



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Erie Canalway
National Heritage Corridor

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Canal Stories

Background Information and Credits

Canal Stories was produced by City Lore and the Erie Canal Museum, in collaboration with the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor Commission and the New York State Museum, with additional funding provided by the New York Council on the Humanities, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress.

The Love for Water

Albert E. Gayer

Jump onboard a canal boat with Albert Gayer (c1898-1976), who grew up alongside the Erie Canal in the early 1900s. Born in Budapest, Hungary, Albert moved to Schenectady from Bristol, Ct. in 1913. He and his vast collection of canal and rail memorabilia are legendary.

Credit: From “The Er-I-E,” a documentary produced by Robert Broekman Productions, written by Irwin Lewis, narrated by Sam Gray

Courtesy: New York State Museum

Sitting on the Potty

Evamay Wilkins

Bootleg on a canal boat! Evamay Wilkins shares her family’s secret for transporting whiskey on the Champlain Canal in the 1920s. In 1993, Evamay—well remembered as a hairdresser in Waterford—was interviewed by historian Craig Williams for the New York State Museum. When she passed away in 2006 at the age of 85, her photo albums were donated to the Museum.

Courtesy: New York State Museum. Music by Evamay Wilkins

A Canal Family

Catherine Charron

As a young girl, Catherine Charron spent hours listening to her great-grandfather Lachapelle and grandfathers Lachapelle and Charron tell stories about their canal boat family on the Champlain Canal. In 2001, Traditional Arts in Upstate New York awarded Catherine the North Country Heritage Award for her storytelling.

Credit: Video and editing by Paul Wagner. Produced in collaboration with City Lore and the Erie Canal Museum. Music by George Ward.

Learning From Old Timers

David Gower

After twenty-odd years on the Erie Canal, Engineer Dave Gower has a few words of advice and more than a few stories to tell. Born in Auburn, New York in 1955, Dave Gower came to work for the Tug Seneca on May 14, 1981.

Credit: Video by Christina Voros, editing by Paul Wagner and Lee Eaton.

Produced in collaboration with City Lore and the Erie Canal Museum. Music by George Ward.

A City of Neighborhoods

Robert Coles

Lifelong Buffalo resident and architect Robert Coles recalls how ethnic tensions influenced access to the canal and shaped a city. A graduate of MIT, Robert Traynham Coles is a retired architect who advocated for the inclusion of more African Americans in architecture.

Credit: Video by Benh Zeitlin, editing by Paul Wagner. Produced in collaboration with City Lore and the Erie Canal Museum. Music by George Ward.

Out of the Fog

Don Meixner

Take a nostalgic journey with Don Meixner, who has lived all his life in and around the Erie Canal. Born in 1950, he grew up in the town of Jack's Reef and now lives in the nearby town of Jordan.

Credit: Video by Benh Zeitlin, editing by Paul Wagner. Produced in collaboration with City Lore and the Erie Canal Museum.

Looking Over His Shoulder

Robert Montross

Robert Montross' grandfather was no stranger to trouble along the Old Erie Canal...or to starting that trouble! From North Bay, New York, Robert shared with us this tale of his grandfather during the era of mule-drawn canal boats. Folklorist and musician George Ward sings "*Boatin' on a Bullhead*," a traditional canal song, as Montross tells his story.

Credit: Video and editing by Paul Wagner. Produced in collaboration with City Lore and the Erie Canal Museum. Music by George Ward.

Driving Mules

Jesse Wimett

Childhood labor may be a thing of the past, but the daily chores of a nine year old mule driver are still remembered by Jesse Wimett.

Credit: Wimett was filmed for *The Ditch that Helped Build America* (c. 1970); Marvin Rapp, narrator and historical consultant. Produced and written by Richard H. Thomas.

Courtesy: New York State Museum. Music by George Ward.

Dipper Dredge No. 3

Steve Wunder

Tugboat Captain Steve Wunder shares his passion for working on the canal through stories and poetry. Steve was born in Lyons, New York in 1957. His answering machine says simply, "Wunder here."

Credit: Video by Christina Voros, editing by Paul Wagner. Produced in collaboration with City Lore and the Erie Canal Museum. Music by George Ward.

For more information

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