

What can be found at Enlarged Erie Canal Lock E-56, Today?

By John R. Groves

During a period of neglect (1998-2005) the lock returned to its previous state of being overgrown by weeds and small trees. This period wasn't intentional but instead was a time when discouragement and lack of focused volunteerism prevailed. Previous efforts were undermined by a lack of community interest and funding.

Recently with the advent of the National Park Service **"ERIE CANAL WAY/NATIONAL HERITAGE CORRIDOR PROGRAM"** a new initiative has been created to again review the restoration of this important site. Even though overgrowth has occurred the structure hasn't deteriorated significantly.

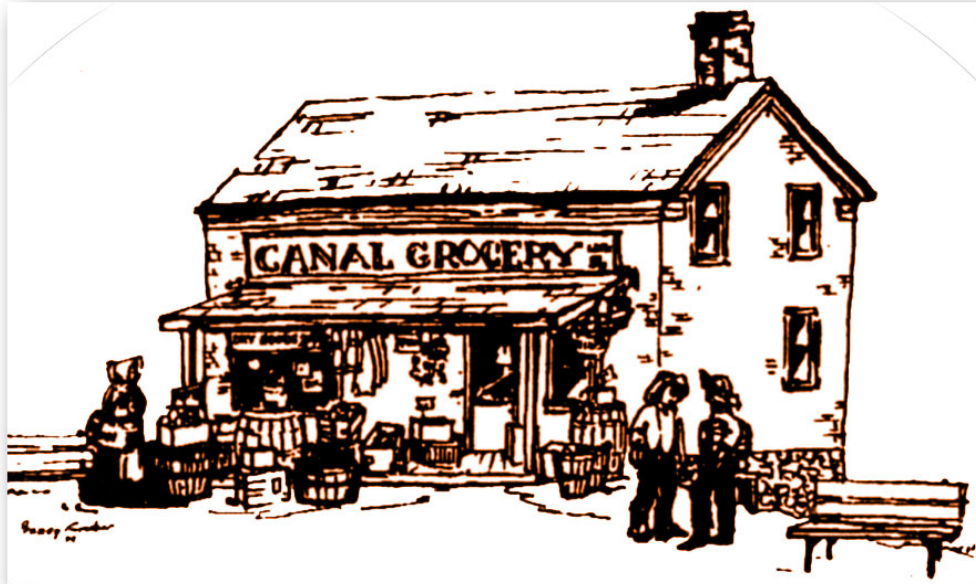
The lock chambers are still intact and plumb. The walls, although impacted by small trees have not shifted or collapsed. The only noteworthy changes to the original Enlarged Erie version of E-56 are the "final improvements" that include poured concrete found at the west end and intermittently on lock walls. These were done between 1913 and 1917.

The "grocery" remains intact with a few external changes; such as a removed west chimney and other attached structures seen in early photographs. (Two images, 1887/1905, are published in the Field Trip Guide, October 26, 1991, **The Erie Canal – Eastern Wayne County**, Canal Society of New York State). The grocery has been home to the Perry family since the early 1940's and has been changed significantly inside. There are no documented images of the grocery as it would have appeared during the period of its use on the canal. One image surfaced a few years ago, from the Barben Collection (Seneca Falls) allegedly showing an interior of the grocery. This period image would have been typical of such stores during the Enlarged Erie Canal era.

During the planning (summer, 1994) by Bristol Design & Planning of Rochester, New York the grocery structure was to become a "Visitors Center" where interpretive exhibits and materials would be available. This concept is still viable. Other aspects would tie together the existing Lock 28/Drydock and parts of the Village of Lyons. This historic and present marriage of Erie Canal infrastructure will provide our visitors with a "one stop" canal experience.

This spring during an inspection of the lock we discovered an intact "tumble gate" at the west end of the northern chamber. It lies a few feet below the surface water now present in the lock chamber. Structures like this can be removed and stabilized for the Visitors Center.

