree. Root systems from this growth cause the laid stone to separate, into which water flows. In the winter months this water freezes, exerting considerable hydraulic forces that further deteriorate the lock walls.

There are more treasures in this image. A process discovers them where first the obvious are described, then a closer look at the minute details. Things like telegraph/electricity poles, patterns in the stonework, fragments of wood, the level of the water in the chamber and many more.

As E-56 is being studied for restoration images of this type are invaluable. Hopefully as the project gets underway more images will appear from collections hidden in attics or files. What is most crucially needed are frontal images of the grocery, from which we can determine the wares, products and services offered. Accurate restoration is only possible from certified images. Anything else would be simply a hypothesis.

John R. Groves  
Member of E.R.I.E.