Even though it is a sad sight to see our lock overgrown the potential of a Western New York Erie Canal Interpretive Center is very much alive. Within a few miles are the remains of the original (1825) Clinton's Ditch, the Palmyra/Macedon Aqueduct and the only known and restored example of a Squire Whipple 1858 Truss Bridge. Wayne County is a rich and present resource of remaining canal infrastructure that must be identified and preserved. The E-56 project will certainly begin the initiative public and private to begin bringing history back to our communities and even the world at large.

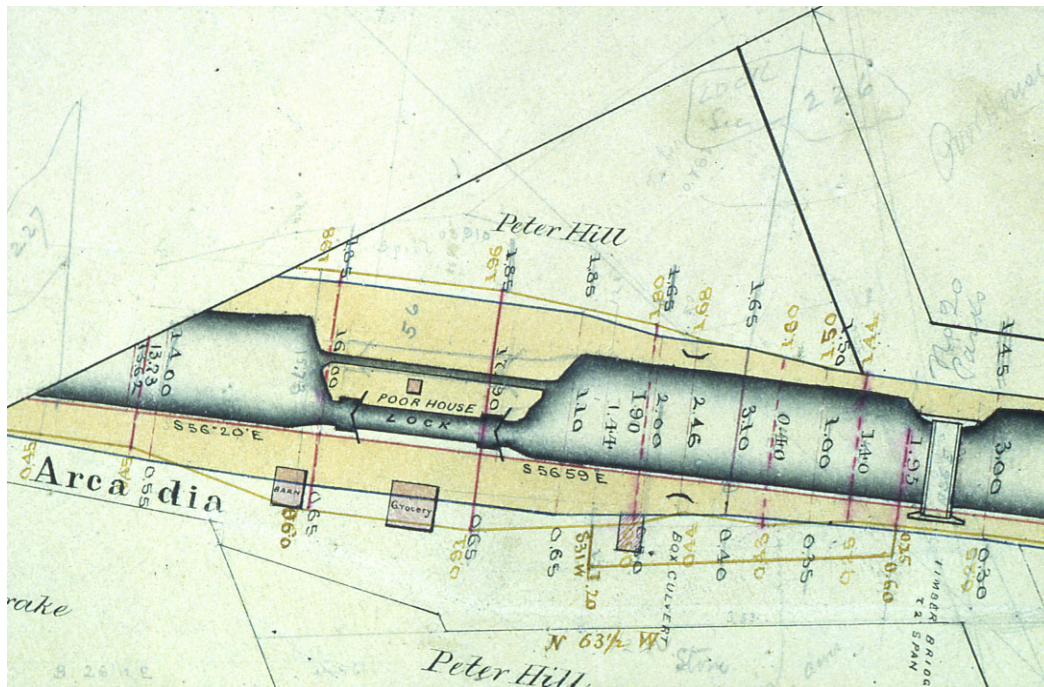


The Grocery as might appear after restoration.

**JOHN HUTCHINSON. CONTRACTOR & BUILDER, TROY NY
G.W. EDDYS FOUNDRY. WATERFORD. NY 1858 .**



Above, The Aldrich Change Bridge #35 of the Enlarged Erie Canal Era located in the Palmyra /Macedon Aqueduct Park. Top, The center upper course on the bridge with the original foundry inscription.



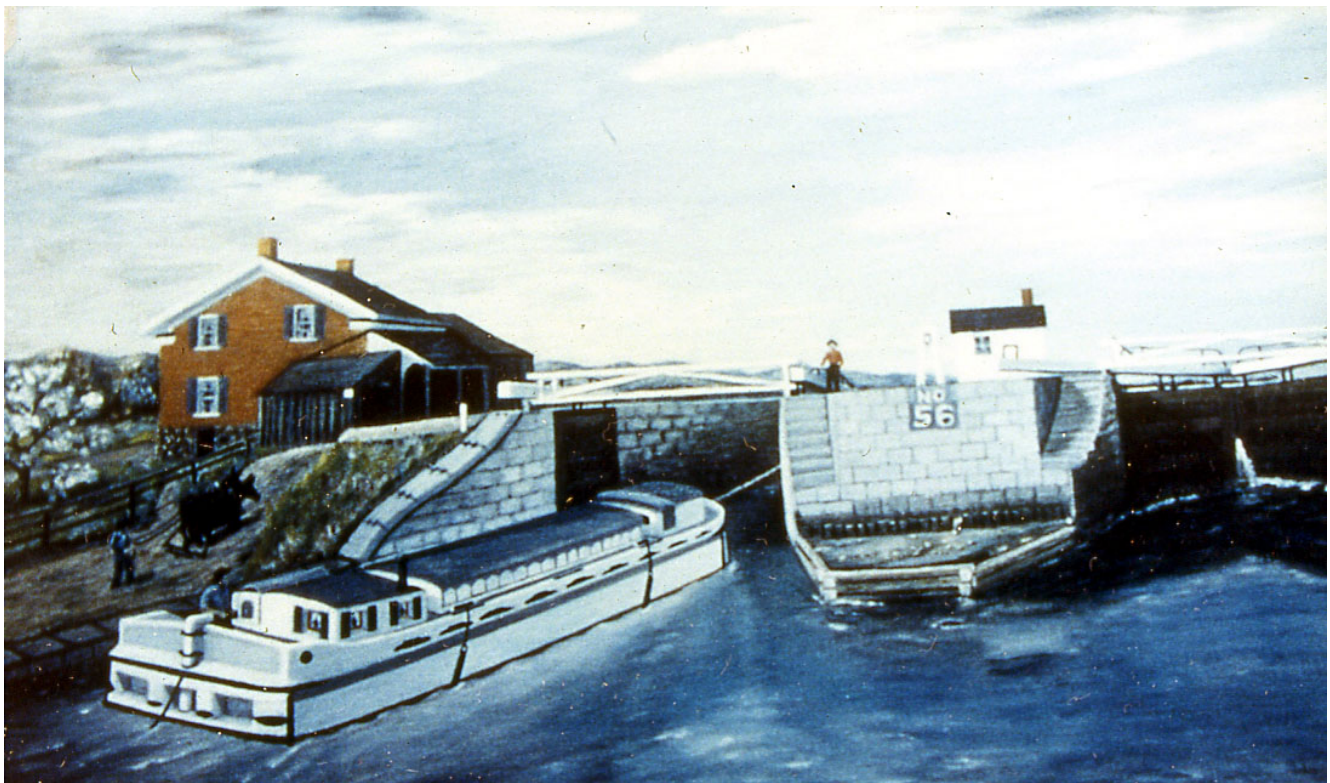
The original 1862 Survey map showing E-56 and the adjacent structures. Note the grocery and barn located within the “blue line” of the canal corridor. This survey map was drawn before the second and lengthen chambers were built later. Peter Hill owned all of the principle land where the lock was located in 1862.



This 1930's image shows the E-56 lock about fifteen years after abandonment. Parts of the original east lock gate remains. The Balance Beam post still shows the joint for the Balance Beam. (*Red arrows point to references in this text*) On the east side are attached outbuildings as well as indications of other attached structures. Two chimneys appear, the east one now removed.



During the planning stages in 1994 the author did computer stimulations. Extraneous items were removed from the foreground and background. Openings in the building were “blacked out” as there are no records of how they might have appeared. A “new” chimney was added and the “saddle” on the roof line improved. During this period the lock chambers were completely cleared of brush and several interpretive signs were installed.



In the late fifties a Dr. Ennis encouraged the county and local citizens about restoring this site. In this effort he commissioned an artist rendering of how the site may have appeared. A “Line Boat” is being winched into the lock using the water-powered turbine located on the west end. In between the chambers can be seen the “Lock Tenders” house or sometimes referred to as shanty. During the early spring and late fall such structures were a welcome addition during cold rainy weather.



A photograph from the Barben Collection (Seneca Falls, NY) allegedly shows the inside of the grocery. The credibility of this image has yet to be documented. In any case, it shows the typical items, staff and customers found during the period the lock would have been in operation. The products and some of the imagery in this photograph indicate a period late in the locks history.



The lock and grocery are in relatively good shape. All that is needed is TLC to create an outstanding interpretive site for the Enlarged Canal Era (1835-1917). With the lock “re-watered” and operational it will be the only such site on the Erie Canal system.